



Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR)

Faculty of Arts and Social Science

Department of Psychology and Counselling

**A Study of Social Media Fatigue, Fear of Missing Out, and Depressive Symptoms
among UTAR Students**

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PANG HUI YUN

APPROVAL FORM

The research paper attached here, entitled “A Study of Social Media Fatigue, Fear of Missing Out, and Depressive Symptoms among UTAR Students” written and submitted by Pang Hui Yun in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) Guidance and Counselling is hereby accepted.

Date: _____

Supervisor

(Mr. Ho Khee Hoong)

DECLARATION

I declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources, be they printed, electronic, or personal

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Media Fatigue (SMF) and Depressive Symptoms among university students. The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, using university students at UTAR as the sample. Data were collected using the Social Media Fatigue Scale (SMFS), the Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOS) and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9). Results from Pearson's correlation analysis indicated a significant positive correlation between social media fatigue and depressive symptoms. Furthermore, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) was not only significantly positively correlated with depressive symptoms but also showed a significant positive association with social media fatigue. These findings support Beck's cognitive model framework, further confirming that digital social stressors trigger negative cognitive schemas, thereby leading to impaired mental health. The study's findings underscore the necessity for higher education institutions to formulate digital wellbeing and counselling policies to assist students in identifying and alleviating the cognitive burden and emotional distress caused by social media at an early stage.

Keywords: FOMO, Social Media Fatigue, Depressive Symptoms, University Students, Beck's cognitive model

Subject Area: BF636-637 Applied psychology

Chapter 1 Introduction

Background of the Study

Over the past decade, young people's daily lives now revolve around social media. These social media platforms and websites serve as a means of direct social communication such as communication, entertainment, studying and self-expression. This almost continual connectedness presents both benefits and threats for Malaysian university students. On the positive side, social media can facilitate academic collaboration, provide quick access to information and help students maintain relationships with family and friends. However, psychological stress has also been connected to excessive and pervasive social media use. According to Qin et al. (2024), overuse of social media can have negative impacts on one's physical health, including mental fatigue, stress, and anxiety. More complex concepts, such as social media fatigue (SMF) and the fear of missing out (FoMO), have begun to be highlighted in recent research as potential explanations for the relationship between social media use and mental health.

In the university setting, where students are juggling social comparison, academic pressure, and developmental shifts, these concepts might be especially prominent. Recent empirical work shows that SMF is increasingly prevalent among young adults who engage heavily with multiple platforms. According to Liu and He (2021), social media-related relationship demands, and privacy concerns might make young people feel anxious, worn out, and even more vulnerable to anxiety and depression. This is because they prioritize maintaining their privacy and controlling their public image. However, these factors are prevalent in the online environment of university students: they must manage substantial academic and social information, maintain numerous online relationships, and frequently encounter idealised portrayals of their peers' achievements and lifestyles. However, overuse

of social media can also have adverse consequences for university students. According to Monne et al. (2025), overuse of social media can cause sleep disturbances, deplete energy, hinder academic performance, and lead to social disengagement, psychological anguish, and a lower level of life satisfaction. These findings suggest that one important way that overly social media use affects mental health, particularly depression, is through social media fatigue.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is another important concept that has attracted a lot of interest in social media studies lately. Fear of missing out is strongly associated with the amount of time spent on social media, according to empirical research. In a study of university students, Elsayed (2025) found that FoMO exhibited a strong positive correlation with time spent on social media, indicating that students with higher levels of fear of missing out tended to use social platforms more frequently. This indicates even further that people who have a higher level of FoMO are more likely to develop a social media addiction. Social media interactions may be more psychologically satisfying for students with higher levels of FoMO, possibly because these platforms improve their sense of social integration and belonging (Elsayed, 2025). In practical terms, content-sharing anxiety, interaction anxiety, privacy worries, and self-evaluation anxiety are just a few of the various types of online social anxiety that university students with elevated fear of missing out frequently experience (Wu et al., 2025). In the long term, these usage patterns may contribute to depressive symptoms, particularly when students engage in persistent negative social comparisons or feel excluded from significant experiences.

Recent research in Malaysia indicates that depressive symptoms are quite prevalent among university students. Overuse of smartphones is concerning since it can interfere with users' everyday lives and mental health by causing anxiety and depression (World Health Organization, 2025). According to Wong et al. (2023) research done during the pandemic at a

university in Selangor, students had high scores on the DASS-21 measures of stress, anxiety, and depression, with a sizable percentage of them hitting at least the moderate depression level. On the other hand, problematic usage patterns—such as excessive late-night screen time, cyberbullying, online harassment, and harmful social comparisons—may exacerbate or trigger depressive symptoms. According to Ghani et al. (2022) found in their research that 5.7% and 0.4% of respondents, respectively, agreed and strongly agreed that they have received unsolicited or offensive emails, texts, or messages on social media. These studies indicate that excessive smartphone use, and online harassment exert a detrimental effect on university students' mental wellbeing.

Investigating the relationship between social media fatigue, fear of missing out, and depressive symptoms can provide valuable insights for psychological counselling practice. Understanding how these three factors interact, particularly among Malaysian university students, will aid in developing more effective mental health intervention strategies. University students face immense academic and social pressures, with excessive social media use exacerbating their psychological distress. Consequently, exploring the link between variables such as social media fatigue and FoMO and depressive symptoms could aid in predicting and managing these issues. This research could inform more targeted psychological counselling programmes for Malaysian university students, helping them use social media healthily, enhance academic performance, and improve emotional well-being. Ultimately, the research findings can offer practical recommendations to educational institutions and mental health organisations, optimising existing counselling and educational programmes to advance students' overall psychological wellbeing.

Problem Statements

Social media has become strongly connected in the daily lives of Malaysian university students. Most spend several hours every day across numerous sites such as Instagram,

TikTok, X (previously Twitter), and WhatsApp for conversation, entertainment, and information gathering. While social networks offer substantial advantages in developing relationships and obtaining information, their excessive use also raises issues regarding mental wellbeing. Research has found that excessive engagement with social media may induce adverse effects such as diminished concentration, social media fatigue (SMF), and emotional distress. Many Malaysian students are also increasingly reporting instances of “social media fatigue”, indicating that excessive use of social platforms may be undermining their mental wellbeing and functional capacity (Yao et al., 2025).

In recent years, researchers have increasingly focused on the potential relationship between social media fatigue, fear of missing out (FoMO), and depressive symptoms. SMF, FoMO and depressive symptoms are unlikely to occur in isolation, they form a negative feedback loop. For instance, Yao et al. (2025) found that FoMO and social media fatigue exhibit a bidirectional interaction, mutually reinforcing each other to form a vicious cycle. According to Qin et al. (2024c), students who engage in high-frequency social media use driven by fear of missing out may develop weariness due to information overload and the buildup of this fatigue has an additional effect on emotional states, which may lead to the onset of depressive symptoms. According to Zhao et al. (2025), the higher the FoMO, the more severe the individual’s depression. These findings suggest that the interaction between FoMO and SMF may serve as a significant mediating mechanism influencing university students’ mental health. However, research into the complex interplay among these three factors remains limited, particularly within the local Malaysian context.

Significance of Study

This study offers the academic community important theoretical insights. Even though social media fatigue (SMF) and fear of missing out (FoMO) have already been connected to mental health issues like anxiety and depression in a large body of international

research (Yao et al., 2025). However, most of these studies have focused on Western cultural contexts, with relatively little attention paid to Southeast Asia, particularly the usage habits and psychological mechanisms of Malaysian university students. Moreover, much existing research tends to address SMF, FoMO or depressive symptoms as isolated factors, without a perspective that integrates all three into a unified research paradigm. As a result, the integrative analysis of this study not only improves our knowledge of the connections between these three variables but also provides fresh perspectives for developing theories about social media use and mental health. At the moment, FoMO and SMF, as relatively new psychological notions, remain understudied in Malaysia. Since a cultural emphasis on communal belonging, Malaysian youngsters may feel more pressure and tiredness when confronted with FoMO (Malik et al., 2025).

This research has obvious practical implications for higher education administration, university counselling services, and mental health promotion organizations. Given the extensive effect of social media in students' daily lives, the negative emotional responses and mental health hazards associated with FoMO and SMF deserve special consideration. If the findings show a strong association between these three characteristics, it will give data-driven evidence for university to develop prevention initiatives. For example, institutions may use research findings to encourage "healthy social media usage" courses on campus, hold workshops on FoMO, or incorporate social media fatigue identification into counselling services (Jing et al., 2025).

Research Objectives

The goal of this research is to explore a study of social media fatigue, fear of missing out, and depressive symptoms among UTAR students. There are four objectives defined to analyse the relationships between the variables. Which are:

1. To examine the positive relationship between social media fatigue and depressive symptoms.
2. To examine the positive relationship between fear of missing out and depressive symptoms.
3. To examine the positive relationship between social media fatigue and fear of missing out.

Research Question

1. Is there a positive relationship between social media fatigue and depressive symptoms?
2. Is there a positive relationship between fear of missing out and depressive symptoms?
3. Is there a positive relationship between social media fatigue and fear of missing out?

Research Hypotheses

H_1 : There is a positive relationship between social media fatigue and depressive symptoms.

H_2 : There is a positive relationship between fear of missing out and depressive symptoms.

H_3 : There is a positive relationship between social media fatigue and fear of missing out.

Definitions

Conceptual Definitions

Social Media Fatigue. Social media fatigue refers to a state of mental and emotional exhaustion caused by excessive or overwhelming social media use. It arises when individuals feel overloaded by constant information, social demands, or interactions on digital platforms, leading to reduced motivation, irritability, or disengagement (Zheng & Ling, 2021).

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). FoMO is characterized by a persistent fear that others may be enjoying fulfilling experiences while they are not. It entails a strong need to always be aware of what other people are doing, motivated by a fear of social exclusion or decline (Tanhan et al., 2022).

Depressive Symptoms. A person's ability to work and manage everyday life may be affected by depressive symptoms. Impaired social and psychological functioning, decreased productivity at work and in daily activities, a higher chance of absences, low mood, changes in weight, exhaustion or lack of energy, reduced concentration, thinking, and decision-making abilities, and a lack of interest or pleasure are all signs of depression (Santos et al., 2022).

Operational Definitions

Social Media Fatigue (SMF). This study employed the Social Media Fatigue Scale (SMFS) developed by Zhang et al. (2021) to measure Social Media Fatigue. In the context of

the current study, Higher score rated by the participants will indicate greater severity of social media fatigue, and vice versa.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). The Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOS), which was first created by Przybylski et al. (2013) and updated by Bowman and Clark-Gordon (2019), was used in this study to gauge participants' fear of missing out. Ten items make up this scale, which is intended to measure a person's generalized anxiety over missing social events or interpersonal encounters. Higher scores in this study correspond to higher FoMO levels, and vice versa.

Depressive Symptoms. Kroenke et al. (2001) developed the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) and used in this investigation to gauge depression symptoms. Participants answer the nine questions on the scale, which correlate to common depression symptoms, based on how frequently they experienced the symptoms during the previous two weeks. Higher scores in this study correspond to more severe depressed symptoms, and vice versa. A total score of at least 10 points is usually considered to meet the screening criteria for at least mild depressive symptoms.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Depressive Symptoms

Feelings of emptiness or hopelessness, loss of interest in activities, persistent poor mood, and other cognitive and physiological abnormalities are all considered depressive symptoms. Everyday functioning is severely hampered by these symptoms (World Health Organization, 2025). Actually, having these symptoms on a regular basis could be a sign of depression. According to Heumann et al. (2024), Depression in students is directly linked to poor academic performance, such as low grades, difficulty focusing, and a greater chance of dropping out. The fact that students at universities who report having depressed symptoms are more likely to engage in self-harming behaviors and consider suicide is perhaps the most alarming (Heumann et al., 2024). Recent estimates indicate that depression affects about 280 million people worldwide, with a prevalence of 3.8% (Mwita et al., 2025). University students constitute a group particularly susceptible to depressive symptoms, as they navigate the transition from adolescence to adulthood amidst substantial academic and social pressures.

Recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses indicate that approximately one-third of university students worldwide experience at least moderate depressive symptoms. This pooled prevalence rate (33.6%) underscores the significant issue of depression within the student population (Mwita et al., 2025). This high prevalence rate is particularly evident among young university students, often linked to transitional pressures in life, academic stress, and the process of rebuilding one's self-identity. According to a Bangladeshi study, 68% of college students in South Asia suffer from moderate to severe depression (Rahman et al., 2025). The same results from local surveys in Malaysia show that university students

there suffer from severe depression. According to Sharif et al. (2025), 71.6% of students had at least mild depressive symptoms, according to a University Malaysia study (47.1% had moderate symptoms, and 7% had severe to profound levels). These study findings collectively underscore the prevalence of depressive symptoms among university students across diverse global contexts. The high prevalence of depression within this group is a matter of serious concern, as it may adversely affect academic performance, physical health, and overall quality of life.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

A typical definition of FoMO is “a pervasive concern that others may be experiencing valuable opportunities to which one is not participating,” coupled with a want to continuously observe what other people are doing (Younis et al., 2025). This concept has rapidly gained prominence in the digital age and is frequently associated with Self-Determination Theory (SDT). According to this theory, when a person’s demand for “relatedness” is not satisfied, FoMO may develop (Elsayed, 2025). So, people may react to perceived threats to their need for connection by obsessively searching for social information online. FoMO is frequently discussed in the context of social comparison theory, as young people tend to compare their own lives with the carefully curated content presented by their peers on social media. This opinion is further supported by later study, which shows that this tendency is made worse by social media’s continual broadcast of other people’s “highlight reels” (Malik et al., 2025). Furthermore, Malik et al. (2025) argue that strong familial and peer expectations may exacerbate the impacts of FoMO in collectivist societies like Malaysia, making its study especially important in such cultural contexts.

Recent research indicates that FoMO is quite prevalent among university students, although its severity varies across different groups. Ibrahim et al. (2022) found that only a small percentage of students in a sample of Malaysian students had moderate to high levels of FoMO, with the majority having low levels. In comparison, Younis et al. (2025) found that FoMO was far more common among Egyptian medical students, with approximately 60% of students having “moderate” FoMO and another 2.5% having “high” FoMO. These results highlight the fact that FoMO is commonly experienced in academic environments, even though regional and cultural differences affect how severe it is.

FoMO is associated with multiple psychological and behavioural outcomes among university students. Higher levels of FOMO are regularly linked to lower levels of psychological well-being. Anxiety, which is essentially a type of social anxiety resulting from a fear of exclusion, commonly occurs with FoMO. Higher levels of emotional distressed and anxiety are frequently reported by students with high FoMO (Younis et al., 2025). They can experience a persistent feeling of inadequacy or exclusion if they continuously compare their social media activity to that of their peers. Additionally, FoMO can interfere with sleep and focus. Students may spend a lot of time scrolling through their social media pages late at night, which can cause sleep problems and exhaustion the next day. These habits may eventually harm mental health and academic success. According to Ye et al. (2023), students with high levels of FoMO were more likely to experience academic burnout, and the link between FoMO and poor sleep quality was mediated by increased smartphone use.

Social Media Fatigue (SMF)

Social Media Fatigue (SMF) is defined by researchers as a range of negative emotional reactions to social networking activities, including as fatigue, exhaustion, irritation,

and decreased interest in online conversation (Zheng & Ling, 2021). According to Alfasi (2022), people with SMF often describe subjective emotions of powerlessness, irritation, and being overwhelmed by online interactions. They often report feeling emotionally and physically exhausted by social media. According to research, the main causes of SMF are communication and information overload. Users are constantly inundated with posts, messages, news, and notifications from social media platforms. Cognitive overload, which manifests as bewilderment, irritation, and unpleasant emotions, occurs when a user's processing capacity is exceeded by the amount of information (Alfasi, 2022). Fatigue eventually results from this ongoing overload. Due to research, users' psychological burden is greatly increased by negotiating privacy settings, managing extensive online interactions, and adjusting to changing social platform features (A. Malik et al., 2020). A lot of university students feel pressured to be online all the time and react to friends' posts right away. This "real-time response obligation" takes a significant amount of focus and mental energy (Alfasi, 2022).

According to Al-Jallad and Radwan (2021), pausing social media use, turning off notifications, cutting back on usage, going on a "digital detox," or deactivating or deleting apps are frequent coping strategies used by students when they feel exhausted; so research refers to this self-regulation technique used to reduce online stress as "discontinuous usage behaviour". Secondly, research has clearly demonstrated that social media fatigue diminishes university students' academic performance. Overuse or obsession with social media could lead in negative consequences, such as increased stress, ineffective time management, and even more fatigue (Ma et al., 2025). According to Han (2024), the more severe the SMF, the more difficult it becomes for students to concentrate on their studies. It is evident that SMF has a negative impact on academic performance, emotional health, and cognitive function.

Depressive Symptoms and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

There has been increasing interest in the connection between young people's mental health and their fear of missing out (FoMO). FoMO and depressed symptoms are significantly positively correlated, according to a few recent research. University students with higher FoMO scores regularly report higher levels of depressed symptoms in a variety of cultural contexts. For example, significantly higher levels of depression and anxiety are seen in students with higher levels of FoMO (Ibrahim et al., 2022). In Italy, Sommantico et al. (2023) similarly observed a significant positive correlation between FoMO and depression, with young adults exhibiting higher levels of FoMO tending to display more severe depressive symptoms. According to a 2021 meta-analysis, FoMO and negative emotions, such as elevated anxiety and depression, have a strong positive correlation (Fioravanti et al., 2021). From a theoretical perspective, this positive relationship is understandable because FoMO may exacerbate an individual's depressive mood by intensifying feelings of inadequacy, exclusion, and social comparison pressure.

However, a small number of studies have also yielded contrary or non-significant results. For examples, research tracking university students during the COVID-19 pandemic found that when controlling for overlapping pressures such as loneliness and fear of the pandemic, the statistical association between FoMO and depressive symptoms ceased to be significant (Santamaría-Perales & Cuevas-Toro, 2025). In addition, research that differentiate between various social media usage habits—such as passive browsing versus active engagement—show that usage patterns have a significant influence on how FoMO affects mood. While more active interaction may reduce feelings of loneliness and reduce the association between FoMO and depression, extensive passive scrolling and passive observation exacerbate the unpleasant emotions associated with FoMO (Jiao et al., 2025). Overall, while the majority of empirical findings support a positive relationship between

FoMO and depressive symptoms, the non-significant or contrary patterns observed in a minority of studies serve as a reminder that cultural contexts, individual coping mechanisms, and research designs may all moderate this relationship.

Depressive Symptoms and Social Media Fatigue (SMF)

Numerous studies show that university students who experience social media fatigue (SMF) have higher degrees of depressive symptoms. According to Xie et al. (2023), a cross-sectional study of Chinese undergraduates found that SMF was positively correlated with students' depressive symptoms. Higher levels of social media fatigue were linked to more internalizing issues among students in the pandemic-period survey; SMF is thought to be a strong predictor of depressive symptoms (Xie et al., 2023). These results are in line with the stressor-strain-outcome paradigm, which states that frequent or obsessive social media use is a stressor that causes exhaustion (strain), which in turn causes negative effects like depression (Xie et al., 2023). It is further supported by long-term data from Europe. For example, Matthes et al. (2019) discovered that an increase in depressed symptoms over time was significantly predicted by perceived social media information overload, a fundamental aspect of SMF.

Although mainstream research supports a positive correlation between SMF and depression, a minority of studies report negative or non-significant relationships, indicating that this association is not absolute. In certain situations, fatigue may even afford psychological benefits, as it encourages users to reduce their social media usage, thereby alleviating mental strain. Participants in an experimental study on social media detoxification showed much fewer feelings of despair and loneliness than those who did not place restrictions on their use of social media (How Social Media Affects Mental Health, 2025). So,

the feeling of having had enough of social media may serve as a healthy self-protective mechanism, with this fatigue-driven disengagement reducing online stressors. Research shows that while obsessive social media use is strongly linked to depression, SMF has a low and non-significant mediation influence on depression (Talabă et al., 2024).

In summary, although SMF is frequently associated with heightened levels of depression among university students, this relationship is not immutable. Existing evidence underscores the importance of context—students' coping strategies, cultural norms, social support, and research methodologies all influence this association. Some students experience depression due to fatigue, while others withdraw from social media in response to fatigue, thereby improving their mood. Furthermore, depression itself may predispose students to greater feelings of exhaustion or lead to reduced social media engagement through emotional withdrawal, rendering the relationship bidirectional.

Theoretical Framework

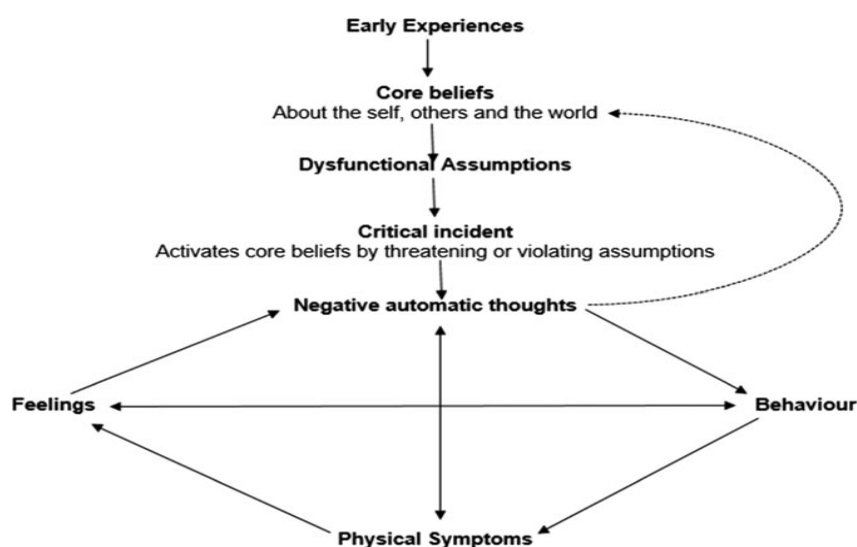


Figure 2.1. The study's theoretical framework, "A Study of Social Media Fatigue, Fear of Missing Out, and Depressive Symptoms among UTAR Students."

According to Beck's cognitive model, people who have maladaptive beliefs and persistent negative cognitive schemata process experiences incorrectly, which leads to the development and maintenance of depressive symptoms (Tsolakis, 2025). Within this framework, fear of missing out (FoMO) and social media fatigue (SMF) may be regarded as situational triggers that activate or reinforce these negative cognitive schemas, thereby potentially amplifying an individual's depressive symptoms. According to Beck's cognitive model (Beck, 1967), depression may develop when a person's negative thoughts and biases are triggered by outside stressors (Wang et al., 2023). In this study, fear of missing out (FoMO) and social media fatigue (SMF) are regarded as cognitive-emotional stressors that trigger individuals' pre-existing "dysfunctional attitudes" (such as rigid core beliefs, including an intense need for approval or perfectionism). These attitudes cause individuals to experience cognitive distortions under pressure. For example, FoMO is often accompanied by catastrophic or overly personalised thinking, such as: "If I don't reply immediately, my friends will dislike me" or "Nobody likes my posts" (Alutaybi et al., 2020). The overload and compulsive use underlying SMF can trigger negative filtering or pessimistic interpretations of social cues. Frequent negative automatic thoughts (such as quick, unconscious, critical, or gloomy thinking) are produced by these biases, and the fundamental mechanism of depression is precisely these automatic thoughts (Prasartpornsirichoke et al., 2025). Depressive feelings are immediately reinforced by these beliefs. They eventually grow into what Beck called the "negative cognitive triangle"—a collection of negative beliefs about oneself ("I am not worthy of being liked"), the world ("Life is unfair"), and the future ("Things will never improve") (Pössel et al., 2021).

Conceptual Framework

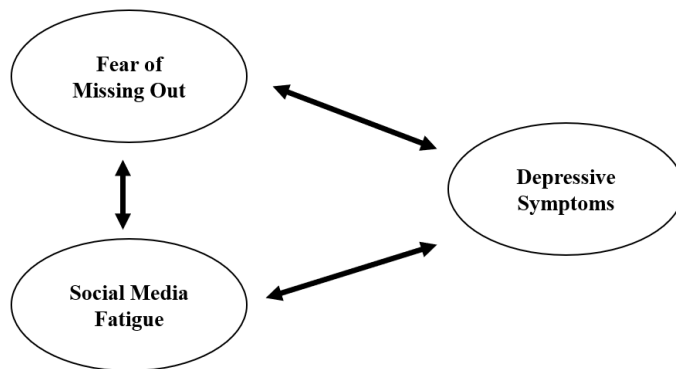


Figure 2.2. The conceptual framework of the study's research objectives, "A Study of Social Media Fatigue, Fear of Missing Out, and Depressive Symptoms among UTAR Students.".

This study's conceptual framework is shown in the above figure. The main variables include depression symptoms, social media fatigue, and fear of missing out. The main purpose of this research is to determine the relationships between the variables. Within the conceptual framework of this study, fear of missing out (FoMO) and social media fatigue (SMF) are regarded as key predictors of depressive symptoms. Upward social comparison driven by FoMO, coupled with compulsive checking of social networks, can erode self-esteem and trigger depressive moods. Similarly, SMF—referring to the fatigue and weariness arising from excessive social media usage—has also been demonstrated to adversely affect mental wellbeing. High levels of SMF frequently coincide with heightened anxiety and stress, potentially leading to negative psychological consequences such as depression. Therefore, the model proposed in this study not only suggests that FoMO and SMF each exert a direct influence on depressive symptoms but also posits that the two often occur concurrently and may amplify each other's effects on depression.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, quantitative survey design to examine the mental health outcomes of UTAR students in the social media era, focusing on social media fatigue, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and depressive symptoms. The survey design was chosen to capture a broad and objective snapshot of students' psychological experiences and their interactions with social media platforms.

Quantitative data were collected through standardized and widely used instruments, including the Social Media Fatigue Scale, the FoMO Scale, and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9). These instruments were selected to measure the levels of social media fatigue, FoMO, and depressive symptoms respectively, enabling clear statistical analysis of how these factors were related. Using validated tools ensured reliability and consistency in assessing the psychological constructs under investigation.

The survey was administered at a single point in time, providing valuable insights into UTAR students' current mental health conditions and their social media-related experiences. This design was particularly suitable for identifying patterns and correlations among variables within a specific population. The survey was distributed online via Qualtrics, which allowed convenient access and efficient data collection.

Overall, this research design supported a comprehensive understanding of how social media fatigue and FoMO were associated with depressive symptoms among university students. The findings aimed to contribute to improved awareness, early detection, and potential interventions targeting social media-related mental health concerns within higher education settings.

Sampling Procedures

Sampling Method

Respondents were chosen using non-probability sampling, which meant that participants were chosen using subjective, non-random criteria as opposed to probabilistic techniques (Rahman, 2023). Since every one of the respondents had to be educated at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was specifically used with an emphasis on the student population. This focused strategy guaranteed that the sample included people who satisfied the research requirements and could be effectively used within a precisely specified community (Rahman, 2023). But as Andrade (2020) pointed out, results from purposive samples could only be extended to the sampled group, which limited the ability to generalize of purposive sampling. In order to improve diversity and reduce this limitation, this survey included UTAR students from multiple campuses and faculties. However, while analysing the results, it took into account the limitations of the sample scope. Purposive non-probability sampling was judged suitable for this investigation in light of these considerations.

Location of Study

The study was conducted at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) Kampar. By including participants from different faculties and academic levels, the study ensured a diverse representation of UTAR's student population.

Ethical Clearance Approval

The researcher submitted the ethical clearance approval to Mr. Ho Khee Hoong, the study's supervisor. The head of the department of psychology and counselling, Dr. Lee Wan Ying, and the dean of the faculty of arts and social science, Professor Dr. Zuraidah Abd Manaf, then authorized the ethical clearance by the UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee. As a

result, the researcher was given permission to carry out this study on (Re: U/SERC/78-684/2026; see Appendix A). The actual study conducted from 25 March 2026 and ended on 8 April 2026.

Sample Size, Power, and Precision

Sample Size

The sample size of the present study was 136, as computed by G*Power version 3.1.9.7. In order to determine the minimum sample size required to test the hypothesis, several elements, such as the alpha, power, and effect size were included in the calculation of the effect size.

To allow for a 0.05 margin of error, the significance level was set at 5% (Brydges, 2019), whereas the power was set at 80% as recommended by Ellis (2010). Lastly, the effect size was derived from previous comparable studies, which were extracted from the articles.

The detailed computation of sample size from every hypothesis was delineated in the following paragraphs.

For H_1 , which was to determine the relationship between social media fatigue and depressive symptoms, a previous comparable study from Xie et al. (2023) showed that the effect size was $r = .357$. G*Power showed that a minimum sample of 44 was required to achieve 80% power and to detect the effect size.

For H_2 , which was to determine the relationship between fear of missing out and depressive symptoms, a previous comparable study from Salman (2020) showed that the effect size was $r = .33$. G*Power showed that a minimum sample of 52 was required to achieve 80% power and to detect the effect size.

For H_3 , which was to determine the relationship between social media fatigue and fear of missing out, a previous comparable study from Ardelia et al. (2024) showed that the effect size was $r = .247$. G*Power showed that a minimum sample of 97 was required to achieve 80% power and to detect the effect size.

As a summary, the sample size of 97 participants was required from the computation of G*Power above. Next, an increment of 40% sample size was added to account for missing data, insufficient effort responding (IER), and other unexpected external factors. Therefore, the final sample size was determined to be 135.8, which was then further rounded down to 136.

Data Collection Procedures

Data for this study were collected through an online survey administered using the Google Form platform. Participation was limited to individuals who met the inclusion criterion of being current undergraduate students at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). All participation was entirely voluntary. Prior to beginning the survey, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the anonymous nature of their responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. These ethical considerations were communicated clearly through an informed consent form presented at the start of the survey. The online questionnaire consisted of several validated measurement instruments, including the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) to assess depressive symptoms, the Fear of Missing Out Scale to measure levels of fear of missing out, and the Social Media Fatigue Scale to evaluate participants' social media fatigue. Upon completion of data collection, all responses were exported and analyzed using JASP statistical software. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and main study variables, while correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships among depressive symptoms, fear of missing out, and social media fatigue. This data

collection procedure ensured efficient and systematic gathering of information while upholding ethical standards, participant confidentiality, and the integrity of the research process.

Instrumentation

Social Media Fatigue Scale (SMFS)

The SMFS was developed by Zhang et al. (2021) to measure social media fatigue. Social media fatigue was conceptualized as a multifaceted construct that included behavioural avoidance, emotional tiredness, and cognitive overload (Zhang et al., 2021). The final 15-item version of the scale was developed from the original 24-item version after qualitative interviews and factor analysis. A seven-point agreement scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”) was used to score each SMFS item. The fifteen items were grouped into three scales that represented the behavioural, affective, and cognitive aspects of exhaustion. The overall score was between 15 and 105, with higher numbers reflecting more social media fatigue. In the present study, social media fatigue was measured using the overall scores. In Zhang et al.’s sample, the scale showed excellent reliability (McDonald’s coefficient $\omega \approx 0.83$) (Zhang et al., 2021). In summary, the SMFS provided a reliable self-report measure of users’ subjective social media fatigue, with higher total scores indicating greater fatigue severity.

Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOS)

Przybylski et al. (2013) developed this scale to assess FoMO at the individual trait level. Ten statements on the measure, such as “I worry that others are having more fulfilling experiences than I am,” were scored on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented “strongly disagree” and 5 represented “strongly agree” with one’s own situation. Consequently, the FoMOS total score ranged from 10 to 50 points, with higher scores

indicating greater fear of missing out. According to Przybylski et al. (2013), this 10-item scale showed strong internal consistency (original sample $\alpha \approx .87$). According to the further studies of Bowman and Clark-Gordon (2019), it was verified for its dependability (Cronbach's α about 0.88). The standard 10-item FoMOS, which was modified by Bowman & Clark-Gordon, was used in this study as a unidimensional self-report tool. Every item on the scale received a positive score.

Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9)

The PHQ-9 Depression Scale was developed by Kroenke et al. (2001) as a brief self-report instrument for assessing the severity of depression. The scale comprised nine items corresponding to the criteria for depressive symptoms outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Each item inquired about the frequency of the symptom experienced by the respondent over the past two weeks, using a 4-point Likert scale (0 = "Not at all" to 3 = "Almost every day") (Lee et al., 2023). The total score ranged from 0 to 27 points, with higher scores indicating more severe depressive symptoms (Lee et al., 2023). In actuality, the cut-off marks for mild, moderate, moderately severe, and severe depression were 5, 10, 15, and 20, respectively. With sensitivity and specificity at 88% in the primary validation study, a score of ≥ 10 was frequently employed as the level indicating possible severe depression. The PHQ-9 had outstanding validity and reliability and used only forward scoring (no reverse-scored items). Kroenke et al. observed strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \approx 0.89$) (Lee et al., 2023).

Chapter 4 Results

Descriptive Statistics

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic profile of the respondents is summarized in Table 4.1. A total of 164 students participated in this survey. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 25 years ($M = 20.99$, $SD = 1.57$). The largest group of respondents were aged 21 (26.8%, $n = 44$), followed by those aged 20 (22.6%, $n = 37$) and 22 (15.8%, $n = 26$). Overall, the sample was predominantly composed of students in their early twenties.

In terms of gender distribution, females constituted a slightly higher proportion of the sample at 57.9% ($n = 95$), while males accounted for 42.1% ($n = 69$).

With regard to ethnicity, most of the respondents were Chinese (97.6%, $n = 160$), with only a small number of Malay (0.6%, $n = 1$) and Indian participants (1.8%, $n = 3$). This indicates that the sample was highly homogeneous in terms of ethnic background.

Regarding faculty affiliation, the largest proportion of respondents were from the Faculty of Arts and Social Science (FAS) at 32.3% ($n = 53$), followed by the Faculty of Information and Communication Technology (FICT) at 21.5% ($n = 35$) and the Faculty of Business and Finance (FBF) at 20.0% ($n = 33$). Other faculties included the Faculty of Science (FSc) (15.1%, $n = 25$), Faculty of Chinese Studies (FCS) (6.4%, $n = 10$), Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology (FEGT) (3.6%, $n = 6$), and Faculty of Education (FEEd) (1.2%, $n = 2$).

Table 4.1 *Demographic Information of Respondents ($n=164$).*

n	%	M	SD	Min	Max
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Gender

Male	69	42.1
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Female	95	57.9
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Age			20.99	1.568	18.00	25.00
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18	6	3.7
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19	22	13.4
----	----	------

20	37	22.6
----	----	------

21	44	26.8
----	----	------

22	26	15.8
----	----	------

23	20	12.2
----	----	------

24	4	2.4
----	---	-----

25	5	3
----	---	---

Enthicity

Chinese	160	97.6
---------	-----	------

Malay	1	0.6
-------	---	-----

Indian	3	1.8
--------	---	-----

Others		
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Faculty

FAS	53	32.23
FBF	33	20.00
FSc	25	15.10
FEEd	2	1.20
FEGT	6	3.60
FICT	35	21.50
FCS	10	6.37

Note, n = number of respondents; % = percentage; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; Min = minimum value; Max = maximum value

Topic-specific characteristics

The topic-specific characteristics of the study variables are presented in Table 4.2. A total of 164 valid responses were obtained for all three variables, depressive symptoms, fear of missing out, and social media fatigue, with no missing data. The mean score for depressive symptoms was 10.48 ($SD = 5.37$), with a median of 10.00, and scores ranging from 0.00 to 24.00. For fear of missing out, the mean score was 25.67 ($SD = 8.91$), with a median of 27.00, and the score ranged from 10.00 to 48.00. Meanwhile, social media fatigue recorded a mean score of 53.26 ($SD = 18.16$), with a median of 55.00 and scores ranging from 15.00 to 102.00.

To evaluate the normality of the data, skewness, kurtosis, and the Shapiro–Wilk test were examined. The skewness values were 0.51 for depressive symptoms, 0.08 for fear of

missing out, and -0.02 for social media fatigue. In addition, the kurtosis values were -0.12, -0.60, and -0.35, respectively. All skewness and kurtosis values fall within the acceptable range of ± 2.00 , indicating that the distributions are approximately normal.

However, the Shapiro–Wilk test showed mixed results. depressive symptoms ($W = 0.97, p < .001$) and fear of missing out ($W = 0.98, p = .01$) were statistically significant, indicating deviations from normality. In contrast, social media fatigue ($W = 0.99, p = .32$) was not statistically significant, suggesting that its distribution did not significantly deviate from normality. Overall, although skewness and kurtosis suggest acceptable normality, the Shapiro–Wilk results indicate that the assumption of normality was only partially satisfied.

Table 4.2 *Descriptive Statistics of Topic-Specific Variables (i.e. Depressive Symptoms, Fear of Missing Out, and Social Media Fatigue)*

	TOTAL_PHQ9	TOTAL_FoMOS	TOTAL_SMFS
Valid	164	164	164
Missing	0	0	0
Median	10.00	27.00	55.00
Mean (arithmetic)	10.48	25.67	53.26
Std. Deviation	5.366	8.911	18.16
Skewness	0.510	0.078	-0.023
Std. Error of Skewness	0.190	0.190	0.190

Table 4.2 *Descriptive Statistics of Topic-Specific Variables (i.e. Depressive Symptoms, Fear of Missing Out, and Social Media Fatigue)*

	TOTAL_PHQ9	TOTAL_FoMOS	TOTAL_SMFS
Kurtosis	-0.121	-0.597	-0.350
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.377	0.377	0.377
Shapiro-Wilk	0.968	0.979	0.990
P-value of Shapiro-Wilk	< .001	.013	.319
Minimum	0.000	10.00	15.00
Maximum	24.00	48.00	102.0

Data Diagnostic and Missing Data

Frequency and Percentage of Missing Data

Table 4.2 sets out the frequency and proportion of missing data. The analysis shows that there are no missing values for any of the variables; all 164 valid responses are complete (100.00%). This indicates that the dataset is of high quality, and therefore no data imputation or handling of missing values is required in subsequent analyses.

Methods Employed for Addressing Missing Data

To minimise the occurrence of missing data, all items in this study were designated as mandatory during the questionnaire design phase, requiring participants to complete all

questions before submitting the questionnaire. This design ensures that participants do not omit any items whilst completing the questionnaire, thereby preventing instances of non-response.

Following the completion of data collection, the researcher conducted a data integrity check using Microsoft Excel. By applying the formula [=COUNTBLANK (A2:AK2)] to the dataset, the researcher checked whether any blank cells existed for each participant. The results showed that the return value was 0 for all cases, confirming that there were no missing values in the dataset and that all participants had completed the questionnaire in full.

Criteria for Post-Data-Collection Exclusion of Participants

To ensure data quality and consistency, a data screening process was conducted following the completion of data collection. As all questionnaire items were marked as mandatory, no missing data were identified. Furthermore, all participants met the inclusion criteria established for this study; consequently, no samples were excluded. These results indicate that the final sample (comprising 164 participants) is fully representative of the study's target population, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the subsequent analytical findings.

Criteria for Imputation of Missing Data

Typically, the method used to impute missing data depends on the level of measurement of the data, to maintain the accuracy and completeness of the data. For example, ordinal data is usually imputed using the median, whilst interval or ratio data is often replaced using the mean.

However, in this study, as all questionnaire items were marked as mandatory and data checks confirmed that there were no missing values, no imputation of missing data was carried out.

Defining and Processing of Statistical Outliers

Boxplot analysis was conducted using JASP to identify potential outliers in the study variables, namely Depressive Symptoms, FoMO, and SMF. Outliers are defined as data points that fall outside the typical range of the dataset and may influence the results of statistical analyses. The boxplot results indicated that outliers were present only in the Depressive Symptoms' variable, specifically in cases 4, 90, 143, and 148. No outliers were detected for FoMO and SMF.

To determine whether these outliers should be removed, the guideline provided by the lecturer was followed, whereby outliers are only removed if the Shapiro–Wilk test indicates normality ($p \geq .05$). Accordingly, the identified outliers in Depressive Symptoms were temporarily removed, and the Shapiro–Wilk test was reanalysed.

However, the results remained unchanged, as the p -value for SMF continued to exceed .05, indicating that the assumption of normality was still satisfied. Based on this outcome, the previously removed outliers were retained in the dataset.

Therefore, no outliers were permanently excluded from the analysis, as their removal did not lead to a meaningful improvement in data normality. Retaining these cases ensures that the dataset remains complete and representative of the original sample. Furthermore, these outliers were considered valid observations rather than data entry errors.

Analyses of Data Distributions

In this study, the distribution of the three variables which are Depressive Symptoms, FoMO, and SMF, was examined using skewness, kurtosis, and the Shapiro–Wilk test. These statistical indicators were used to evaluate the normality of the data and to guide the selection of appropriate analytical techniques, particularly in determining whether parametric or non-parametric methods should be applied.

Skewness and kurtosis are commonly used to assess the shape of data distributions, with values within the range of ± 2.00 generally considered acceptable for normality. As shown in Table 4.2, all three variables fell within this acceptable range. The skewness values were 0.51 for Depressive Symptoms, 0.08 for FoMO, and -0.02 for SMF, while the kurtosis values were -0.12, -0.60, and -0.35, respectively. These findings indicate that the distributions of the variables are approximately normal based on skewness and kurtosis measures.

In addition, the Shapiro–Wilk test was employed to further assess normality. According to Souza et al. (2023), this test is particularly effective when evaluated at a 5% significance level. At this level, the results showed that Depressive Symptoms ($W = 0.97, p < .001$) and FoMO ($W = 0.98, p = .01$) were statistically significant, indicating deviations from a normal distribution. In contrast, SMF ($W = 0.99, p = .32$) was not statistically significant, suggesting that this variable meets the assumption of normality.

Data Analysis

H_1 : There is a positive relationship between Social Media Fatigue and Depressive Symptoms.

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) test was used to examine the relationship between social media fatigue and depressive symptoms. It is a one-tailed test with an alpha level of .05. Table 4.3 shows the result of $r(162) = .540, p < .001$. The null hypothesis was rejected. This shows that the higher the level of social media fatigue, the more severe the depressive symptoms. The Shapiro–Wilk test for bivariate normality between depressive symptoms and social media fatigue yielded a p -value of .649, indicating that the assumption of normality was satisfied. As the variables were measured at the interval level,

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was used. Using Guilford's rule of thumb, the effect size was moderate.

Table 4.3 *Pearson's Correlations (n=164)*

Variable		TOTAL_SMFS	TOTAL_PHQ9
1. TOTAL_SMFS	Pearson's <i>r</i>	—	
	<i>p</i> -value	—	
2. TOTAL_PHQ9	Pearson's <i>r</i>	0.540***	—
	<i>p</i> -value	< .001	—

Note. All tests one-tailed, for positive correlation.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, one-tailed

Table 4.4 *Shapiro-Wilk Test for Bivariate Normality*

			Shapiro-Wilk	<i>p</i>
TOTALSMF	-	TOTAL PHQ9	0.993	.649

H_2 : There is a positive relationship between Fear of Missing Out and Depressive Symptoms.

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) test was used to examine the relationship between fear of missing out and depressive symptoms. It is a one-tailed test with an alpha level of .05. Table 4.5 shows the result of $r(162) = .592, p < .001$. The null

hypothesis was rejected. This shows that the higher the level of fear of missing out, the more severe the depressive symptoms. The Shapiro–Wilk test for bivariate normality between depressive symptoms and fear of missing out yielded a p -value of .074, indicating that the assumption of normality was satisfied. As the variables were measured at the interval level, Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation was used. Using Guilford’s rule of thumb, the effect size was moderate.

Table 4.5 *Pearson's Correlations (n=164)*

Variable		TOTAL_FoMOS	TOTAL_PHQ9
1. TOTAL_FoMOS	Pearson's r	—	
	p -value	—	
2. TOTAL_PHQ9	Pearson's r	0.592	—
	p -value	< .001	—

Note. All tests one-tailed, for positive correlation.

Table 4.6 *Shapiro-Wilk Test for Bivariate Normality*

			Shapiro-Wilk	p
TOTAL_FoMOS	-	TOTAL_PHQ9	0.987	.074

H_3 : There is a positive relationship between Social Media Fatigue and Fear of Missing Out.

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) test was used to examine the relationship between social media fatigue and fear of missing out. It is a one-tailed test with an alpha level of .05. Table 4.7 shows the result of $r(162) = .529, p < .001$. The null hypothesis was rejected. This shows that the higher the level of social media fatigue, the higher level the fear of missing out. The Shapiro–Wilk test for bivariate normality between social media fatigue and fear of missing out yielded a p -value of .625, indicating that the assumption of normality was satisfied. As the variables were measured at the interval level, Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation was used. Using Guilford’s rule of thumb, the effect size was moderate.

Table 4.7 *Pearson's Correlations (n=164)*

Variable		TOTAL_FoMOS	TOTAL_SMFS
1. TOTAL_FoMOS	Pearson's r	—	
	p -value	—	
2. TOTAL_SMFS	Pearson's r	0.529	—
	p -value	< .001	—

Note. All tests one-tailed, for positive correlation.

Table 4.8 *Shapiro-Wilk Test for Bivariate Normality*

			Shapiro-Wilk	p
TOTAL_FoMOS	-	TOTAL_SMFS	0.992	.625

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the relationships between social media fatigue, fear of missing out, and depressive symptoms among UTAR students.

Social Media Fatigue and Depressive Symptoms

The first hypothesis posited a positive correlation between social media fatigue and depressive symptoms, and this hypothesis was supported by the data $r(162) = .540, p < .001$. The findings indicate that higher levels of social media fatigue are associated with more severe depressive symptoms.

These findings are consistent with the recent study by Duc (2025), which demonstrated that excessive use of social media platforms and the resulting psychological stress significantly exacerbate depressive symptoms among university students. Furthermore, the chronic psychological fatigue resulting from browsing digital platforms is considered a key factor in undermining users' self-regulation abilities, thereby exacerbating mood disorders (Yao et al., 2025).

In the context of this study, the sample consisted primarily of UTAR students in their early twenties. Whilst coping with academic demands, heavy reliance on digital platforms for communication can easily lead to cognitive overload. When students experience behavioural and emotional exhaustion characteristic of social media fatigue their psychological resilience declines, making them more susceptible to depressive symptoms.

Fear of Missing Out and Depressive Symptoms

Hypothesis 2 was also supported, indicating a significant positive correlation between fear of missing out and depressive symptoms $r(162) = .592, p < .001$. This result suggests that higher levels of fear of missing out correspond to more severe depressive symptoms.

These findings are consistent with the research by Liu et al. (2024), who confirmed that high levels of FoMO trigger chronic anxiety and negative cognitive biases, which in turn precipitate depressive states. Students experiencing high levels of FoMO frequently engage in

‘upward social comparisons’, which inherently foster feelings of dissatisfaction and inadequacy (Duc, 2025).

Interpreting these results within the context of the university student population: university students are at a critical developmental stage where peer recognition and a sense of social belonging are highly valued. The fear of being excluded from social activities, or of failing to keep up with the achievements shared by peers online, can lead to long-term emotional distress. For UTAR students, this persistent sense of social exclusion and dissatisfaction naturally evolves into pronounced depressive symptoms over time.

Fear of Missing Out and Social Media Fatigue

Lastly, there was support for the third hypothesis, which predicted a positive association between social media weariness and FoMO $r(162) = .529, p < .001$. Higher levels of social media fatigue were linked to higher levels of FoMO, according to the investigation.

This outcome illustrates a mutually reinforcing relationship. According to Yao et al. (2025), FoMO causes people to stay online all the time to prevent missing information, which eventually exhausts their cognitive resources and causes weariness. In a similar vein, Yao et al. (2025) noted that students are caught in a vicious cycle of emotional tiredness due to this continuous information monitoring.

The students in the sample group have a primal desire to keep up with the most recent advancements, which motivates them to be online all the time. But instead of meeting their social requirements, this continual surveillance has exhausted their capacity for information processing. As a result, individuals consume social media information more intensely the more they are afraid of missing out, which directly causes acute social media weariness.

Implication of the Study

Theoretical implication

The study's findings show that SMF and FoMO function as situational triggers, strengthening negative cognitive schemas in Beck's model such as catastrophic thinking like 'missing out means abandonment' and negative filtering, which worsen depressive symptoms and the negative cognitive triad in UTAR students (Gao et al., 2023). By using longitudinal designs to monitor the cognitive pathways of the FoMO and SMF vicious cycle, confirming the mediating function of negative automatic thoughts, and investigating cultural aspects such as social comparison pressures under Asian collectivism, future research should expand the Beck framework (Huang, 2025).

To test the predictive power of Beck's model in high FoMO situations, researchers might further investigate modifiers like peer pressure or social exclusion (Gao et al., 2023). For example, they can manipulate social media exposure experimentally to see cognitive distortions in real time. In response to Tsolakis (2025) criticism of the model's contemporary evidence, this approach suggests integrated qualitative techniques such as diary analysis to record university students' subjective experiences and close generational divides.

Furthermore, AI could be used to create digital versions of Beck's model that simulate trigger scenarios for depression risk prediction, validate the effectiveness of CBT interventions like cognitive restructuring in breaking the cycle, and compare its explanatory power with self-determination theory for SMF resource depletion (Xia et al., 2025). These additions offer empirical evidence for Beck's model's digital adaptability in addition to validating Yao et al. (2025) cognitive fatigue mechanism.

Practical implication

University counselling facilities should offer Beck model-based CBT group programs to UTAR students, teaching them cognitive restructuring techniques to confront false ideas brought on by FoMO such as ‘not replying means being disliked’ while using mindfulness to reduce SMF emotional exhaustion a strategy that has been shown to be successful in comparable academic environments (Ma et al., 2025).

In terms of policy, based on previous university digital wellness initiatives, ‘digital health guidelines’ might be created with usage time limit notifications and offline activity rewards to stop the vicious cycle. In order to assess high SMF or FoMO pupils using platform-level frameworks, the Ministry of Education should provide funding for mobile apps with Beck oriented modules for real-time self-monitoring (M. H. Kim et al., 2025).

Young adults could benefit from community courses that encourage support groups that fortify real-world ties against the negative triad (Yao et al., 2025). Governments ought to push social media companies to incorporate psychological cues that encourage JOMO culture, backed by data on strategies for changing digital behaviour (Eitan & Gazit, 2024).

Limitation of the Study

Firstly, the sample in this study exhibits a marked lack of diversity, comprising primarily students of Chinese descent. Owing to the characteristics of UTAR’s student body, most participants share a similar cultural background. According to Beck’s cognitive model, cultural values profoundly influence the formation and activation of an individual’s negative cognitive schemas. This group bias may amplify the influence of collectivist culture on FoMO, as research indicates that Chinese university students experience greater social comparison pressure than those in more diverse samples (Kramer et al., 2002).

To examine the association between social media weariness, fear of missing out (FoMO), and depressive symptoms, this study used a cross-sectional research approach, which entails gathering data from individuals at a specific point in time. Even though this design successfully illustrates the correlations between variables, this study is unable to prove causal linkages between them because the data is not monitored over time. As a result, the results only show that there are correlations between the variables; they are unable to identify the causal mechanisms or the direction of influence.

Although the study's questionnaire is in English, there might be some diversity in the participants' English understanding because they are all local university students. Even though most students are proficient readers in English, some participants might not be able to fully and accurately comprehend the content of items that deal with more abstract or psychological issues. These differences in understanding language could result in errors, queries that are oversimplified, or answers that are predicated on subjective beliefs. Furthermore, participants' assessment and expression of their own condition may be further impacted by insufficient language comprehension when questionnaire items pertain to emotional states or internal psychological experiences, which would lower the measurement results' accuracy. To put it another way, some participants' answers might not fairly represent their true psychological condition so they might be impacted by linguistic barriers. The interpretation and accuracy of the research findings may be somewhat impacted by this circumstance, which may also influence the validity and reliability of the overall data.

Finally, as data collection relies entirely on self-report measures, this may give rise to social desirability bias. Given that sensitive psychological states such as depression and social anxiety are involved, respondents may subconsciously conceal their true feelings when completing the questionnaire. Zhao and Zhou (2021) emphasise that self-report measures often struggle to objectively capture the 'automatic negative thoughts' occurring

subconsciously whilst individuals are scrolling through their mobile phones; this may result in a discrepancy between the measurement results and the actual digital psychological burden experienced by students.

Recommendations for Research in the Future

Future research could be enhanced in the following areas considering this study's limitations. First, future studies could expand the sample's source to include students from various ethnic groups, cultural backgrounds, and higher education institutions in order to solve the problem of inadequate sample diversity and improve the findings' representativeness. Increasing sample diversity will improve the generalizability of the findings and enable a more thorough investigation of the impact of cultural factors on the link between social media fatigue, depressive symptoms, and fear of missing out.

Furthermore, future research may think about using a longitudinal approach because this study used a cross-sectional design. Researchers could better grasp the causal linkages between variables and their trends throughout time by repeatedly gathering data at various time points. Such a design would improve the findings' interpretability and aid to clarify the direction of influence between variables.

Additionally, future research could modify the questionnaire design to address language understanding concerns, for as by offering bilingual versions or incorporating clearer instructions within the items to lessen participant comprehension bias. This would increase participants' comprehension of the questionnaire's content, improving measurement quality and data accuracy.

Lastly, since this study used self-report questionnaires to collect data, future research could incorporate alternative techniques, like behavioural observation or interviews, to reduce the bias that comes with depending just on one data source. Research will be able to show

participants' psychological states and real behaviours more thoroughly through the use of numerous approaches, which will further improve the validity and reliability of the research findings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine the connection between depressive symptoms, fear of missing out (FoMO), and social media fatigue (SMF). The study sample consists of current undergraduate students at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). This study discovered strong positive relationships between all three variables using Pearson's correlation analysis and a quantitative questionnaire survey. The findings show a strong positive link between fear of missing out and depressive symptoms, as well as a moderately high correlation between social media weariness and depressive symptoms. Additionally, there is a positive correlation between social media fatigue and fear of missing out, indicating that these two social media-related psychological phenomena may interact and have an impact on a person's mental health.

From a point of view of theory, the findings of this study support Beck's cognitive theory model, which holds that when individuals face external pressures such as the comparative pressure and information overload caused by social media, this may trigger negative cognitive schemas, resulting in the emergence of depressive emotions. FoMO, in particular, may increase social comparison and feelings of insecurity, whereas SMF represents psychological exhaustion caused by extended information overload; both may influence emotional states via negative cognitive mechanisms.

From the point of view of practicality, the findings of this study indicate the major influence of social media use on university students' mental health, especially in circumstances where social contact is heavily reliant on digital platforms. As social media has

become an integral part of university students' lives, the psychological hazards that come with it must not be neglected. This study provides an empirical basis for educational institutions and related agencies to emphasize students' psychological burdens in the digital world, as well as address the possible influence of FoMO and SMF on mental health.

Overall, this study not only adds to the body of empirical research on social media-related psychological issues among Malaysian university students, but it also integrates the relationships between FoMO, SMF, and depressive symptoms, establishing a framework for future research. Although this study has limits, its conclusions are theoretically and practically significant and provide essential avenues for future research.

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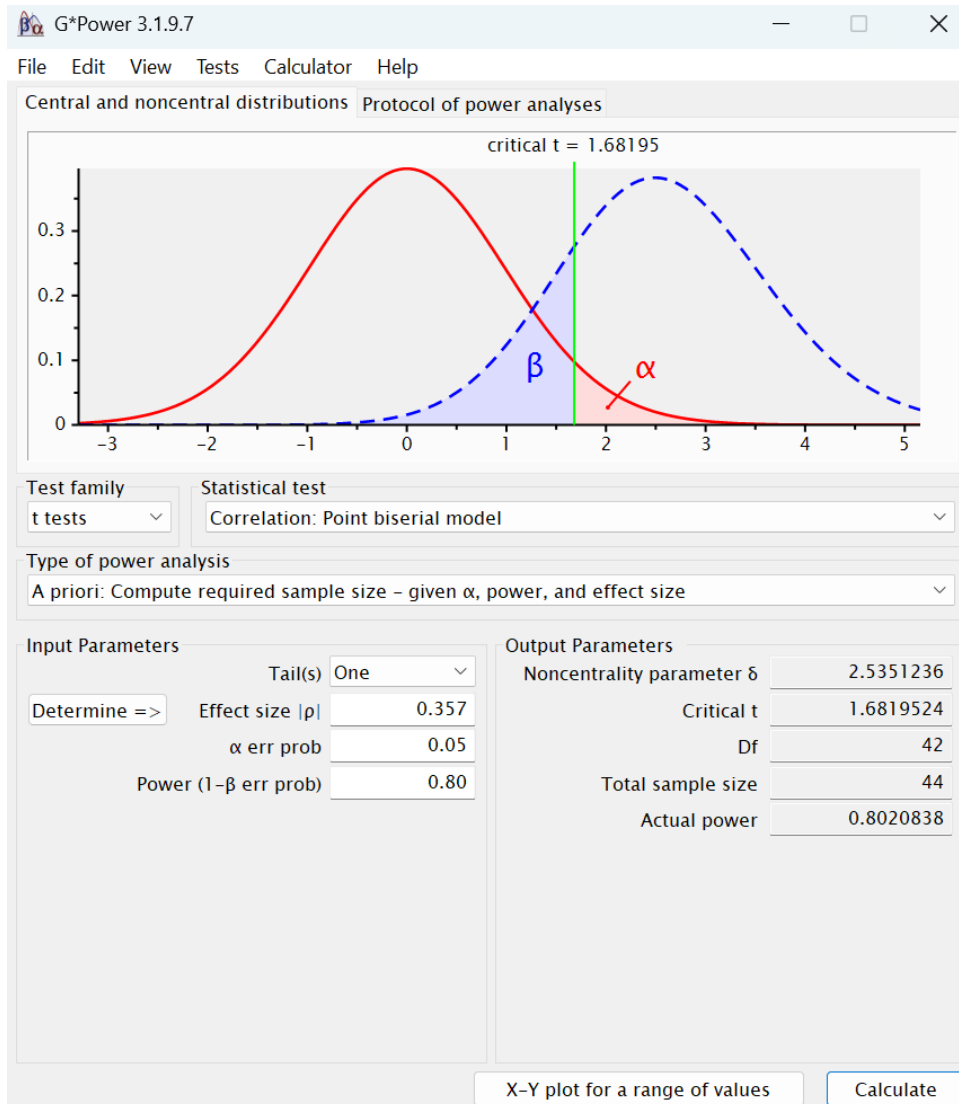
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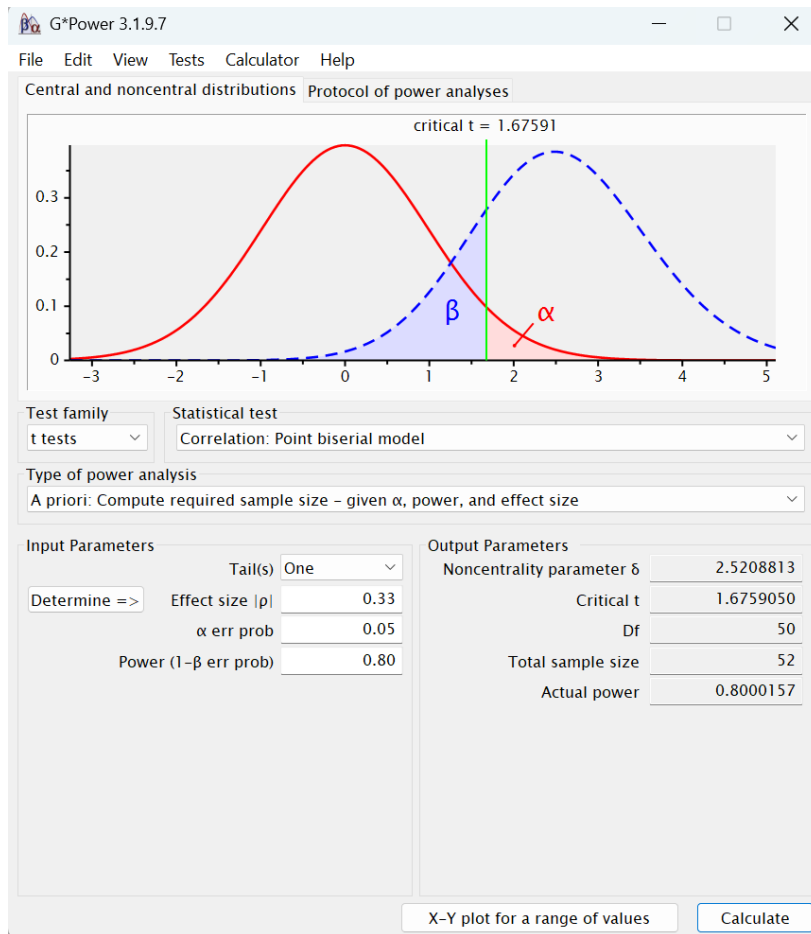
Appendix

Appendix A: G*Power Analysis

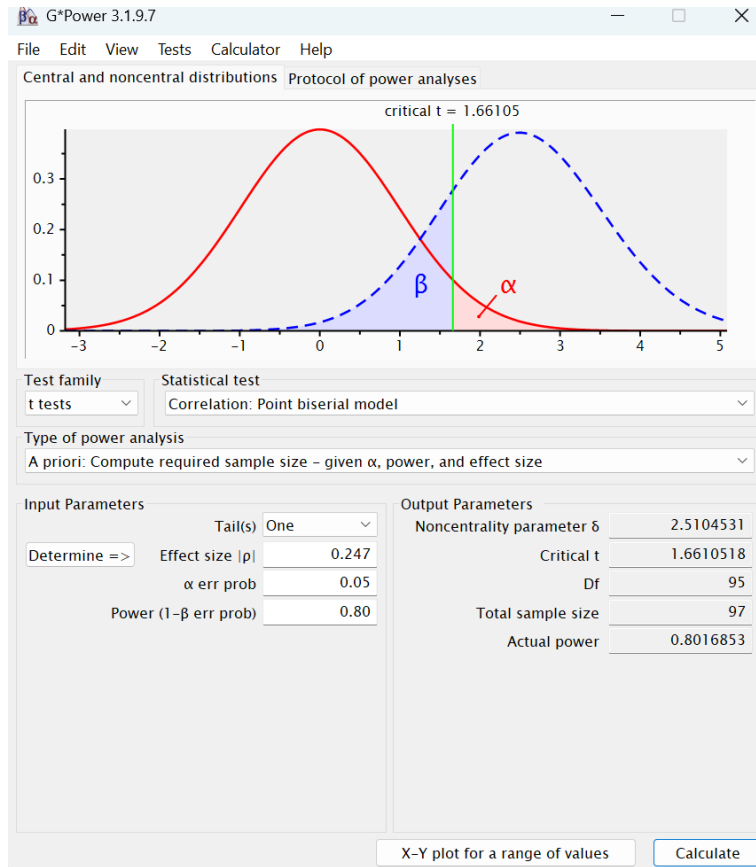
Pearson Correlation Test: Social Media Fatigue and Depressive Symptoms



Pearson Correlation Test: Fear Of Missing Out and Depressive Symptoms

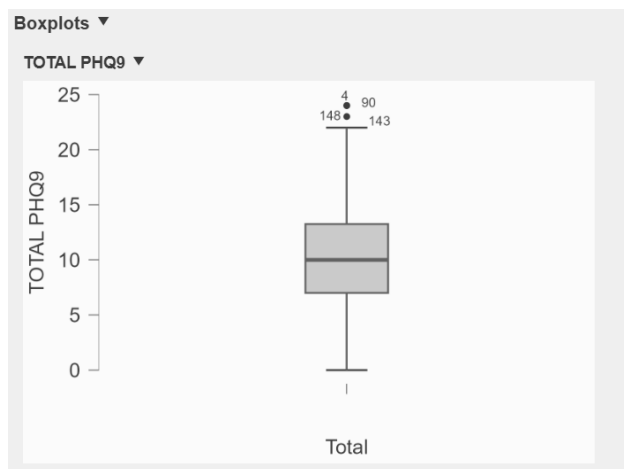


Pearson Correlation Test: Social Media Fatigue and Fear of Missing Out

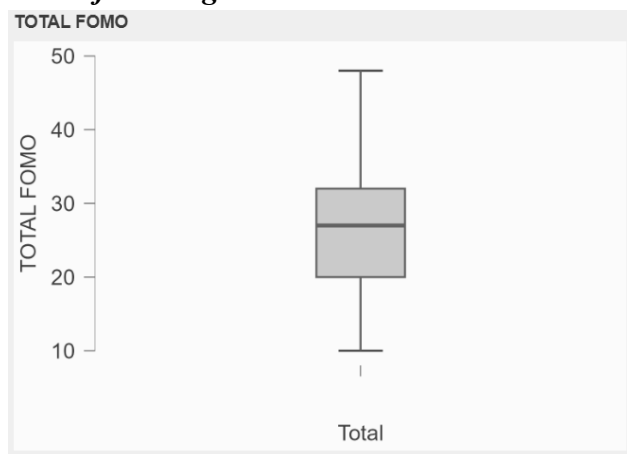


Appendix B: Boxplots

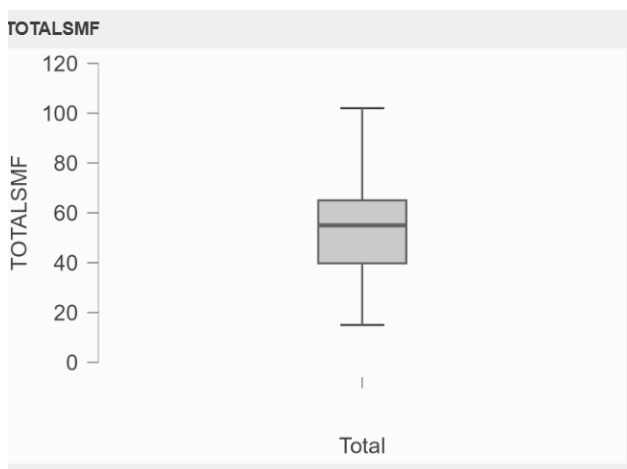
Depressive Symptoms



Fear of Missing Out



Social Media Fatigue



Appendix C: Action Plan

Appendix D: Turnitin

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