



# College students' academic motivation, media engagement and fear of missing out



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## ABSTRACT

The concerns about the consequences of mental problems related to use of social media among university students have recently raised consciousness about a relatively new phenomenon termed Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Drawing on the self-determination theory and on the assumption that low levels of basic need satisfaction may relate to FoMO and social media engagement, the aim of the present research was to examine for the first time possible links between FoMO, social media engagement, and three motivational constructs: Intrinsic, extrinsic and amotivation for learning. Data were gathered from 296 undergraduate students by using the following scales: Social Media Engagement (SME), Fear of Missing Out (FoMOs) and Academic Motivation. The SME is a new scale, specifically designed for this study to measure the extent to which students used social media in the classroom. This scale includes three categories: Social engagement, news information engagement and commercial information engagement. Path analysis results indicated that the positive links between social media engagement and two motivational factors: Extrinsic and amotivation for learning are more likely to be mediated by FoMO. Interpretation of these results, their congruence within the context of the theoretical frameworks and practical implications are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Students attending colleges today, known as the 'Millennials' (Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004), are heavy users of social media tools relative to the general population, and use them extensively for communication with peers, including other students in their courses (Ophus & Abbitt, 2009; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). These technologies might play a key role in keeping college students connected to family and friends to obtain social support (Gemmill & Peterson, 2006). However, extensive social media use could also negatively affect psychological outcomes, such as well-being (Alabi, 2013; Alavi, Maracy, Jannatifard, & Eslami, 2011). These concerns about the consequences of mental problems related to use of social media among university students have recently raised consciousness about a relatively new phenomenon termed Fear of Missing Out, popularly referred to as FoMO. This phenomenon has been defined as a "pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, FoMO is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing" (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013, p. 1841).

Drawing on the self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2008), Przybylski et al. (2013) suggest that FoMO could serve as a mediator linking deficits in psychological needs to social media engagement. Their study showed that FoMO plays an essential role in the explanation of social media engagement over and above several individual factors, such as levels of need satisfaction. Based on this motivation-based perspective, the current study aims to further explore FoMO and its set of connections to Millennials' social media engagements in higher education settings.

Motivation is considered to be a significant psychological construct in the learning process, and highly connected to academic achievement and persistence in college (Donche, Coertjens, Van Daal, De Maeyer, & Van Petegem, 2014; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Ratelle, Guay, Vallerand, Larose, & Sénécal, 2007), therefore seems as a useful perspective for framing an empirically based understanding of FoMO. The current study aims to assess this psychological construct's connections to college students' social media engagement during lessons, mediated by FoMO, hence enables to delve further into the newly defined phenomenon of FoMO by investigating its correlates with learning motivations.

The current work represents a twofold effort. First, from a methodological point of view and with the dearth of empirically-based assessment instruments, a new scale, designed to measure

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features of social media activities in higher education settings, will be constructed and validated. Moreover, Przybylski et al.'s (2013) single-factor scale will be adapted to include different facets of FoMO, corresponding to the different social media utilities suggested by theory. Thus, in contrast to previous work, the current study could point to specific elements of FoMO and social media engagements, which may be connected to learning motivations. These efforts might allow for the examination of more components or dimensions based on theoretical considerations than have been assessed thus far.

Second, with relation to college students' learning processes, this study could illustrate the role of motivational constructs in explaining FoMO and social media engagement, when the latter is not harnessed for pedagogical purposes. This potentially new avenue of research might encourage a future discussion related to Millennials' engagement in current higher education learning environments, and to the investigation of new instructional approaches incorporating social media usages into current pedagogical applications.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Psychological correlates of social media engagement

Social media provides a platform for active communication between friends and an access to new information through a diverse set of acquaintances (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010). Lankshear and Knobel (2011) describe social media as new ways of participating and communicating that rely on collaboration, remixed texts, and self-publishing. Social media utilities afford easy access to real-time information about the activities, events, and conversations happening across diverse social networks (Przybylski et al., 2013). These utilities enable users to articulate a network of connections of people with whom they wish to share access to diverse forms of content, such as profile information, news, or status updates (Steinfeld, Ellison, Lampe, & Vitak, 2013). In the field of marketing, the emergence of Internet-based social media has made it possible for individuals to communicate with other people about products and the companies that provide them (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media has also dramatically reduced the cost to produce, distribute, and access diverse news information. With the rise of social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, individuals can share their favorite stories with hundreds of their contacts. According to Mitchell and Guskin's (2013) report, nearly one-in-ten U.S. adults (8%) get news through Twitter and 30% of Americans get news on Facebook.

Previous research on social media has been mainly focused on the influence of technological tools for seeking social connections on attitudes and behaviors that enhance individuals' social capital (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Putnam, 2000; Steinfeld et al., 2013). Several studies have examined the underlying mechanisms through which social capital benefits are generated by the use of social media. These studies have indicated several advantages of social tools like Facebook and Twitter for the general population. For instance, use of these sites has been associated with greater levels of emotional support from close friends (Putnam, 2000). Steinfeld et al. (2013) maintain that these social media utilities have become important for managing relationships with a large network of people who provide social support and serve as conduits for useful information. Other studies show that young people are motivated to join social media sites to keep strong ties with friends and to strengthen ties with new acquaintances (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Ellison et al., 2007). In a similar route, Steinfeld, Ellison, and Lampe (2008) found that the intensity

of Facebook use strongly predicted higher levels of social capital outcomes. Social networks could also enable individuals to develop norms of trust and reciprocity, which are necessary for successful engagement in collective activities (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009).

While the aforementioned studies reveal positive associations between online social network use and well-being, others suggest the opposite. For instance, Chou and Edge (2012) have examined the impact of using Facebook on undergraduate students' perceptions of others' lives. Their study indicated that those who have used Facebook longer, agreed more that others were happier and had better lives, and agreed less that life is fair; furthermore, students who included more people whom they did not personally know as their Facebook 'friends' agreed more that others had better lives. Kross et al.'s (2013) study indicated that Facebook use could predict declines in two components of subjective wellbeing: How people feel moment to moment and how satisfied they are with their lives.

### 2.2. FoMO and social media use in college

The generation of students attending colleges today is known as the 'Millennials'. The characteristics typically attributed to millennial students are an information technology mindset and a highly developed skill in multitasking. Millennials are described as having a focus on social interaction and connectedness with friends, family and colleagues by using SMS, mobile phones, chat-rooms and email while they simultaneously play computer games, listen to music and watch TV (McMahon & Pospisil, 2005). Gemmill and Peterson (2006) posit that on the up side, these technologies might play a significant role in keeping college students connected to family and friends to obtain social support, as a buffer to "excessive" levels of stress they experience as they grapple with a host of academic, personal, and social pressures. On the down side, their study on college students indicated that technology may also disrupt and occupy the time of a college student, and that could enhance higher levels of perceived stress. Others suggest that social media could also afford an outlet for addictive behaviors (Alabi, 2013), or psychiatric symptoms, such as sensitivity, depression and anxiety (Alavi et al., 2011).

### 2.3. Psychological correlates of FoMO

Whereas the above-surveyed studies have focused on the impact of social media use on psychological outcomes, such as well-being, a recent study (Przybylski et al., 2013) examined possible potential personal predictors of social media engagement, in particular aspects of deficits in psychological need satisfactions. Drawing on the self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2008), Przybylski et al. contend that FoMO could serve as a mediator linking deficits in psychological needs to social media engagement. Their study's results indicated that individuals who evidenced less satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for competence (efficacy), autonomy (meaningful choice), and relatedness (connectedness to others) also reported higher levels of FoMO.

In the field of educational psychology, the psychological construct of motivation for learning, is one of the most highly studied variable, and has been extensively investigated in previous research (Donche et al., 2014; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Ratelle et al., 2007). Therefore, in the context of higher education, the SDT regarding learning motivation appears to be a particularly useful perspective to empirically explore FoMO.

Previous studies on learning motivations have placed an emphasis on the motivation behind the choices that students make, and on how social factors affect their sense of volition and initiative, as well as their well-being and the quality of their academic performance (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Ratelle

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