

Fear of Missing Out and Social Networking Site Usage: Predictors of Problematic Internet Use among College Students

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Abstract –Internet over usage is problematic. With the proliferation of the smartphones, the number of hours individuals spend on social media has significantly increased. The development of undesirable habits and behaviors including virtual addictions are the consequences of the uncontrolled use of social media. One of such undesirable behaviors is Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) generated from extensive use of social media leading to the overuse of smartphones and computers of the younger generation. This cross-sectional, predictive study assessed the level of Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) associated with FoMO and the usage of social networking sites (SNS). A total of 254 college students were randomly selected from universities and colleges in the regions of Central Luzon, Southern Tagalog, and Metro Manila, Philippines. Young's Internet Addiction Test (IAT) Questionnaire, Przybylsk's FoMO scale, and Olufadi's Social Networking Time Use Scale (SONTUS) were administered. The data analysis was done using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and regression analysis. The findings of the study showed that college students have moderate level of PIU and FoMO, whereas, their time spent on SNS is above average. PIU of college students is found to be associated and predicted by FoMO and SNS usage. Meanwhile, FoMO better predicts PIU compared to SNS use. The use of qualitative approaches such as phenomenological analysis and grounded theory is recommended for future studies to further explain the dynamics of relationship between variables.

Keywords –College students, fear of missing out, problematic internet usage, social media use, social networking sites.

INTRODUCTION

Social communication means such as personal computers, tablets, smartphones and the Internet have become an integral part of daily lives. The proliferation of these technologies have caused changes to people's day-to-dayliving [1]. At the forefront of this is the addictions involving using these technologies and the social networking sites (SNSs) over the past decade. The present century is known as Internet age because the Internet became the basic source of information and the common platform for communication [2]. In 2017, Internet Usage and World Population Statistics estimated that about 4.15 billion people, more than half of the population were online [3]. About 12% of Asian youth are addicted to internet and in the Philippines there was a 932% increase in the number of internet users from the 2000 to 2009 [4]. The composition of the internet users covers people from all walks of life, from various backgrounds and age groups.

Majority of younger adults [5]. They were referred "digital generation" or "digital natives" due to their early acquaintance to the use of computers and the Internet since their childhood [6]. Among college students, researches have revealed that they use it nearly everywhere. However, the negative consequences of excessive and unmanageable use of the Internet are rapidly arising. Internet addiction affects a person's occupational, educational, and social engagements[7]. Compared to all demographic internet users, young adults, 18-24 years old appear to be vulnerable to problematic or excessive internet usage. In the Philippines, research has also shown that approximately 10% to 50% of college students were reported to have problematic Internet use [5].

Problematic Internet Use (PIU) is a new term describing a phenomenon about adolescents and young adults' engagement in the Internet. PIU can be defined as "use of the internet that creates psychological, social,

school and/or work difficulties in a person's life" [9]. Block [10] suggested four diagnostic criteria essential to a possible diagnosis of PIU as an addictive behavior: (1) excessive use of the Internet that leads to neglect of basic drives; (2) withdrawal behavior and feelings of anger, depression, and tension when internet is not accessed; (3) compulsive need for better computer equipment, more software, or more hours of use; and (4) educational and occupational impairment including lying, poor work or school performance, social isolation, and fatigue. Problematic internet users may check their social network account/s several times a day or spend much of the day watching videos or movies in SNSs. They feel that internet is the only platform where they feel good about themselves and the world around them.

The term social media is referred to as the SNSs available in the Internet. These sites host virtual communities where users can create individual public and/or private profiles through different platforms for different activities using computers or smartphones [11]. SNS is a member-based online community where users create "profiles" containing information about them and communicate with other members through video or text chatting, timeline posts, and video sharing. SNSs also provide entertainment opportunities including reading news, listening to music, and playing online games [12]. Today, SNSs are not only used for used for personal communication and entertainment. It is now used for personal business or organizational communication and marketing purposes. Social media is like a mediator it allows human interactions in a space lacking in-person interactions. It can affect individuals' interpersonal functioning and relationship [13]. There are advantages and disadvantages of social media. With its use, people who are miles apart can now interact in real time. But sadly, it was also used for crimes and embarrassment and may cause addiction, feelings of insecurity, and many others [14, 15].

Also, researchers studied the possible factors which may cause an individual to use social media and the Internet excessively. Przybylski and colleagues [16] identified the mediating role of a phenomenon called Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) in individuals' social media and internet overuse. The study described FoMO as a "pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" [16]. FoMO is a kind of social anxiety resulting to a compulsive concern of missing something from social media, it is often aroused by posts seen on social media sites [17]. FoMO is a phrase used to describe an emotional state in reaction to a social experience

therefore it exists as a means to coincide an emotional state with a social climate. Researchers recognized that frequently checking social networking site is linked to the development of FoMO, whereby individuals have a tendency to continuously follow other individuals, groups to know all the updates about them [16], [18]. The effects of FoMO and the excessive use of social media is reported in published works [16], [19]. In a recent study conducted by Reyes et al. [20], it was found out that among Filipinos, FoMO is significantly related with both SNS use and PIU and that FoMO is able to predict both social media use and problematic internet use.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study examined fear of missing out and social networking site usage as predictors of problematic internet use among college students.

Specifically, it sought to address the following: (1) assess the levels of fear of missing out, social networking time use, and problematic internet use of the respondents; (2) determine the correlations among these variables; and (3) examine if fear of missing out and social networking time use predict the respondents' problematic internet use.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In view of examining whether fear of missing out (FoMO) and time spent for social networking site (SNS) could predict problematic internet use among college students, this study employed a cross-sectional, predictive research design. According to Johnson (2011), a cross-sectional, predictive research is used in prediction of a phenomenon based on data collected from respondents at a single point in time.

Respondents

A total of 254 college students were randomly selected from tertiary education institutions in Central Luzon, Southern Tagalog, and Metro Manila regions. Their ages ranged from 19 to 25 years old participated in the study. The average age among the sample was 22.40 years old ($SD = 1.44$), and the sample was 62.60% female and 37.40% male. Regarding internet use, majority of them use smartphone (89%). Almost all of the respondents frequently access internet at home (95.70%). Majority of them frequently visit Facebook/Messenger (78%).

Instruments

To assess FoMO, *Fear of Missing Out Scale* was used in this study. It is a 10-item self-report questionnaire developed by Przybylski et al. [16]

designed to measure the level of fear of missing out. Statements were formed as a 5-point Likert scale with response options ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 5 (extremely true of me). Using adolescent samples, principal components analysis verified the presence of a 1-factor model, maintaining a strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$) of all 10 original scale items. FoMO scale has demonstrated good reliability and construct validity [21].

The time spent in social media is gauged using the *Social Networking Time Use Scale* (SONTUS). Olufadi[22] developed the scale to measure the time spent by people on SNS. This 29-item self-report questionnaire is consist of 5 components: (1) relaxation and free periods; (2) academic related periods; (3) public-places-related use; (4) stress related periods; and (5) motives for use. SONTUS was designed in an 11-point Likert scale format with 1 as “not applicable to me during the past week” up to 11 as “I used it more than 3 times during the past week but spend more than 30 min each”. SONTUS has an internal consistency of .92 Cronbach’s alpha value [22].

The tool used in this study to measure PIU is the *Internet Addiction Test* (IAT). This test is developed by Young in 1998 comprising of 20 items. Through this scale, the presence and severity of internet dependence among adolescents and adults can be gauged. The items fall on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Not applicable) to 5 (Always). The initial investigation of the IAT’s psychometric properties has shown strong internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alphas ranging from .90 to .93 and good test–retest reliability ($r = .85$) [20].

Procedures, Ethical Considerations, and Data Analysis

The researchers sought permission from the heads of the institutions to make formal as well as personal request for the respondents of the study. The quantitative data was obtained by administrating survey questionnaires to 300 respondents. Having obtained the necessary permissions from the organizational authorities on an appointed day, the researchers personally distributed the set of questionnaires in its original English version to the respondents with an informed consent form explaining the research topic, purpose, and methods of the study as well as the conditions for participating. Their identity were kept anonymous. Participation was done on voluntary basis and no compensation was provided. Out of 300 respondents, only 254 set of questionnaires were properly completed. The data analysis involving

descriptive statistics, Pearson-Product-Moment correlation, and regression analysis was performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data generated from the FoMO scale, SONTUS, and IAT were summarized using descriptive statistics, correlations, and regression analysis. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the study. The respondents’ fear of missing out (FoMO) was gauged within moderate level ($M = 1.77$; $SD = 0.79$), their time use for social networking sites (SNSs) was above average ($M = 5.98$; $SD = 1.90$), and they have moderate problematic internet use (PIU; $M = 2.23$, $SD = 0.89$)

Table 1. FoMO, Social Networking Time Use, and Problematic Internet Use

Variables	Mean	SD	Description
Fear of Missing Out	1.77	0.79	Moderate
Social Networking Time Use	5.98	1.90	Above Average
Problematic Internet Use	2.23	0.89	Moderate

N=254

A moderately high level of FoMO may make people more conscious to what is happening around them, improving their awareness, but the preoccupation with what they are may disconcert them, curbing their capacity to be knowledgeably vigilant [23]. With the heightened FoMO, college students may compulsively engage to more frequent Internet use. On the other hand, high SNS time use may lead to social media addiction. Most of the respondents have the experience and knowledge of social networking and they are accessing the SNSs and updating their profile on a daily basis. Their profile suggests that majority of them engage in *Facebook* activities at home. The work of Banyai et al. [11] cited that problematic social media use exists in the literature with different diagnostic suggestions including *Facebook* dependence or addiction, social networking or social media addiction, and social media disorder. However, in the Philippines, Filipino youth have an overall positive perception of social media as platforms for advocacy communication and it is being utilized in times of risk management and emergency response by local government units (LGUs) [20].

A moderate score in the IAT indicates that the respondents were experiencing occasional or frequent problems because of the use of the internet, thus affecting their daily living [24]. PIU, which has become a global social issue, involves spending excessive time on the Internet that results to negative consequences in the daily functioning of the individuals [2]. Among

college students, excessive use of the internet also affects their academic achievements; they become more involved in the internet than their studies [25]. There are also symptoms involving behavioral (e.g., aggression), psychological (e.g., social anxiety), and physical (e.g., sleep disturbances) problems [26]. Aside from psychological problems, social difficulties appear to be caused by online social interaction. Social gathering that are intended for face-to-face interactions have turned into people who were preoccupied with the use of the mobile phones [20]. Another risk has something to do with parents. In an online national survey of 629 U.S. adolescents age 12–17 years old with their parents showed that PIU was associated with poor parenting and parental relationship [26].

Table 2 displays the statistics for the correlation among FoMO, SNS use and PIU. There is a correlation between PIU and FoMO ($r = 0.538$; $p < 0.01$). Similarly, there is a correlation between PIU and SNS use ($r = 0.197$; $p < 0.01$). Meanwhile, there was no correlation between FoMO and SNS use.

Table 2. Inter-correlations among the Variables.

Variables	Fear of Missing Out	Social Networking Time Use
Problematic Internet Use	0.538**	0.197**
Fear of Missing Out	-	0.084

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

FoMO, as found to be related with PIU could be one of the reasons for college students' engagement in a greater number of social networks showing addictive behavior using mobile phone, tablet or laptop. This interpretation is compatible with other findings in this field [16] [19]. Similarly, this present study indicated a positive relationship between SNS usage and PIU. Studies pointed out that the increased availability of SNSs may contribute to, and maintain PIU patterns [20] [27].

Table 3 shows the multiple regression analysis. It was performed in order to examine the relative influences of independent variables. The coefficient of determination using the adjusted R^2 shows that 30.70% of the change in their level of PIU can be attributed to the independent variables which are FoMO and SNS use. But around 70% may be attributed to other variables outside the model. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results should a $sig. = 0.005$ which is less than 0.05, an indication of a good model fit. FoMO is the best predictor of PIU at $Beta (254) = 1.19$, were $sig.$ value is less than 0.05. In addition, SNS use also significantly predicts PIU at $Beta (254) = 0.018$.

Table 3. Multiple Regression.

Coefficient Model	Unstd . B	Std. Error	Std. Beta	T	Sig.
1 (Constant)	20.18	2.486		8.119	0
Fear of Missing Out	1.19	0.119	0.525	10.003	0
Social Networking Time Use	0.018	0.006	0.153	2.905	0.004

Dependent Variable: IA

$R^2 = 0.313$; $AdjR^2 = 0.307$; $F = 57.110$; $sig. = 0.005$

A number of previous studies have indicated that too much use of online technologies may be particularly addictive especially to young people [28]. Kittinger et al. [27] found that the number of times an individual logged into a SNS was a better predictor of PIU. Furthermore, social media use leads to serious relational, occupational, educational, and psychological problems [14]. On a positive note, the Internet has also been the most reliable and readily available source of information especially for college-aged individuals. Gratification theory [29] explained that people's psychological and social needs result to motivations to choose and to use the social media that will best meet their needs and expectations. In other words, people use the media to meet their needs.

Meanwhile, FoMO is rooted from the desire of not missing out on anything regarding the people and/or groups they are engaging with [17], [18]. This results to more PIU. According to Block [10], one of the clusters of symptoms of PIU includes withdrawal, feelings of anger, extreme distress, and depression when internet is not accessible. With the experience of FoMO, Internet users are afraid to miss out information and news particularly those that are current, trendy, or important most especially those that pertains to their family and friends. In connection to this, the study of Li, O'Brien, Snyder, & Howard [30] found that participants spend substantial amounts of time thinking about activities on the Internet, not only while using the Internet but also when not using or anticipating the next session of use.

In other studies (e.g., [20] [21]), FoMO has been associated with psychological symptoms (e.g., depressed feelings). This is explained through Baumeister and Leary's belongingness theory wherein social exclusion causes anxiety because it signals an actual loss of belonging. Often associated with the problem, social isolation and lack of social support in the real world are likely to increase the desire to divert to online social interactions [26].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The main results of this study confirmed that FoMO and social media use play a significant role in developing maladaptive Internet use among college students. College students have moderate problematic Internet use (PIU) and fear of missing out (FoMO). They spend above average time in social networking sites (SNS). Moreover, this study was able to establish positive associations among variables. Both FoMO and SNS use were correlates as well as predictors of PIU of college students. Also, this research suggested that between the two predictors, FoMO was more related and better determinant of PIU among college students. The results of this study add to the knowledge base about the nature of college students of today. This may raise awareness on the risks and possible devastating effects of excessive and additive Internet use.

In the light of the present findings, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and school psychologists may come up with strategies to address the debilitating effects of PIU. Schools in particular should come up with programs emphasizing the responsible use of social media and the Internet. Also, since among the variables of the study, FoMO is the relatively a new construct, future researches involving other variables such as age, gender, socio-economic status and personality traits are suggested. Also, to further explain the experience of FoMO and the relationship among variables, the use of qualitative research design such as phenomenological analysis and grounded theory may be necessary.

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