

Relationship Between Fear of Missing Out (FoMo) And Body Image Concerns Among Young Adults in Kerala, India

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Abstract—This study examines the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and body image concerns among young adults in Kerala, India, with emphasis on the role of physical appearance comparison. The study included 106 participants aged between 15 and 30 years. Data were collected using the Fear of Missing Out Scale, the Body Shape Questionnaire–8C (BSQ-8C), and the Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS). The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson's correlation, and mediation analysis. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between FoMO and body image concerns. FoMO was also positively associated with physical appearance comparison, which showed a significant positive relationship with body image concerns. The mediation analysis indicated a significant indirect effect of FoMO on body image concerns through physical appearance comparison, while the direct effect was not statistically significant. These findings highlight the importance of considering physical appearance comparison when understanding the relationship between FoMO and body image concerns. However, the results should be interpreted cautiously due to the sample characteristics and cross-sectional design of the study.

Index Terms—Body Image Concerns, Fear of Missing Out, Physical Appearance Comparison, social media

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms have become an important part of everyday life providing opportunities for communication, social interaction, self-expression, and access to information about the activities and experiences of others. However, continuous exposure to social updates may contribute to concerns about being excluded from rewarding experiences. Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is defined as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding

experiences from which an individual is absent, accompanied by a desire to remain continually connected with what others are doing [1]. This concept is relevant to understanding how individuals experience social media and respond to the social activities and experiences of others.

Body image concerns refer to worries and negative evaluations relating to one's physical appearance, body shape, and body size. Social media provides frequent exposure to photographs, appearance-related content, and representations of physical attractiveness, which may create opportunities for individuals to compare their appearance with that of others. Jiotsa et al. [2] examined the association between social media use, appearance comparison, body dissatisfaction, and drive for thinness, highlighting the relevance of appearance-related comparison when investigating body image concerns in social media contexts.

Physical appearance comparison is an important variable to consider when examining the relationship between FoMO and body image concerns. Individuals who are concerned about their social experiences and about the activities of others may also encounter situations in which they evaluate their own appearance in relation to other people. Research by Servidio et al. [3] examined FoMO, social comparison, self-esteem, and problematic social media use within a serial mediation model, providing relevant context for investigating the relationships between FoMO and comparison-related psychological processes.

Although research has examined FoMO, social media experiences, and body image concerns, the original dissertation identifies a need for more regionally focused evidence concerning young people in Kerala, India. It also highlights limited psychometric

validation of FoMO and body image measures among Malayalam-speaking samples and a shortage of longitudinal, mixed-methods, and regionally representative studies. These gaps support the need to examine the association between FoMO and body image concerns within the Kerala context.

The present study therefore examines the relationship between Fear of Missing Out and body image concerns among young adults aged 15–30 years residing in Kerala, India. It also investigates physical appearance comparison as a potential mediating variable in this relationship. By examining these variables together, the study aims to contribute region-specific evidence to the existing literature on FoMO, appearance comparison, and body image concerns.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and body image concerns among young adults in Kerala, India. Physical appearance comparison was also examined as a potential mediating variable in the relationship between the two primary variables. The cross-sectional design enabled the variables to be assessed at a single point in time, allowing their associations to be examined without manipulating any variables.

B. Participants and Sampling

The study included 106 participants aged between 15 and 30 years residing in Kerala, India. A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit participants. Of the total sample, 75 participants (70.8%) were female and 31 (29.2%) were male. The mean age of the participants was 22.7 years ($SD = 4.49$). Participants were drawn from different districts of Kerala, although a substantial proportion were from Thiruvananthapuram.

C. Research Instruments

Data were collected using a sociodemographic and social media usage questionnaire, along with three psychological assessment instruments.

1) Fear of Missing Out Scale: The Fear of Missing Out Scale developed by Przybylski et al. [1] was used to

assess participants' fear of missing rewarding experiences and their desire to remain connected with the activities of others. The scale provided the measure of FoMO used in the analysis.

2) Body Shape Questionnaire–8C (BSQ-8C): The BSQ-8C was used to assess concerns relating to body shape and body dissatisfaction. It is an eight-item short form of the Body Shape Questionnaire, with higher scores indicating greater body-shape concerns. The short form has been examined for its psychometric properties by Welch et al. [4].

3) Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS): The PACS was used to assess the extent to which participants compared their physical appearance with that of other people. This measure enabled the study to examine the association between appearance comparison, FoMO, and body image concerns.

The sociodemographic questionnaire collected information about participants' age, sex, educational qualification, district of residence, and social media usage patterns.

D. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered using Google Forms. The questionnaire included the sociodemographic and social media usage questions, followed by the FoMO Scale, BSQ-8C, and PACS. A total of 106 responses were included in the study. The responses were organised for statistical analysis in accordance with the study objectives.

E. Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analysed using jamovi statistical software. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise participants' demographic characteristics and the study variables. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the internal consistency of the three psychological measures. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationships between FoMO, body image concerns, and physical appearance comparison. Mediation analysis was conducted to investigate whether physical appearance comparison statistically mediated the relationship between FoMO and body image concerns. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Descriptive Statistics

The study included 106 participants aged between 15 and 30 years, with a mean age of 22.7 years ($SD = 4.49$). Of the participants, 70.8% were female and 29.2% were male. A considerable proportion of respondents reported spending three to four hours per day on social media (50.9%). The sample was geographically concentrated in Thiruvananthapuram (61.3%) and Kollam (14.2%) districts.

The descriptive statistics for the three main study variables are presented in Table I.

TABLE I. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE STUDY VARIABLES

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)	25.8	7.68	10	50
Body image concerns (BSQ-8C)	18.2	7.31	8	48
Physical appearance comparison (PACS)	25.2	8.79	11	55

Note: $N = 106$ for all variables.

The results indicate variability in FoMO, body image concerns, and physical appearance comparison among the participants. These descriptive statistics provide an overview of the scores obtained in the sample and form the basis for examining the relationships among the variables.

B. Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of the three assessment instruments was examined using Cronbach's alpha. The FoMO Scale demonstrated an alpha coefficient of .891, while the BSQ-8C and PACS yielded coefficients of .905 and .939, respectively.

TABLE II. INTERNAL CONSISTENCY OF THE SCALES

Scale	Cronbach's α
FoMO Scale	.891
BSQ-8C	.905
PACS	.939

All three scales demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency within the present sample. These findings indicate that the items within each measure showed a high degree of consistency in this dataset.

C. Correlation Analysis

Pearson's product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationships among FoMO, body image concerns, and physical appearance comparison. The results are presented in Table III.

TABLE III. CORRELATIONS AMONG THE STUDY VARIABLES

Variables	r	p
FoMO and body image concerns	.200	.039
FoMO and physical appearance comparison	.386	< .001
Physical appearance comparison and body image concerns	.549	< .001

Note: $N = 106$; $df = 104$ for each correlation.

A weak positive correlation was observed between FoMO and body image concerns, $r(104) = .200$, $p = .039$, 95% CI [.010, .377]. This indicates that higher FoMO scores were associated with higher body image concern scores, although the strength of the relationship was relatively small.

FoMO was also positively correlated with physical appearance comparison, $r(104) = .386$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.211, .537]. This suggests that participants reporting greater FoMO also tended to report more frequent physical appearance comparisons.

The strongest correlation was observed between physical appearance comparison and body image concerns, $r(104) = .549$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.400, .669]. Participants who reported greater appearance comparison also tended to report greater body image concerns. This relationship highlights the relevance of physical appearance comparison when examining individual differences in body image concerns within the sample.

Taken together, the correlation findings indicate statistically significant positive associations among all three variables. However, correlations alone cannot establish the direction of influence or demonstrate that one variable cause another.

D. Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether physical appearance comparison statistically mediated the relationship between FoMO and body image concerns. FoMO total score was entered as the predictor, PACS total score as the mediator, and BSQ-8C total score as the outcome variable.

TABLE IV. MEDIATION ANALYSIS

Effect	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Indirect effect	.2037	.0573	3.557	< .001
Direct effect	-.0129	.0838	-.153	.878
Total effect	.1909	.0906	2.106	.035

The indirect effect of FoMO on body image concerns through physical appearance comparison was statistically significant (estimate = .2037, SE = .0573, $Z = 3.557$, $p < .001$). The total effect was also statistically significant (estimate = .1909, SE = .0906, $Z = 2.106$, $p = .035$). However, the direct effect of FoMO on body image concerns, after accounting for physical appearance comparison, was not statistically significant (estimate = -.0129, SE = .0838, $Z = -.153$, $p = .878$).

This pattern is consistent with an indirect-only mediation result in the statistical model. It suggests that physical appearance comparison may be an important variable in the association between FoMO and body image concerns. Nevertheless, because the study used a cross-sectional design, the mediation findings do not establish a causal pathway or confirm the temporal order of the variables.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and body image concerns among young adults aged 15–30 years in Kerala, India, while investigating physical appearance comparison as a potential mediating variable. The findings revealed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between FoMO and body image concerns. FoMO was also positively associated with physical appearance comparison, which demonstrated a stronger positive relationship with body image

concerns. The mediation analysis identified a significant indirect effect through physical appearance comparison, although the direct effect was not statistically significant after accounting for this variable.

These findings highlight the relevance of physical appearance comparison when examining the association between FoMO and body image concerns. However, the cross-sectional design and convenience sampling method require cautious interpretation. The results indicate statistical associations rather than causal relationships and should not be generalised to all young adults in Kerala without further evidence. Future research using larger, more representative samples and longitudinal designs may help clarify these relationships.

V. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

The study was limited by its relatively small sample of 106 participants, convenience sampling, geographical concentration, and unequal representation of male and female participants. The cross-sectional design also prevented the establishment of temporal or causal relationships among the variables. Future studies could recruit larger and more geographically representative samples across Kerala, conduct longitudinal or qualitative research, and examine additional psychological and social media-related variables to develop a more comprehensive understanding of FoMO and body image concerns.

APPENDIX

The study used an online questionnaire comprising a sociodemographic and social media usage section, the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Scale, the Body Shape Questionnaire-8C (BSQ-8C), and the Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS). Data were collected through Google Forms from participants aged 15–30 years residing in Kerala, India.

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