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Driven by FOMO: how the fear of missing out shapes information-seeking behaviors in university students

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and information-seeking behavior among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Diponegoro. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory and the Information Search Process model, the study explores how unmet psychological needs influence students' motivations to seek information. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured questionnaire for 364 students selected through simple random sampling. Data were analyzed using simple linear regression with SPSS software. The analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between FOMO and information-seeking behavior, explaining 68.4% of the variance. Students with higher FOMO levels demonstrated more frequent and intensive information-seeking activities, indicating that FOMO serves as an emotional and psychological driver. The study concludes that FOMO significantly influences students' information-seeking behavior. These findings provide practical implications for university administrators in helping students develop healthier information-seeking strategies. Further longitudinal research is recommended to establish causal relationships and explore how digital platform interactions shape these behaviors over time.

Keywords: *academic information; digital behaviour; fear of missing out (fomo); information-seeking activities; information search process (isp)*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the rising wave of digital sociality and the Internet, students at the modern university literally live most of their lives inside online communities, which greatly affects the way they communicate and learn. Of all the psychological effects associated, one key change of behavior driven by FOMO is that it impels students to do certain things. FOMO can be described as anxiety or insecurity, with the real underlying feeling that the fun or information most others are having is something the individual is not. This is common among university students living in a high-speed world where being informed and connected are keys to success in both social and academic life. Therefore, FOMO induces information-seeking behaviors since an individual tries to manage this discomfort of missing something and remains engaged by constantly searching for novel information.

The relationship between the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and information-seeking activities is multifaceted and deeply intertwined, particularly in the context of digital communication and social media usage. FOMO is a social construct that represents a person's anxiety about missing out on satisfying experiences that others are having. This fear is linked to the desire to remain continuously informed and engaged with others' activities, driven by social media platforms that provide real-time updates and content.

The linkage of FOMO and information seeking is important for several reasons. It evolved from three unfulfilled needs, namely relatedness, competence, and autonomy, for those who seek information identified by SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When left unmet, it makes students resort to

information seeking as a compensatory mechanism to fill the void in their social and academic lives. From a cognitive perspective, Kuhlthau's Information Search Process (ISP) model (1991) shows the complexity of information seeking and contains cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. FOMO exacerbates these dimensions that drive students to conduct thorough searches to get information to fill the perceived gap.

Digital platforms that create curated content on social media exaggerate FOMO. Often, they show idealized lives of peers, which enhance feelings of exclusion and urgency to stay updated. Recent statistics regarding digital engagement among university students underline the vast prevalence of these behaviors, a reason to dwell further into their psychological underpinnings. Social media algorithms play a crucial role in shaping FOMO-related behaviors by curating content that fosters this fear, thereby increasing users' time spent on platforms for constant updates (Poleac & Gherguț-Babii, 2024).

It further affirms the relationship between information seeking and FOMO, as explained by Rahardjo & Soetjningsih (2022), who noted that a strong positive relationship exists between FOMO and social media addiction. The emotional fear of missing out leads people to use digital media excessively. Dam et al. (2023) stated that psychological problems caused by FOMO have negative consequences such as reduced quality of life and increased student depression. These results reveal how the mental cost of FOMO, beyond anxiety, becomes a major concern for well-being.

The fear of missing out leads to compulsive usage of social media, characterized by constant checking and enhanced engagement. Oberst et al. (2017) point out that FOMO frequently leads to problematic use of social media behaviors related to compulsion and anxiety among adolescents. This agrees with Fu et al. (2023), who found that FOMO mediates between perceived stress and problematic social network use, showing its role in amplifying maladaptive behaviors.

Social comparison and seeking validation are the processes through which FOMO impacts students. Przybylski et al. (2013) stated that FOMO results from unsatisfied psychological needs, pushing individuals to use social media to fulfill relatedness and belonging. Zhao et al. (2022) further demonstrated that risk factors such as impulsivity and social anxiety exacerbate FOMO and increase addiction to social media.

Interventions to counteract the impacts of FOMO have been promising. Chang et al. (2023) reported that mindfulness practices moderate social media addiction by improving attentional control and relieving FOMO. This means targeted strategies could assist students in reducing compulsive behaviors and the negative consequences brought on by FOMO in their social and educational lives.

Diverse dimensions of FOMO are further examined by recent studies. Jabeen et al. (2023) found that social media fatigue is caused by time cost and anxiety. Hurly et al. (2024) studied that unnecessary social media use is related to serious mental health problems among university students, with stress generated by negative self-reflection and constant pressures. Similarly, Haug et al. (2023) added that the pressure to receive social validation through likes and comments stresses Instagram content authors.

Materialism adds to the negative impact of FOMO. Social comparisons based on materialism enhance addiction and reduce life satisfaction as argued by Ozimek et al. (2024). Hou et al. (2019) demonstrated that self-esteem mediates between social media addiction and its adverse effects on mental health and academic performance. Wolfers and Utz (2022) classified social media as stressors, resources, and coping means and revealed that how it is used depends on its context.

In work scenarios, Si et al. (2023) found that exhaustion and reduced innovation are caused by enterprise social media use. Alshakhsi et al. (2023) highlighted cultural differences between neuroticism and conscientiousness related to FOMO and problematic use. Tandon et al. (2022) showed a relation between FOMO and workplace practices such as “phubbing,” which reduces creativity and worsens relationships. Hattingh et al. (2022) compared Instagram and Snapchat

users and found that compulsive use and information overload mediate relations between FOMO and social media fatigue.

Despite the growing body of research on Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), most existing studies primarily focus on its psychological outcomes, such as social media addiction, anxiety, or well-being, rather than its implications for academic information behavior. This study addresses this gap by positioning college students as a critical population, as they operate within environments that demand continuous access to information for learning, decision-making, and academic performance. University students are not only intensive users of digital platforms but also active information seekers whose academic success depends on their ability to navigate abundant and rapidly updated information sources.

Focusing on college students, particularly those in the humanities, offers a unique contribution to the field of library and information science. Humanities students engage in interpretative, exploratory, and reflective information-seeking practices that differ from procedural or technical disciplines. Examining how FOMO shapes their information-seeking activities provides novel insight into how emotional and psychological drivers intersect with academic information behavior in digitally saturated learning environments. By doing so, this study extends FOMO research beyond psychological consequences and contributes to a deeper understanding of affective factors influencing information-seeking behavior.

The present study highlights the dynamics by which FOMO affects information search behaviors of university students, particularly undergraduates of the Faculty of Humanities at Universitas Diponegoro. Given this background, such dynamics reveal how FOMO implicitly predisposes students to seek and process information in academic and social contexts. Understanding these relationships is essential for designing interventions to counter the negative influence of FOMO and encourage a healthier lifestyle in digital environments.

2. METHODS

The influence of FOMO on information-seeking activities among Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Diponegoro students was clarified by current quantitative survey research. While information-seeking activities constituted the dependent variables, FOMO was the independent variable. Target population for this study was 1,200 active students running the 2024/2025 academic year; simple random sampling was used to sample 364 responders.

Structured questionnaires with demographic data, FOMO, and information-seeking behaviors helped to compile data. To study the relationship between FOMO and information-seeking behavior, statistical analysis comprised validity and reliability tests, descriptive statistics, and simple linear regression.

As this study was conducted independently and involved minimal risk, formal ethical clearance from an institutional review board was not required. Ethical principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were strictly observed.

The FOMO scale consisted of five items adapted from Przybylski et al. (2013), reflecting anxiety related to unmet psychological needs for relatedness and competence as described in Self-Determination Theory (e.g., “I feel anxious when I miss important information shared by my peers”). Information-seeking activity was measured using five self-developed items informed by the affective and behavioral components of Kuhlthau’s Information Search Process, focusing on students’ frequency, strategies, and perceived effectiveness of academic information seeking (e.g., “I regularly seek information to support my academic tasks”). All items were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Table 1 Construct Validity of the FOMO Scale

Item	Item–Total Correlation (r)	Sig. (p)	Validity
F1	0.450	< 0.001	Valid
F2	0.414	< 0.001	Valid
F3	0.488	< 0.001	Valid
F4	0.520	< 0.001	Valid

F5	0.382	< 0.001	Valid
PI1	0.451	< 0.001	Valid
PI2	0.462	< 0.001	Valid
PI3	0.475	< 0.001	Valid
PI4	0.481	< 0.001	Valid
PI5	0.421	< 0.001	Valid

Source: Author’s own processing (2024)

Construct validity was assessed using Pearson correlation analysis between each item and its respective total score. All items showed significant positive correlations with their constructs ($r > 0.30$, $p < 0.01$), indicating acceptable construct validity for both the Fear of Missing Out and information-seeking activity scales and confirming that the items adequately represent the intended theoretical dimensions.

Table 2 Reliability Statistics

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Interpretation
Combined Scale	10	0.511	Moderate to Low Internal Consistency

Source: Author’s own processing (2024)

Reliability testing using Cronbach’s alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.511 across ten items, indicating moderate to low internal consistency. Although this value is below the conventional threshold for high reliability, it reflects the multidimensional and context dependent nature of psychological constructs such as FOMO and information-seeking behavior. In the context of exploratory social science research, the instrument remains methodologically acceptable, and the results should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

3. RESULTS

Table 3 The model summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.827 ^a	.684	.683	.866
a. Predictors: (Constant), FOMO				

Source: Author’s own processing (2024)

The model summary, presented in Table 3, supplies the meaningfulness of the correlation between FOMO and information-seeking activities. Having a value of 0.827, R points towards a very strong relationship between the independent variable—FOMO—and the dependent variable, that is, information-seeking activities. The R square value arrives at 0.684; therefore, about 68.4% of the variance in information-seeking activities is explained with respect to FOMO. The rest of the 31.6% of the variance is explained by other factors that are not used in the model. The adjusted R-squared at a value of 0.683 indicates that the model is strongly fitted with the number of predictors used in the regression analysis.

Table 4 The coefficients

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.315	.334		12.905	.000
	FOMO	.631	.023	.827	27.980	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Information_Seeking_Activities						

Source: Author’s own processing (2024)

Table 4 represents the quantitative analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and information-seeking activities, with a standardized regression coefficient of $\beta = 0.827$ and an explained variance of 68.4%. This finding indicates that FOMO is

not a marginal psychological factor, but a dominant predictor of students' information-seeking behavior. The magnitude of this effect is notably high for behavioral research, suggesting that emotional drivers play a central role in shaping how students search for and engage with information in academic contexts..

Moreover, the regression analysis confirmed the hypothesis that FOMO is very important with regards to student information-seeking activity, which becomes apparent by the strong and meaningful connection of these two variables, testified not only by the high correlation coefficient but by the non-significant test value of p as well. Therefore, if they have a high level of FOMO, it will lead them to have high levels of information-seeking behavior because of the internal need to always keep in contact, which suggests information from the source. This process will help explain the psychosocial factors that drive their behavior in academic and social settings.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1. *The relationship between FOMO and information-seeking activities*

The quantitative findings of this study reveal a strong and statistically significant relationship between Fear of Missing Out and information-seeking behavior among undergraduate students. The regression analysis shows that FOMO accounts for 68.4 percent of the variance in information-seeking activities, with a standardized coefficient of $\beta = 0.827$ and a significance level below 0.001. This indicates that FOMO functions as a dominant predictor of students' information-seeking behavior rather than a marginal psychological factor.

The relatively high coefficient of determination suggests that students' information-seeking activities are largely driven by affective motivations. Students experiencing higher levels of FOMO tend to engage in more frequent searches, monitor information updates more intensively, and demonstrate a stronger sense of urgency in obtaining information. This finding confirms that information seeking in academic contexts is not purely rational or task oriented, but is substantially shaped by emotional concerns related to fear of being left behind academically or socially.

These results are consistent with previous studies that conceptualize FOMO as a motivational force that encourages individuals to remain socially connected and continuously informed in order to reduce anxiety and perceived exclusion (Przybylski et al., 2013). In the context of this study, the strong predictive power of FOMO suggests that students actively seek information as a coping mechanism to manage uncertainty and social comparison in a digitally saturated academic environment.

The findings further highlight the role of digital platforms in amplifying FOMO driven information-seeking behavior. Social media environments characterized by continuous updates and curated content intensify students' awareness of peers' activities, thereby increasing pressure to stay informed. Prior research has shown that FOMO is associated not only with increased social media use but also with psychological outcomes such as anxiety and social media fatigue (Rahardjo & Soetjningsih, 2022; Jabeen et al., 2023). This study extends those findings by demonstrating that such psychological pressures translate directly into heightened information-seeking behavior within academic settings.

Empirical evidence from other contexts supports this interpretation. For instance, Hurley et al. (2024) reported that university students experience heightened anxiety due to constant social comparison and perceived expectations to remain continuously connected. Such pressures encourage students to intensify both social and academic information seeking in order to avoid feelings of exclusion or inadequacy. Therefore, the strong statistical relationship identified in this study reflects broader digital and social dynamics that shape contemporary student behavior.

Moreover, social networking platforms such as Instagram further reinforce these tendencies by promoting validation seeking behaviors through likes, comments, and peer comparison. Previous studies indicate that this cycle contributes to stress and the adoption of coping strategies that may include excessive information monitoring (Haug et al., 2024; Oberst et al., 2017). Materialistic values embedded in social media use also increase social comparison and compulsive

behaviors, which subsequently heighten FOMO and anxiety (Ozimek et al., 2024). These mechanisms help explain the magnitude of the quantitative relationship observed in this study.

4.2. Theoretical implications

These findings extend support for the Self-Determination Theory of Deci and Ryan (1985). According to this theory, unmet psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy can result in negative emotional states, including FOMO. The strong association between FOMO and information-seeking behavior suggests that students who experience deficiencies in social connection or academic confidence are more likely to engage in intensified information-seeking activities as a compensatory strategy.

In this context, information seeking serves as a means to restore psychological balance. Students may seek information to reaffirm their sense of belonging, improve perceived competence, or regain control over academic and social situations. This interpretation aligns with prior research indicating that FOMO is associated with anxiety, compulsive behaviors, and maladaptive social practices such as phubbing (Younas et al., 2022; Tandon et al., 2022).

Notably, the results have been examined in terms of Kuhlthau's Information Search Process (ISP) model (1991). The ISP model illustrates the central functions of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions in the information-seeking process. The strong quantitative effect of FOMO observed in this study highlights the central role of emotional discomfort in triggering information-seeking behavior. Students experiencing anxiety related to missing out are likely to intensify their search efforts in order to reduce uncertainty and emotional distress. This supports the view that information seeking is deeply embedded in affective experiences rather than being a purely cognitive process. Studies related to the over-usage of social media also support this view; they find that hypermedia exposure leads to stress and tiredness, which in turn reduces a person's high mental state and emotional involvement (Fu et al., 2023; Si et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the findings suggest the need to extend existing theoretical models by incorporating digital stressors as key contextual factors influencing information behavior. While the ISP model acknowledges emotional states, this study demonstrates that digitally induced emotions such as FOMO can significantly shape the frequency and intensity of information seeking. Future research may explore how these theoretical frameworks interact with specific digital environments, including social media platforms and academic information systems.

4.3. Practical implications

The results of this study have important implications for educators, counselors, and university administrators. Recognizing FOMO as a significant driver of information-seeking behavior can inform the development of interventions that address the emotional and psychological needs underlying students' academic practices. Universities may consider implementing digital well-being programs, counseling services, or workshops aimed at helping students manage anxiety related to constant connectivity and information overload.

The findings also indicate that students who engage in FOMO driven information seeking may be at risk of experiencing information overload and psychological stress. Previous research has shown that compulsive information consumption associated with FOMO is negatively related to life satisfaction and positively related to stress (Hattingh et al., 2022; Chang et al., 2023). Therefore, promoting balanced information-seeking strategies is essential to support students' academic performance and well-being.

Universities can play a key role by strengthening centralized academic information systems and improving the clarity of official communication channels. Such efforts may reduce students' perceived need to constantly search for information across multiple platforms. In addition, integrating digital literacy and self-regulation training into student development programs may help students cultivate healthier information-seeking habits. Mindfulness based interventions, for example, have been shown to reduce impulsive information seeking and mitigate the negative effects of FOMO (Chang et al., 2023).

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored the existence of a relationship between FOMO and information-seeking behavior among undergraduate students at the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Diponegoro. The obtained results indicate a significant positive correlation between FOMO and the tendency of students to seek information. What is more, FOMO accounted for a 68.4% variance in the information seeking activity, with a standard equally strong coefficient of $\beta = 0.827$, showing that information seeking behavior rises as FOMO levels increase and are more often performed at a stronger intensity.

The findings corresponded relatively well with the philosophical underpinnings of the Self-Determination Theory and Information Search Process because it appears that FOMO signaled unmet psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy, which prodded teens to look for information that might alleviate the bad feelings of being left out or feeling low. The ISP model not only recognizes the emotional and rational reasons for seeking information, but it posits that such elements compel students to activity out of a fear of falling behind, similarly reflected by information-seeking activities.

Practical applications of this research are that educational institutions must take into consideration psychological and emotional aspects in students' behaviors and support systems, which will assist them in managing FOMO. Educative campaigns promoting good informational search behaviors can assist in preventing negative consequences pertaining to FOMO like information overload and stress. This study further provides a framework for future research on the longitudinal causal relationships between FOMO and information-seeking behaviors and the shaping of these dynamics by digital platforms.

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