

Scroll or Stuck: Uncovering Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Among Public Relations Students

Anisa Oktafriani¹, Yanti Dwi Astuti²

^{1,2} Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received Jun 6th, 2024

Revised Des 20th, 2025

Accepted Des 26th, 2025

Published Des 31th, 2025

Keywords:

Fear of Missing Out; Self-Determination Theory (SDT); PR Students; Digital Identity; Student Behaviour

Abstract

This study aims to explore the lived experiences and meaning-making of FoMO among members of the PERHUMAS Muda Yogyakarta 2023 cohort, a public relations student organization that paradoxically possesses strategic communication awareness yet remains vulnerable to FoMO. Using a qualitative approach with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving four informants. Findings reveal that FoMO is not merely a fear of missing out, but a manifestation of efforts to fulfill three basic psychological needs: (1) Autonomy, in which FoMO drives digital identity management strategies through account separation (first/second account); (2) Competence, in which FoMO acts as a double-edged catalyst, simultaneously triggering social comparison anxiety while driving productive behaviors such as participation in competitions; and (3) Relatedness, which creates a paradox of being "digitally connected but relationally empty." The novelty of this research lies in unpacking the duality of FoMO as both a pathology and a professional catalyst, as well as the discovery of impression management strategies as an autonomous response to digital pressure. Theoretical and practical implications for communication education and digital mental health are discussed.

How to Cite (APA Style): Anisa Oktafriani, A., and Astuti, Y.D. (2025). Scroll or Stuck: Uncovering Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Among Public Relations Students. *Interaksi: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 14(2), 337-357. <https://doi.org/10.14710/interaksi.14.2.337-357>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC-BY-SA). Copyright © 2025 The Author(s).

INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid advancement in information and communication technology, Indonesian society has become increasingly dependent on the internet. According to the report published by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2022), the number of Indonesians connected to the internet in 2021–2022 reached 210,026,769 out of a total population of 272,682,600 representing a penetration rate of 77.02%. This figure places Indonesia among the countries with the largest internet user populations in Southeast

Asia. According to Alfirahmi (2019), the internet plays a critical role in the daily lives of society, serving as a communication medium for creating, distributing, and transmitting information. Internet use in Indonesia is dominated by social media activities (89.15%), followed by online messaging (73.86%), online shopping (21.26%), and online gaming (14.23%) (APJII, 2022). These figures indicate that social media is no longer merely a source of entertainment; it has evolved into a communication infrastructure that shapes the way individuals interact, access information, and engage with the digital ecosystem.

This high intensity of digital connectedness has given rise to a contemporary psychological phenomenon known as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). FoMO is defined as the anxiety that others are experiencing more rewarding, meaningful, or advantageous events in one's absence (Przybylski et al., 2013; Ayuningtyas & Wiyono, 2020). When individuals spend extended periods online, the rapid pace of the digital world can create a sense of exclusion and the feeling of being left behind whenever they are disconnected.

The need for self-determination forms the foundational basis of human motivation, which is shaped by three elements: relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, posits that human motivation is closely tied to the fulfillment of these three basic psychological needs. When these needs are not adequately met, individuals tend to seek fulfillment through compulsive social media use, which in turn reinforces FoMO behavior (Przybylski et al., 2013). Self-determination can also describe an individual's motivation for internet use, such as seeking up-to-date information, maintaining competence, and connecting with others through the exchange of information (Dewi & Sari, 2022).

The phenomenon of FoMO creates a new paradox that can be described as the condition of "Scroll or Stuck." Individuals continuously scroll through social media feeds to ensure they are not falling behind the flow of information and social trends, yet psychologically they feel stuck in cycles of anxiety, diminished self-worth, and the pressure of social comparison. McGinnis (2020) notes that FoMO is rooted in the primitive human instinct to belong to a group (emotional inclusion). When this need is threatened by the perception of being left behind, individuals respond compulsively.

A substantial body of prior research has consistently mapped Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) as a phenomenon driven by internet dependence, the need for social recognition, low self-control, and patterns of passive social media use, all of which ultimately lead to psychological exhaustion or social media fatigue (Umam, 2021; Aisafitri & Yusriyah, 2021;

Ayuningtyas & Wiyono, 2020; Carolina & Mahestu, 2020; Hattingh et al., 2022; Dewi & Sari, 2022).

The majority of these studies employed quantitative approaches that positioned FoMO solely as a psychological deficit or a correlated variable within general populations. Although such studies have provided a solid empirical foundation, there remain methodological and contextual gaps that urgently require attention. Methodologically, prior studies tended to measure the intensity of FoMO and its statistical impact, but failed to capture how FoMO is lived, interpreted, and subjectively negotiated by individuals amid digital pressures.

Contextually, the existing literature predominantly drew samples from the general student population without considering the disciplinary backgrounds that shape their communication patterns. No in-depth study has focused specifically on public relations students, such as members of PERHUMAS Muda Yogyakarta. As aspiring communication practitioners, these students operate within a highly competitive organizational ecosystem where FoMO is triggered not only by entertainment, but also by professional pressure to remain constantly up-to-date, maintain a visible digital presence, excel academically, and sustain public relations networks.

Furthermore, there exists an intriguing theoretical anomaly or conceptual gap worth examining. Logically, communication studies students who possess high media literacy and an understanding of information curation mechanisms should be more resilient against the pressures of FoMO. Yet empirical realities reveal a contradiction: this digitally literate group is in fact highly vulnerable to FoMO. This gap demonstrates that information literacy alone is insufficient to shield individuals from the psychological pressures of digital spaces; rather, intrinsic motivational drives, specifically the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are what ultimately govern their communicative behavior.

Based on this mapping of research gaps, the present study seeks to explore the meanings and motivations underlying FoMO behavior among members of PERHUMAS Muda Yogyakarta. This study offers a novel contribution to the field of communication studies by reframing FoMO not as a pathology, but as a manifestation of individuals' active efforts to manage their self-presentation, demonstrate communicative competence, and seek relational connectedness within a professional ecosystem that demands digital existence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

FoMO in the Ecology of New Media

The internet, as part of the new media landscape, has transformed from a mere information channel into an interactive, borderless, and real-time social infrastructure (Nugroho, 2020; Pamuji, 2019; S. Arifianto, 2018). This media ecology creates conditions of information overload that give rise to a psychological and communicative phenomenon known as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). FoMO is no longer understood merely as a primitive fear of social exclusion (McGinnis, 2020); it has evolved into a compulsive response to the affordances of social media platforms deliberately designed to stimulate social comparison.

Individuals experiencing FoMO are trapped in a cycle of anxiety when disconnected, yet paradoxically feel compelled to continuously monitor others' digital performances (Ayuningtyas & Wiyono, 2020; Przybylski et al., 2013).

FoMO, or Fear of Missing Out, is the condition in which a person perceives others' experiences as more satisfying than their own, generating an unwanted fear and a persistent desire to remain present and connected (McGinnis, 2020). Social pressure, in the form of feeling left out after an event or missing a positive experience, is typically triggered by intense social media use.

Those who experience FoMO consistently feel compelled and even addicted to accessing the internet, while the absence of internet access produces anxiety and stress (Ayuningtyas & Wiyono, 2020). Przybylski et al. (2013) in Taswiyah (2022) identified four characteristics of individuals experiencing FoMO: (1) frequently checking social media to monitor others' activities, (2) forcing themselves to always participate in order to enhance their self-esteem, (3) using social media as a personal stage for self-presentation, and (4) feeling perpetually lacking and desiring more across various domains of life, whether academic, social, or professional.

From a communication perspective, FoMO compels individuals to continuously negotiate their identity, force participation in digital trends, and engage in impression management in order to maintain their existence and self-esteem in cyberspace (Carolina & Mahestu, 2020; Taswiyah, 2022).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a Framework for Analyzing Digital Motivation

Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan developed Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a theory concerning the motivation underlying human behavior. To unpack the motivations behind what may appear as irrational FoMO behavior, this study employs SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2017). SDT argues that human beings are active organisms with a natural tendency to integrate psychological aspects of the self with social structures, wherein well-being and motivation are highly dependent on the fulfillment of three basic needs: Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness.

Autonomy refers to the freedom to express oneself and control one's own identity; Competence refers to the need to feel effective, accomplished, and recognized; and Relatedness refers to the need for connection and a sense of belonging within a community (Ryan, 2009; Aisafitri & Yusriyah, 2021). In the context of social media, these three needs are often not fully met in the real world, prompting individuals to turn to digital platforms as compensatory mechanisms.

FoMO, therefore, can be understood as a manifestation of individuals who feel deficient in autonomy, competence, or relatedness, seeking fulfillment through compulsive digital validation (Przybylski et al., 2013). Social media simultaneously serves as an arena in which all three basic needs are at stake, fulfilled, or challenged by the dynamics of digital interaction.

SDT and FoMO in Digital Communication

SDT provides a framework for understanding why FoMO occurs and how it drives particular behaviors on social media. Przybylski et al. (2013) explicitly linked FoMO to the insufficient fulfillment of the basic psychological needs identified by SDT, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Individuals who feel that these three needs are not adequately met tend to seek fulfillment through compulsive social media use. When someone experiences FoMO, they may feel threatened by the perception that others' experiences are more enjoyable, which then motivates them to match or even surpass those perceived achievements (Przybylski et al., 2013). This creates a cycle in which FoMO simultaneously functions as both a product of and a driver for all three basic SDT needs.

Prior research has provided an empirical foundation regarding the relationship between SDT and FoMO; however, the majority of studies continue to rely on quantitative approaches applied to general populations. The present study aims to address this gap by exploring the FoMO experiences of PERHUMAS Muda Yogyakarta members. The novelty

of this research lies in three areas: (1) reframing FoMO not merely as a pathology but as a manifestation of efforts to fulfill basic psychological needs; (2) revealing the duality of FoMO as a productive catalyst within a professional student organization ecosystem; and (3) identifying impression management strategies, such as the separation of first and second accounts, as expressions of autonomous agency in response to FoMO-induced pressures.

In doing so, this study enriches the communication and digital psychology literature by offering a more nuanced perspective on how digitally literate young people navigate the paradox of being digitally connected yet psychologically constrained, that is, the condition of Scroll or Stuck.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. Phenomenology was selected because it enables researchers to explore in depth how individuals personally assign meaning to their lived experiences, in this case the experience of FoMO in the context of social media use (Smith et al., 2009). Unlike transcendental phenomenology, which aims to uncover universal essences, IPA focuses on the particularity of individual experience and how meaning is constructed through a double interpretive process between the researcher and the subject.

The study was conducted between March and May 2023 within the community of PERHUMAS Muda Yogyakarta. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim before being analyzed.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) active membership in the PERHUMAS Muda Yogyakarta 2023 cohort with representation from different universities; (2) active enrollment in a communication studies program; (3) identifiable FoMO behavior detected through a preliminary study; and (4) willingness to participate in in-depth interviews. These criteria were chosen because phenomenological research does not aim for statistical generalization but rather for depth of understanding.

The study involved four informants, namely AM, IGT, MC, and FA, drawn from different universities and possessing diverse FoMO experiences. All four informants were selected following a pre-study phase comprising initial observation and an open screening process involving all active members of PERHUMAS Muda Yogyakarta's 2023 cohort.

Data analysis followed the IPA steps outlined by Smith et al. (2009): (1) reading transcripts repeatedly for immersion; (2) initial coding through linguistic and conceptual exploration; (3) developing emergent themes for each case; (4) identifying connections between themes within a single case; (5) conducting cross-case analysis to map patterns across informants; and (6) final interpretation using the SDT framework.

Data validity was verified through source triangulation, comparing interview results across all four informants, as well as theoretical triangulation by confirming findings against the SDT framework. In addition, member checking was conducted with informants to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To provide a comprehensive overview of the informants' lived experiences, the following presents a mapping of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Table 1. Thematic Mapping of FoMO Experiences Among Public Relations Students

Tema	Sub-Tema/ Perilaku
Autonomy	- Constantly checking social media - Creating a personal performance stage (first/second account) - Forcing oneself to participate in order to remain up-to-date
Competence	- Feeling dissatisfied with one's own competence - Actively participating in competence-building activities - Using social media as a source of knowledge
Relatedness	- Maintaining online and offline social relationships - Using social media for personal branding - Seeking recognition from one's social environment

Source: Processed by the Researchers

Research Findings

1. Autonomy in Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Behavior

The findings indicate that informants experience FoMO not only as an external pressure, but also as a trigger for autonomous responses in managing their digital identities.

Autonomy refers to an individual's capacity to exercise self-control and make decisions aligned with their own desires. They have the freedom to choose which platforms to use for accessing information and communicating with others online. Constantly checking social media is one of the defining characteristics of individuals experiencing FoMO, and this was demonstrated by informant AM during the interview:

"Almost every day, I use the internet mostly for social media." (AM)

This habitual social media checking was also observed by the researcher in the environment of PERHUMAS Muda Yogyakarta members. Students were found to continuously check their social media even while physically gathered together. This indicates that dependence on the internet and social media has influenced their level of autonomy in controlling their attention and interactions in the real world.

They also retain the freedom to engage in various activities on social media, including creating their own personal performance stage as an effort to construct desired images and identities through posts, photos, and other online activities, as demonstrated by AM:

"Oh yes, usually I do things like updating my activities, reposting things from friends, sharing information, or posting appreciation posts, things like that."
(AM)

To shape their self-image, some informants employed a strategy they refer to as a first account and a second account. The first account is used to project a curated public persona for a broad audience, reflecting how they wish to be known publicly. The second account is reserved for a closer circle of acquaintances who already know them in their everyday life and for whom no constructed image is necessary. This was articulated by informant FA:

"My first account is more like my campus life. And to be honest, I'm also the type who rarely uploads things myself, I more often repost. On my second account, it's really personal things that I trust enough to share with others."
(FA)

The social environment is one of the factors contributing to the formation of FoMO behavior. The informants' sense of autonomy also manifests as a drive to constantly participate, feeling the need to keep up with whatever is trending online in order to remain relevant and up-to-date, as expressed by MC:

"What can I say... Hmm, sometimes I feel that if I don't follow what's trending, if I don't know what's popular, people might think I can't keep up with the topic, can't join in on the conversation. So that's one thing that can make interactions feel okay, being able to chime in about anything." (MC)

MC's account illustrates how the pressure to "chime in" compels them to continuously consume viral content. This pressure is also triggered by observing the achievements of others, prompting informants to aspire to similar accomplishments, as narrated by AM:

"So, for this past month, in one of my WhatsApp group chats, almost every week there's always a friend who receives recognition for being elected as an outstanding student, winning a national or international competition, and I

keep thinking, why not me? It's been happening more frequently lately. And in another group chat, every week someone shares updates about their worship achievements. I just think, wow, how can they do that, while I'm still here in the same place." (AM)

This compulsion to push oneself is not always destructive in nature. AM describes how his sense of autonomy continues to function in the form of determination to keep trying:

"For me, I think it's more about pushing myself. I try first with everything I have, and if it still doesn't work out, then okay. So it's not about doing only what I can, it's more like trying everything first, giving it all at once." (AM)

Autonomy in the context of FoMO refers to the ability of individuals to recognize, appreciate, and fulfill their own needs and desires. In this case, autonomy drives them to meet the expectations that arise from observing the achievements of others on social media.

Przybylski et al. (2013) laid an important foundation in the study of FoMO by identifying the motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of the phenomenon through quantitative surveys with general population samples, thereby mapping broad patterns of FoMO. The present study moves in a different direction: rather than measuring the magnitude of FoMO, it examines how FoMO is actively interpreted and responded to by individuals within a homogeneous professional-orientation student community. This methodological difference yields findings that are richer in descriptive depth, even if not statistically generalizable.

The finding regarding dual-account management strategies represents a dimension that has received little attention in prior FoMO literature, including in studies by Przybylski et al. (2013) and Aisafitri and Yusriyah (2021), which tended to frame FoMO as a passively experienced condition. The practice of separating a first account from a second account reflects a highly conscious form of impression management, in which individuals deliberately choose what to display and to whom. This finding opens a new dimension: FoMO does not only contribute to excessive information consumption, but can also drive agency and creativity in digital identity management. Autonomy, therefore, is not simply eroded by social media pressure; it also becomes a space in which individuals actively design their own self-narratives in the digital realm.

2. Competence in Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Behavior

In the dimension of competence, informants revealed lived experiences marked by dissatisfaction with themselves when confronted with the curated achievements of others on social media.

Competence forms part of the motivational drive to fulfill needs related to skill mastery and achievement. Among individuals experiencing FoMO, competence needs can surface as dissatisfaction with one's own capabilities and a felt necessity to improve, just as others appear to be doing. The experience of FoMO arises from a persistent sense of inadequacy and the desire to attain more, as expressed by informant IGT:

"The pain is something like... oh, I haven't become anything yet, something like that. Even though in reality... we actually have become something..."
(IGT)

Phenomenologically, however, this anxiety does not paralyze them. Instead, FoMO triggers a strong drive to develop competence in concrete ways. IGT explains how the fear of missing out on trends drives productive behavior:

"Oh, like whatever, unless it's going back to trends about competitions, internships, or joining this or that, volunteering here and there, then I'm afraid of missing out on those trends..." (IGT)

The competence motivation also drives informants to use social media not merely as a form of entertainment, but as a valuable source of knowledge. They actively check social media to access the latest information, broaden their perspectives, and learn new things related to their interests and areas of expertise. Informants are also consciously transforming the affordances of social media from entertainment to a tool for competence development. FA explains how he curates his Instagram and TikTok feeds for purely informational purposes:

"For more information, maybe... for information, because TikTok used to rank first, TikTok mixes a lot of information with entertainment. So TikTok can also be used to access information. But for pure information, on Instagram I follow informational accounts, things like that. So maybe there."
(FA)

The presence of the internet also provides informants with a platform for self-actualization on social media, enabling them not only to monitor others' activities but also to actively share posts about their own achievements, as narrated by IGT:

"In today's world, besides having skills, we also need to have connections. Because if only we ourselves know our own skills but we don't have

connections to be able to brand ourselves, then there's something missing. Because connections are very important now." (IGT)

Informant FA's FoMO experience stems from comparing himself to others online and perceiving their lives as more impressive:

"When FoMO hits, it really feels like... hmm, what is it... I haven't... missed this information, or like, others have already tried it but I haven't. It's more like a feeling of frustration, that kind of frustration." (FA)

Although he is aware that what is displayed online is curated content, FA still feels pressure to measure up to it. Yet FA also maintains a critical awareness that the internet only shows the polished surface without revealing the struggles behind it:

"We can so easily see that someone suddenly has this or that, without us knowing the process behind it and what their background is. Then we suddenly start comparing ourselves, even though we might think we both work 24 hours or something, but we're not like that. Because we don't have the education... we don't realize that every person has their own path." (FA)

From the observations conducted, all four informants tend to actively participate in various activities aimed at self-improvement. These include social activities, campus and off-campus organizations, national-level competitions, and community service programs. The influence of competence motivation drives them to make every effort to excel in their areas of interest, confront challenges, and adapt to ongoing change. They are not merely pursuing achievements; they are also striving to find personal fulfillment and to prepare themselves for the future.

Umam (2021) found that internet addiction is a significant predictor of FoMO among university students, with a linear relationship: the greater the dependence on the internet, the greater the experience of FoMO. That study provides an important reference point regarding the risk factors for FoMO from a media use behavior perspective. The present study uncovers the next layer of that finding. When the informants in this study experienced FoMO, their response was not limited to increased internet consumption; it also manifested as an active drive to participate in competitions, internships, volunteer activities, and self-development programs. In other words, within the context of a professionally oriented student organization such as PERHUMAS Muda Yogyakarta, FoMO functions as a competence catalyst rather than merely a psychological burden.

This finding enriches the argument of Hattingh et al. (2022), who through a comparative study of Instagram and Snapchat users showed that FoMO can lead to social media fatigue.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the impact of FoMO is highly dependent on the community context: among students embedded in a public relations and communication ecosystem, FoMO in fact drives the urge to prove oneself rather than withdraw. This difference in response suggests that the variables of organizational context and career orientation need to be taken more seriously in future FoMO research. FA's awareness of content curation mechanisms, despite still experiencing FoMO-related pressure, further reinforces the researchers' view that FoMO is not simply a matter of information literacy, but touches deeper psychological dimensions related to self-esteem, the need for social recognition, and the dynamics of social comparison.

3. Relatedness: Hyper-Connection and Relational Emptiness

The informants' experience of relatedness is shaped by intensive efforts to maintain social relevance and build a professional public image. Relatedness represents the human need to have positive social relationships and to receive recognition from others. Individuals experiencing FoMO find that the relatedness motivation drives them to maintain social ties and interactions with others, not only in the real world but also in the digital realm, as expressed by MC:

"In the real world, it's like its name implies, real. Online, it's just online relations. But sometimes people online, on social media, actually turn their online friends into real-world friends." (MC)

The internet serves as a bridge through which they remain connected and communicate. Checking social media thus becomes a routine for staying connected with others, as practiced by MC:

"In general, it's through social media, because my friends are there too." (MC)

Observations revealed that when informants gathered with close friends, they tended to be more focused on interacting with those physically present, though they would still occasionally check their phones or social media during conversations. The convenience that social media offers for long-distance communication cannot surpass the value of direct communication, as face-to-face interaction is considered more meaningful in fulfilling relatedness needs.

They use social media as a performance stage for personal branding and self-actualization, as expressed by AM:

"In my opinion, everyone needs to be acknowledged. And one of the functions of communication is precisely that, so that our existence is recognized by those around us." (AM)

They seek interaction and connection with others in an effort to broaden their sphere of influence and build a reputation, as narrated by AM:

"Social interaction means communicating with people, and one of the benefits of communicating with people is that we exchange news, get the latest information, we can sustain relationships, there are many functions of communication, of course. So essentially, social interaction is important so that we're not out of the loop. Public relations practitioners always need to stay updated." (AM)

Having a positive social environment and building relationships with high-achieving individuals carries complex consequences for the informants. On the one hand, they feel motivated; on the other, their FoMO is also triggered, as narrated by IGT:

"The FoMO I experience is when... I'm afraid of not being able to become anything, while the people around me are already much further ahead, their level is already above mine. That's the thought. Yet if we explore ourselves, search for our experiences, our perspectives, our achievements, they might actually be at the same level or even better. It's just that, according to IGT, FoMO can influence a person in their thinking, their actions, and in doing unexpected things." (IGT)

AM also acknowledged that although he often feels left behind, FoMO actually drives him to keep striving:

"When it comes to being left behind, I keep trying, keep trying. It's actually not that I have to be like them, but at least I also have one thing that I'm truly proud of." (AM)

Beyond this, the desire to always remain connected with peers carries a tendency to neglect one's own needs and prioritize others in certain situations. Ironically, despite the high intensity of digital connectivity, informants do not always have genuinely close friends. They are aware that the quantity of connections does not correspond to the depth of relationships. IGT revealed an experience of loneliness amid the noise of the digital world:

"Because I'm the type of person who is afraid of losing friends, but I don't have any close friends. That's the problem. So because of that, I just think, 'oh whatever, rather than losing a friend, it's fine if I get hurt a little.'" (IGT)

Social media provides them with a space to build and maintain relationships with virtual friends, allowing their need for social connection and a sense of relatedness to be met, even if this does not always produce meaningful depth of relationship.

Carolina and Mahestu (2020) described how FoMO drives adolescents to remain digitally connected in order to avoid the feeling of being excluded from their community, focusing on the general adolescent population. The present study uncovers more nuanced layers within an older, organizationally active student population. Although all informants actively maintain digital connections, there is a clear awareness that face-to-face interaction is still valued more highly for fulfilling genuine relational needs. A distinctive paradox emerges in this study: the high intensity of digital connectivity coexists with the absence of genuinely close relationships.

This paradox aligns with the findings of Duradoni et al. (2024), who revealed a correlation between intensive internet use and increased feelings of loneliness. The distinction produced by this study lies in its context and mechanism: whereas Duradoni et al. (2024) addressed the broad population of internet users, this study demonstrates how that paradox manifests specifically among communication students who possess high digital literacy yet still experience relational emptiness. Dewi and Sari (2022) found that passive Instagram use motivation correlates positively with FoMO. The present study raises a different dimension: how individuals who consciously understand the mechanisms of content curation on social media still experience FoMO-related pressures.

The researchers contend that these findings indicate that digital competence does not automatically produce depth of social connection. A high mastery of communication technology can in fact create the illusion of connectedness, one that is ultimately unable to fulfill the genuine need for relatedness. This presents a particular challenge for communication studies students who are professionally expected to be active on social media, yet psychologically still require the depth of interpersonal relationships that cannot be fully substituted by digital interaction.

DISCUSSION

Autonomy as an Impression Management Strategy

The finding regarding the strategy of separating first and second accounts introduces a new dimension into the FoMO literature. Whereas Przybylski et al. (2013) and Aisafitri &

Yusriyah (2021) tend to frame FoMO as a passive condition that erodes self-control, this study finds that among public relations students, FoMO actually triggers autonomous agency in the form of a highly calculated impression management strategy.

From a communication perspective, this account separation represents a form of digital identity negotiation (Goffman, 1959) in which individuals deliberately curate their self-narratives for different audiences. FoMO does not entirely diminish autonomy; on the contrary, it compels individuals to become more strategic "identity managers" in navigating the pressures of social expectations in digital spaces.

Competence: The Duality of FoMO as a Pathology and a Productive Catalyst

The most significant finding of this article lies in the dimension of competence. Prior literature, such as Umam (2021) and Hattingh et al. (2022), linearly associates FoMO with internet addiction and social media fatigue. However, this study reveals a more complex layer: within the ecosystem of a professional student organization such as PERHUMAS, FoMO functions as a competence catalyst. The feeling of being stuck while observing peers achieving things on social media actually drives the urge to register for competitions, internships, and volunteer programs. FoMO transforms from a mere psychological burden into an intrinsic motivation to prove oneself.

This finding enriches the SDT argument (Deci & Ryan, 2017) within a digital context: when the need for competence is threatened by social comparison, individuals do not necessarily withdraw, but may instead respond with achievement-oriented behavior. However, this is a double-edged sword. If left unmanaged, this productive drive can lead to burnout due to the unrealistically curated standards of achievement prevalent on social media.

Relatedness and the Paradox of Connected yet Lonely in Computer-Mediated Communication

The findings regarding relatedness confirm and deepen the connectivity paradox within Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). Informants acknowledge that face-to-face interaction remains more valuable, yet they remain trapped in a cycle of FoMO that compels them to constantly "chime in" and build personal branding in order to maintain a sense of belonging.

IGT's account, stating that he is "afraid of losing friends yet has no close friends," strongly aligns with the findings of Duradoni et al. (2024), who identified a correlation between intensive internet use and increased loneliness.

However, this study adds contextual nuance: this paradox is experienced specifically by individuals with high digital literacy. For public relations students, the professional pressure to always remain up-to-date and maintain a broad network of relationships as a professional asset in public relations actually comes at the expense of deeper interpersonal relationships. This demonstrates that technical competence and media literacy alone are insufficient to shield individuals from relational emptiness; genuine relatedness needs still require physical presence and emotional vulnerability that cannot be fully simulated through digital interaction.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the motivational underpinnings of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) behavior among PERHUMAS Muda Yogyakarta 2023 cohort members cannot be understood linearly as a simple fear of missing information. More than that, FoMO represents an expression of individuals' active efforts to fulfill the three fundamental psychological needs identified by Self-Determination Theory (SDT): autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These three dimensions do not operate in isolation; they are mutually reinforcing in shaping the complex patterns of FoMO behavior in the digital space.

In terms of autonomy, the informants actively developed digital identity management strategies through the separation of social media accounts as a means of exercising control over the self-image they project to different audiences. This finding indicates that FoMO does not always weaken individual autonomy; on the contrary, in certain contexts, FoMO encourages individuals to become more deliberate and strategic in managing their digital presence.

In terms of competence, FoMO does not function solely as a psychological burden; it also serves as a catalyst that drives active participation in competence-building activities, academic competitions, and professional development. This finding demonstrates that within a professionally oriented student organization environment, FoMO can possess a productive dimension that has been largely underexplored in the existing literature.

In terms of relatedness, the high intensity of digital connectedness coexists with real relational emptiness. Informants recognized that social media is only capable of partially fulfilling their need for connectedness, while the depth of interpersonal relationships still requires face-to-face interaction.

The researchers contend that these findings carry important implications both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study reinforces the relevance of SDT as a framework for analyzing social media behavior in the context of communication-oriented student organizations, while simultaneously expanding the understanding of FoMO beyond the clinical and quantitative perspectives that have dominated the literature. The primary contribution of this research lies in three areas that have received limited attention in prior studies: the discovery of digital identity management strategies as active responses to FoMO, the uncovering of FoMO's function as a competence catalyst in professional organizational contexts, and the identification of a digital connectivity paradox among individuals with high media literacy.

On a practical level, this study offers several recommendations. First, for educators and student organization administrators, it is important to integrate digital literacy programs that go beyond technical media use skills to also address the strengthening of digital psychological well-being. Such programs should encompass the capacity to manage social comparison, build realistic expectations of achievement, and distinguish between digital connections and the depth of interpersonal relationships. Second, for practitioners and administrators of communication-based student organizations such as PERHUMAS, these findings suggest the need to create structured face-to-face interaction spaces that complement the already-high level of digital connectivity, in order to more comprehensively fulfill relatedness needs. Third, for future researchers, this study opens opportunities to examine FoMO with a larger number of informants or through a mixed-methods approach in order to extend the generalizability of these findings to student communities with more diverse backgrounds and fields of study.

FUNDING

This research received no external funding.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the members of PERHUMAS Muda Yogyakarta 2023 cohort for their time and openness throughout the in-depth interview

process. The authors also thank the reviewers for their constructive feedback, which has significantly enhanced the quality of this manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request to the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical limitations agreed upon with the informants.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article.

REFERENCES

- Aisafitri, L., & Yusriyah, K. (2021). Kecanduan Media Sosial (FOMO) Pada Generasi Milenial. *Jurnal Audience*, 4(01), 86–106. <https://doi.org/10.33633/ja.v4i01.4249>
- Alfirahmi. (2019). Fenomena Kopi Kekinian Di Era 4.0. *Jurnal Lugas*, 3(1), 24–32.
- APJII. (2022). Laporan Survei Penetrasi & Perilaku Pengguna Internet Indonesia 2022. Available from: <https://apjii.or.id>
- Arifianto, S. (2018). Praktik budaya media digital dan pengaruhnya. Aswaja Pressindo.
- Ayuningtyas, R. F., & Wiyono, B. D. (2020). Studi Mengenai Kecanduan Internet dan Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) pada Siswa di SMK Negeri 1 Driyorejo. *Jurnal BK UNESA*, 11(4), 413–419. <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/jurnal-bk-unesa/article/view/33592>
- Carolina, M., & Mahestu, G. (2020). Prilaku Komunikasi Remaja dengan Kecenderungan FoMO. *JRK (Jurnal Riset Komunikasi)*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.31506/jrk.v11i1.8065>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness. Guilford Publications.
- Deci, E. L., Olafsen, A. H., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-determination theory in work organizations: The state of a science. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 4, 19–43.
- Dewi, F. I. R., & Sari, M. P. (2022). Motivation for Instagram Use, Passive Instagram Use and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). *Jurnal Komunikasi*, 14(1), 251. <https://doi.org/10.24912/jk.v14i1.18592>

- Duradoni, M., Serritella, E., Severino, F. P., & Guazzini, A. (2024). Exploring the relationships between digital life balance and internet social capital, loneliness, fear of missing out, and anxiety. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2024/5079719>
- Ferdous, A., & Huda, Z. (2023). Social media, new cultures, and new threats: Impact on university students in Bangladesh. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/2205861>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books.
- Hattingh, M., Dhir, A., Ractham, P., Ferraris, A., & Yahiaoui, D. (2022). Factors mediating social media-induced fear of missing out (FoMO) and social media fatigue: A comparative study among Instagram and Snapchat users. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 185, 122099. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2022.122099>
- McGinnis, P. J. (2020). *Fear of missing out: Practical decision-making in a world of overwhelming choice*. Sourcebooks, Inc.
- Nugroho, C. (2020). *Cyber society: Teknologi, media baru, dan disrupsi informasi*. Prenada Media.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, 101860.
- Pamuji, E. (2019). *Media Cetak Vs Media Online (Perspektif Manajemen dan Bisnis Media Massa)*. Unitomo Press.
- Smith, J. A., Larkin, M., & Flowers, P. (2021). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*.
- Taswiyah, T. (2022). Mengantisipasi Gejala Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Terhadap Dampak Sosial Global 4.0 dan 5.0 Melalui Subjective Well-Being dan Joy of Missing Out (JoMO). *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter JAWARA*, 8(1), 103–119.
- Umam, N., & Rengganis, D. R. P. (2021). Harga diri, neurotisme & kecanduan internet sebagai prediktor Fear of Missing Out pada mahasiswa. Available from: <https://prosiding.unimus.ac.id>