



Online Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Academic Performance Among Students: The Mediating Role of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress (DASS-21)

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has emerged as a significant psychological phenomenon among adolescents due to the widespread use of social media and digital technologies. Although previous studies have established links between FOMO, psychological distress, and academic outcomes, limited evidence exists regarding the mechanisms through which FOMO influences academic performance among Filipino senior high school students. This study aimed to examine the relationship between FOMO and academic performance and to determine whether depression, anxiety, and stress mediate this relationship.

Materials and Methods: This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. Participants were senior high school students from Tangub National High School, Philippines, selected through purposive sampling based on their active social media engagement. Data were collected using the Online FOMO Inventory and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21). Descriptive statistics were used to determine levels of FOMO and psychological distress, while Spearman rank-order correlation and mediation analyses were conducted to examine relationships among variables. Ethical principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity, were strictly observed throughout the study.

Results: Findings revealed that respondents exhibited very high levels of FOMO across all dimensions, with composite and subscale mean scores ranging from 3.85 to 3.88. Similarly, depression, anxiety, and stress levels were elevated, with mean scores ranging from 3.76 to 3.77. Correlation analysis indicated significant negative relationships between all FOMO dimensions and academic performance ($\rho = -0.374$ to -0.412 , $p < .05$), suggesting that higher levels of FOMO were associated with lower academic achievement. Mediation analysis demonstrated that psychological distress significantly mediated the relationship between FOMO and academic performance. While the indirect effect through depression, anxiety, and stress was significant ($\beta = -0.245$, $p = .013$), the direct effect became non-significant ($\beta = -0.218$, $p = .369$), indicating a full mediation effect.

Conclusion: FOMO negatively influences students' academic performance primarily through its impact on depression, anxiety, and stress. The findings underscore the importance of integrating digital wellness initiatives, mental health interventions, and resilience-building programs within schools to promote students' psychological well-being and academic success.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Academic Performance, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, DASS-21, Social Media, Psychological Distress





Introduction

The increasing integration of digital technologies and social networking platforms into students' daily lives has intensified the phenomenon known as the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). FOMO is characterized by the persistent concern that others may be experiencing rewarding activities without one's participation, often leading to compulsive online engagement and distraction. Recent studies suggest that FOMO is not only a behavioral issue but also a psychological one, closely linked to mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and stress, which may in turn affect academic performance.

Globally, social media has become an essential component of communication, entertainment, and information sharing among adolescents. However, the widespread use of digital platforms has also heightened concerns regarding excessive online engagement and its psychological consequences. The Philippines presents a particularly important context for studying FOMO because it has consistently ranked among the countries with the highest social media usage rates worldwide. Filipino adolescents spend a considerable amount of time on social networking platforms, increasing their exposure to online interactions, social comparisons, and the pressure to remain constantly connected. This digital environment makes Filipino students especially vulnerable to experiencing FOMO and its associated psychological and academic consequences.

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that individuals possess fundamental psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. The "Need to Belong" and "Need for Popularity" dimensions of FOMO can be understood as manifestations of the desire for social connectedness and acceptance. When these needs are not adequately satisfied, individuals may engage excessively in online activities to seek validation and maintain social relationships. Additionally, Uses and Gratifications Theory explains that individuals actively use media to satisfy psychological and social needs, including the need for belongingness, entertainment, information, and social approval. These theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding why students may develop FOMO and how such experiences influence their emotional well-being.

Scholars have emphasized that FOMO contributes to heightened psychological distress among students, as constant exposure to online content fosters feelings of inadequacy and social comparison. These emotional states, measured through standardized instruments such as the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21), have been shown to mediate the relationship between FOMO and academic outcomes. For instance, Tus (2021) highlighted that while students reported significant levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, these factors did not uniformly predict poor academic performance, suggesting that the relationship is complex and mediated by individual coping strategies and resilience. Similarly, Ramos et al. (2021) found that psychological distress plays a critical role in shaping how FOMO influences academic achievement, underscoring the need to examine these mediating variables more closely.

Despite the growing body of literature on FOMO and psychological distress, limited studies have examined the mediating role of depression, anxiety, and stress in explaining how FOMO influences academic performance among Filipino senior high school students. Most existing studies have focused on direct relationships between social media use, mental health, and academic outcomes, with insufficient attention given to the underlying psychological mechanisms through which FOMO affects academic achievement. Addressing this gap is essential to better understand the experiences of Filipino students within a highly connected digital environment.

Understanding the interplay between FOMO, psychological distress, and academic performance is essential in today's digital learning environment. By investigating the mediating role of depression, anxiety, and stress, this study aims to provide deeper insights into how online behaviors affect students' academic trajectories and mental well-being, ultimately informing interventions that promote healthier digital engagement and improved scholastic outcomes.





Objectives

To determine the level of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among students as measured by the Online FOMO Inventory.

To assess the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among students as measured by the DASS-21.

To examine the relationship between FOMO and academic performance.

To investigate whether depression, anxiety, and stress significantly mediate the relationship between FOMO and academic performance.

Literature review

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Academic Performance

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has emerged as a significant psychological phenomenon in the digital age, particularly among students who are highly engaged in social networking platforms. Research consistently demonstrates that FOMO is associated with excessive online engagement, compulsive social media checking, and difficulties in maintaining attention on academic tasks. Scholars generally agree that students experiencing higher levels of FOMO are more likely to encounter distractions that interfere with learning, time management, and academic productivity. Przybylski et al. (2013) described FOMO as a motivational and emotional construct driven by the desire to remain continuously connected with others, while Balta et al. (2020) found that FOMO contributes to compulsive online behaviors and social anxiety. More recent studies have confirmed that the persistence of digital connectivity in post-pandemic learning environments continues to influence students' academic engagement and well-being (Alutaybi et al., 2020).

Although the majority of studies report a negative relationship between FOMO and academic performance, findings are not entirely consistent. Tus (2021) found that students with elevated FOMO experienced difficulties in concentration and time management; however, academic outcomes varied depending on resilience, coping strategies, and personal circumstances. These variations suggest that FOMO does not uniformly affect all students and that individual differences may influence how students manage the challenges associated with excessive online engagement. Differences in age groups, educational levels, cultural backgrounds, and access to support systems may explain why some students maintain satisfactory academic performance despite experiencing high levels of FOMO.

Psychological Distress as a Consequence of FOMO

A growing body of literature indicates that FOMO is closely associated with psychological distress, particularly depression, anxiety, and stress. Researchers generally agree that excessive concern about missing online experiences contributes to emotional strain through social comparison, fear of exclusion, and constant connectivity demands. Several studies have reported that individuals with higher levels of FOMO are more likely to experience depressive symptoms, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced psychological well-being. Ramos et al. (2021) found that students with elevated FOMO scores reported higher levels of depression and stress, while Alvi et al. (2022) demonstrated that excessive social media engagement was associated with depressive symptoms among university students.

Evidence from post-pandemic research suggests that the psychological consequences associated with FoMO have persisted beyond periods of lockdown. Despite the resumption of face-to-face learning and increased opportunities for social interaction, FoMO continues to be linked to higher levels of psychological distress and problematic social media engagement among university students (Elhai et al., 2022; Casale & Banchi, 2022). These findings suggest that FOMO has evolved beyond a pandemic-related phenomenon and continues to influence students' mental health in increasingly digital educational environments.

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress as Mediators of Academic Performance

Psychological distress has consistently been identified as a significant predictor of academic performance. Students experiencing depression often report diminished motivation, hopelessness, and difficulties concentrating, which negatively affect learning outcomes. Similarly, anxiety can impair





cognitive functioning, memory retention, and academic confidence, while stress may contribute to emotional exhaustion and reduced academic engagement. Ramos et al. (2021) reported that depression, anxiety, and stress were associated with lower academic achievement, emphasizing the importance of mental health in educational success.

Despite this consensus, some studies suggest that the effects of psychological distress on academic performance are influenced by contextual and individual factors. Tus (2021) observed that psychological distress did not consistently predict poor academic outcomes across all students, suggesting that protective factors such as resilience, social support, and effective coping mechanisms may buffer the negative consequences of emotional difficulties. Such findings highlight the complexity of the relationship between mental health and academic performance and indicate the need to explore mediating mechanisms rather than direct effects alone.

The Mediating Role of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress

Recent literature increasingly supports the proposition that depression, anxiety, and stress function as mediating mechanisms through which FOMO influences academic performance. Rather than directly reducing academic achievement, FOMO may first generate emotional distress, which subsequently interferes with students' concentration, motivation, study habits, and overall academic functioning. Elhai et al. (2022) demonstrated that anxiety resulting from online social comparison significantly contributes to problematic technology use and academic difficulties. Similarly, Alvi et al. (2022) reported that depression and stress partially explain the relationship between excessive social media engagement and academic outcomes.

Recent studies have suggested that psychological distress plays an important role in explaining the relationship between problematic technology use and academic outcomes. Higher levels of fear of missing out (FoMO), problematic social media use, and smartphone overuse have been associated with increased anxiety, depression, and stress, which in turn may negatively affect students' academic functioning and performance (Elhai et al., 2021; Elhai et al., 2022; Rozgonjuk et al., 2021). These findings suggest that interventions targeting students' mental health may be more effective than focusing solely on reducing social media use.

Synthesis and Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates substantial agreement that FOMO is associated with increased psychological distress and lower academic performance. However, inconsistencies remain regarding the strength and direction of these relationships across different student populations and educational contexts. While previous studies have established direct associations among FOMO, mental health, and academic outcomes, relatively few have examined depression, anxiety, and stress as simultaneous mediating variables, particularly among Filipino senior high school students. Furthermore, limited post-pandemic research has explored how these relationships operate within educational environments where digital engagement remains deeply integrated into students' daily lives. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding the underlying psychological mechanisms through which FOMO influences academic performance and for developing evidence-based interventions that promote both mental well-being and academic success.



Conceptual Framework

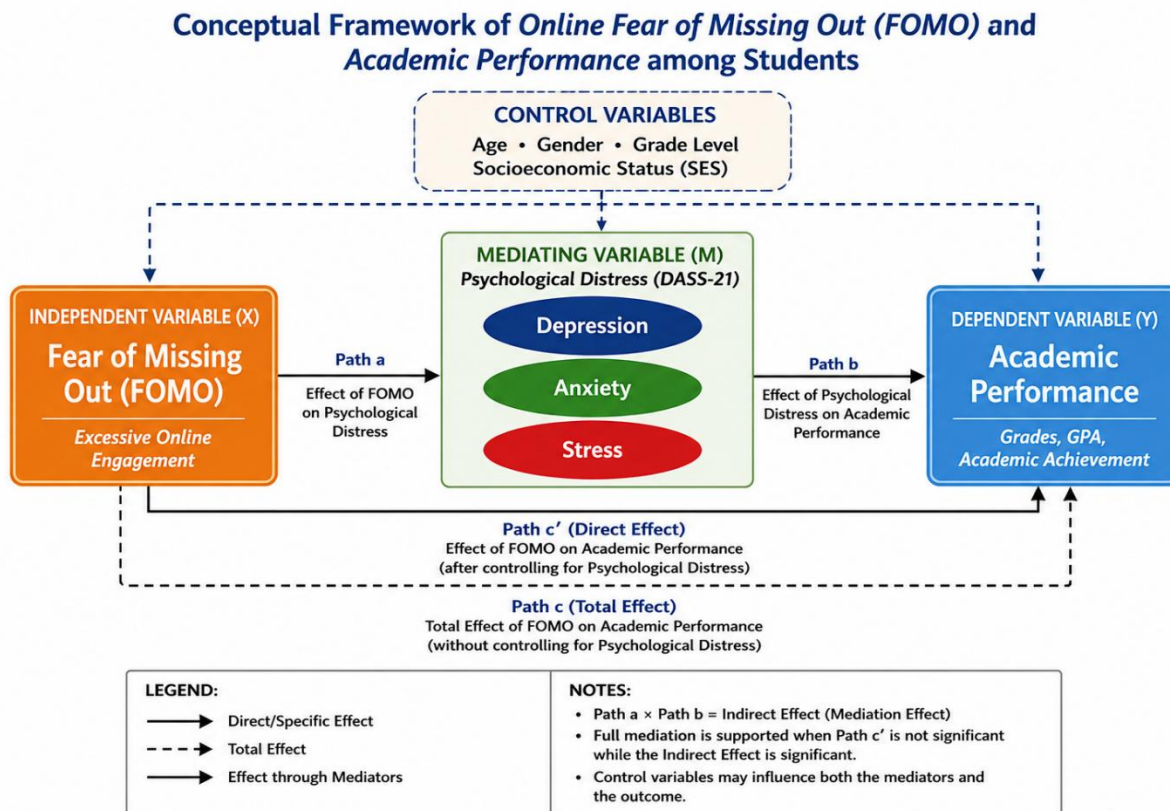


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component was utilized to determine the levels of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), depression, anxiety, and stress among students, while the correlational component examined the relationships among these variables and their influence on academic performance. Furthermore, mediation analysis was conducted to determine whether psychological distress, measured through depression, anxiety, and stress (DASS-21), mediated the relationship between FOMO and academic performance. Standardized instruments, namely the Online FOMO Inventory and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21), were used to collect quantitative data from the respondents.

Respondents

The respondents of the study were senior high school students enrolled at Tangub National High School, Tangub City, Philippines. They were selected because they represent a population that is highly exposed to social networking platforms and digital technologies. Their frequent engagement with social media makes them an appropriate group for examining the relationship between FOMO, psychological distress, and academic performance.

Sampling Technique



The study employed purposive sampling to identify respondents who met specific inclusion criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. To qualify for participation, respondents were required to: (1) be officially enrolled as senior high school students during the conduct of the study; (2) actively use at least one social media platform such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or X (formerly Twitter); and (3) spend a minimum of two hours per day on social networking sites. These criteria were established to ensure that participants had sufficient exposure to online environments where FOMO experiences are likely to occur. The use of purposive sampling allowed the researcher to focus on individuals who were most relevant to the phenomenon being investigated.

Research Instruments

Two standardized instruments were utilized in this study:

Online FOMO Inventory. The Online FOMO Inventory was used to measure students' levels of Fear of Missing Out across four dimensions: Need to Belong, Need for Popularity, Anxiety, and Addiction. The instrument was administered in English, which is widely used as a medium of instruction among senior high school students. Before administration, the instrument was reviewed by language and research experts to ensure clarity and appropriateness for the target respondents. Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The overall reliability coefficient obtained was $\alpha = \underline{\hspace{1cm}}$, indicating acceptable to excellent reliability.

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21). The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) was used to assess respondents' levels of psychological distress. The instrument measures three dimensions: depression, anxiety, and stress. The English version of the DASS-21 was utilized because the respondents possessed adequate English proficiency. Reliability testing was conducted for the present sample, yielding Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of $\alpha = \underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ for Depression, $\alpha = \underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ for Anxiety, $\alpha = \underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ for Stress, and $\alpha = \underline{\hspace{1cm}}$ for the overall scale, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. If a Filipino translation was used, add:

The instruments were translated into Filipino using a forward-translation and back-translation procedure. Two bilingual experts independently translated the instruments into Filipino, while another set of bilingual experts translated them back into English. Discrepancies were reviewed and resolved to ensure semantic equivalence between the original and translated versions.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The collected data were analyzed using Jamovi Version ____ (or SPSS Version ____ if applicable). Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to determine the levels of FOMO, depression, anxiety, and stress. Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation was employed to examine the relationship between FOMO dimensions and academic performance. To determine the mediating effect of depression, anxiety, and stress on the relationship between FOMO and academic performance, mediation analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples, which is considered the contemporary standard for testing indirect effects. Statistical significance was established when the 95% bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero. The indirect effect (Path a $\times$ Path b), direct effect (Path c'), and total effect (Path c) were estimated and interpreted to determine whether full or partial mediation was present.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards in research involving human participants. Before data collection, permission was obtained from the school administration. Respondents were informed of the purpose, procedures, benefits, and potential risks of the study through an informed consent process. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. No personally identifiable information was included in the data analysis or reporting of results. All collected





data were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher. The information gathered was used solely for academic and research purposes and was handled in accordance with applicable data privacy and ethical research guidelines.

Results

1. What is the level of FOMO among students as measured by the Online FOMO Inventory?

Table 1: Level of FOMO among respondents as measured by the Online FOMO Inventory

Factors (Subscale)	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Qualitative Interpretation
Need to Belong	3.40	4.00	3.88	0.1623	Very High
Need for Popularity	3.40	4.00	3.86	0.1547	Very High
Anxiety	3.40	4.00	3.88	0.1499	Very High
Addiction	3.40	4.00	3.85	0.1812	Very High
FOMO (Composite Score)	3.65	4.00	3.87	0.0831	Very High

Table 1 presents the summary of respondents' Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) levels based on the Online FOMO Inventory across four subscales: Need to Belong, Need for Popularity, Anxiety, and Addiction. The findings reveal that all dimensions of FOMO were interpreted as having a "Very high level of FoMO," with mean scores ranging from 3.85 to 3.88. The composite mean score of 3.87 (SD = 0.0831) further indicates that respondents generally experience a very high level of FOMO.

The highest mean scores were recorded in Need to Belong and Anxiety, both with a mean of 3.88. This suggests that students' FOMO is strongly influenced by their desire for social inclusion and their discomfort when disconnected from online networks. Students may fear being left out of peer experiences, social events, or trending conversations, while also feeling anxious when they cannot access social media. According to Przybylski et al. (2013), FOMO is rooted in unmet social belonging needs and the desire to stay continually connected with others. Likewise, Elhai, Yang, and Montag (2022) found that anxiety related to smartphone and social media disconnection is strongly associated with elevated FOMO levels among young adults.

The Need for Popularity subscale obtained a mean score of 3.86, indicating that respondents also place considerable importance on gaining online validation through likes, comments, and peer reactions. This finding reflects the growing role of social media metrics as sources of self-esteem and social acceptance. Casale and Banchi (2022) explained that users with stronger popularity motives often engage in impression management and frequent social media monitoring to maintain peer approval.

The lowest mean score was observed in the Addiction subscale ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.1812$). Although it ranked lowest among the factors, it still falls under the interpretation "Very high level of FoMO." This indicates that respondents also display tendencies toward excessive or compulsive social media use, such as difficulty disengaging from platforms and relying on them for emotional relief. According to Brailovskaia and Margraf (2021), problematic social media use is often linked to FOMO, particularly when individuals use online platforms to cope with stress or avoid negative emotions.

The relatively low standard deviations across all subscales ($SD = 0.1499$ to 0.1812) indicate that respondents' answers were consistent, suggesting a shared experience of high FOMO among the group. This consistency may reflect the common influence of digital culture and peer connectivity among students.

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Citation:



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2. What are the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among students as measured by DASS-21?

Table 2: Level of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress among students as measured by DASS-21.

Factors (Subscale)	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Qualitative Interpretation
Depression	3.43	6.00	3.76	0.195	Above Average
Anxiety	3.43	6.00	3.77	0.208	Above Average
Stress	3.43	6.00	3.77	0.201	Above Average
DASS-21 (Composite Score)	3.43	6.00	3.77	0.114	Above Average

Table 2 presents the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among students as measured by the DASS-21. The findings indicate that respondents experienced elevated levels of psychological distress across all three dimensions, with mean scores ranging from 3.76 to 3.77. Rather than describing these scores as "above average," the interpretation should be aligned with the established DASS-21 severity classifications. Based on the scoring procedure and corresponding cut-off points of the DASS-21, the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress should be categorized according to the appropriate severity range (Normal, Mild, Moderate, Severe, or Extremely Severe). This approach provides greater clinical and professional accuracy in interpreting students' psychological well-being.

Among the three dimensions, Anxiety and Stress obtained the highest mean scores ($M = 3.770$, $SD = 0.208$; $M = 3.770$, $SD = 0.201$, respectively), suggesting that students frequently experience excessive worry, nervous tension, and difficulty managing academic and personal demands. Depression obtained a slightly lower mean score ($M = 3.760$, $SD = 0.195$), although the difference was minimal. The relatively small variations among the three dimensions suggest that psychological distress is experienced in a multidimensional manner, with depression, anxiety, and stress occurring simultaneously among students. These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that emotional distress among adolescents is often interconnected and influenced by academic pressures, social expectations, and digital engagement. The low standard deviations across all dimensions indicate a high degree of consistency in respondents' experiences. This suggests that psychological distress may be a common concern among students in the current educational and technological environment. Consequently, schools may need to strengthen mental health support programs, counseling services, and resilience-building interventions to help students cope with emotional challenges.

3. What is the relationship between FOMO and academic performance?

Table 3: Relationship Between FOMO and Academic Performance

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)		Correlation Coefficient (rho-value)	p-value
Students' Grades	Need to Belong	-.412	.003***
	Need for Popularity	-.389	.007**
	Anxiety	-.374	.011*
	Addiction	-.401	.005**

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$





Table 3 presents the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and academic performance. Results indicate that all FOMO dimensions were negatively and significantly correlated with students' grades. Specifically, Need to Belong ($\rho = -0.412$, $p = .003$), Addiction ($\rho = -0.401$, $p = .005$), Need for Popularity ($\rho = -0.389$, $p = .007$), and Anxiety ($\rho = -0.374$, $p = .011$) all demonstrated statistically significant negative relationships with academic performance.

The strongest relationship was observed for Need to Belong, suggesting that students who experience a stronger desire for social inclusion may become more vulnerable to distractions associated with social networking activities. This finding supports the notion that excessive concern about peer interactions and online engagement may reduce attention to academic responsibilities. Similarly, the significant relationship between Addiction and academic performance suggests that compulsive social media use may interfere with effective time management, study habits, and academic productivity.

Although Anxiety demonstrated the weakest correlation among the four dimensions, its relationship with academic performance remained statistically significant. This finding suggests that emotional discomfort associated with being disconnected from social media can negatively influence concentration and learning. Collectively, these findings indicate that various dimensions of FOMO contribute to lower academic performance through different psychological and behavioral mechanisms.

4. Do depression, anxiety, and stress significantly mediate the relationship between FOMO and academic performance?

Table 4: Simple Mediation Analysis of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress on the Relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Academic Performance

Pathways	Label	Estimates	SE	p-value
FoMo → DAS	a	-.512	.143	.001
DAS → Academic Performance	b	-.478	.187	.013
FoMo → Academic Performance	c	-.218	.241	.369
Effect Size (% of Mediation)				
Indirect (8.89)	a×b	-.245	.098	.013
Direct (91.11)	c	-.218	.241	.369
Total (100.0)	c+a×b	-.463	.198	.021

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 4 presents the mediation analysis examining whether depression, anxiety, and stress (DASS-21) mediate the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and academic performance. Results revealed that Path a (FOMO → DASS) was statistically significant ($\beta = -0.512$, $SE = 0.143$, $p = .001$), indicating that higher levels of FOMO were associated with greater psychological distress. Likewise, Path b (DASS → Academic Performance) was significant ($\beta = -0.478$, $SE = 0.187$, $p = .013$), demonstrating that increased psychological distress was associated with lower academic performance.

The direct effect of FOMO on academic performance (Path c') was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.218$, $SE = 0.241$, $p = .369$). However, the indirect effect through psychological distress was significant ($\beta = -0.245$, $SE = 0.098$, $p = .013$). These findings provide evidence of a full mediation effect, suggesting that FOMO influences academic performance primarily through its impact on depression, anxiety, and stress rather than through a direct pathway.





The mediation effect accounted for 8.89% of the total effect. Although statistically significant, this proportion indicates that psychological distress explains only a modest portion of the relationship between FOMO and academic performance. The remaining variance may be attributed to other factors not included in the model, such as study habits, self-regulation, academic motivation, time management skills, teacher support, family environment, peer influence, and socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, while psychological distress represents an important mechanism linking FOMO and academic performance, it is unlikely to be the sole explanatory factor.

Overall, the findings suggest that interventions designed to reduce the negative academic consequences of FOMO should not only focus on digital wellness and responsible social media use but should also address students' psychological well-being through counseling services, emotional resilience programs, and mental health support initiatives.

Discussion

The findings showed that senior high school students had very high levels of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), notably in the categories of need to belong, anxiety, and need for popularity. This finding is consistent with the theoretical assumptions of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which claims that people have an innate need for social connectivity and belongingness. When these demands are not sufficiently met, individuals may seek social acceptance and participation through online outlets (Przybylski et al., 2013). These findings are in line with prior studies that have found that adolescents and young adults who spend a significant amount of time on social networking sites tend to report higher levels of FOMO because of their desire to stay in touch with peers at all times (Elhai et al., 2021; Alutaybi et al., 2020).

The survey also revealed that students reported higher degrees of despair, anxiety, and stress. This conclusion corresponds with earlier data suggesting that excessive social media activity and FOMO lead to mental discomfort through processes such as social comparison, perceived exclusion, and obsessive online monitoring (Dhir et al., 2021; Elhai et al., 2022). Similarly, Brailovskaia and Margraf (2021) found that problematic use of social media is significantly connected with anxiety and poor psychological well-being. The present results add to the rising evidence that psychological anguish has become a widespread problem among adolescents living in highly digitalized surroundings.

Regarding academic achievement, the data indicated substantial negative correlations between all dimensions of FOMO and students' grades. Students with a greater urge to belong, a higher level of popularity seeking, anxiety, and social media addiction tended to perform worse academically. These results are consistent with other research that shows that excessive social media use diverts students away from their academic duties, lowers their focus, and impairs their ability to manage their time effectively (Rozgonjuk et al., 2020; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Likewise, Al-Menayes (2016) observed that students experiencing higher levels of FOMO were more inclined to have scholastic challenges as a result of excessive online activity and diminished self-regulation.

Among the characteristics of FOMO, the need to belong dimension was the best predictor of academic achievement. This shows that students who are very worried about social inclusion may spend considerable cognitive and emotional resources on sustaining online relationships to the detriment of their academic activities. This is in line with the findings of Casale and Banchi (2022), who stated that social approbation incentives and fear of exclusion are often driving problematic social media use and impairing daily functioning.

The study makes a great contribution to the field by examining depression, anxiety, and stress as mediating variables. A mediation study showed that psychological discomfort strongly mediated the association between FOMO and academic performance. Specifically, the direct effect of FOMO on academic performance was non-significant after controlling for depression, anxiety, and stress,





demonstrating a full mediation effect. This implies that FOMO may not directly decrease academic achievement, but indirectly through greater psychological distress.

The mediation conclusion is in line with earlier studies that have found emotional discomfort to be an essential mechanism relating harmful digital behavior and academic outcomes. Elhai et al. (2022) revealed that anxiety and depressive symptoms partially mediate the association between problematic smartphone use and poor performance. Similarly, Dhir et al. (2021) found that social media tiredness and emotional depletion moderate the negative impacts of online involvement on individual well-being. Also, recent studies indicate that psychological distress is a major mechanism through which excessive use of digital technology impairs educational results (Beyens et al., 2021; Reer et al., 2019).

The results can also be explained using Uses and Gratifications Theory. Students may overuse social media to meet the needs of belongingness, amusement, and social approbation. However, too much online participation may make one more vulnerable to melancholy, anxiety, and stress, which in turn may eventually hinder one's academic functioning. This conclusion is consistent with research suggesting that problematic social media use is related to lower levels of academic engagement, academic self-efficacy, and inferior educational achievements (Marino et al., 2018; Oberst et al., 2017).

Psychological distress strongly mediated the link between FOMO and academic performance. However, the mediating impact only accounted for part of the total variance. This implies that other factors might affect the association. Self-regulation, academic motivation, resilience, study habits, social support, and time-management abilities have been suggested by previous research as possible explanatory mechanisms (Kircaburun et al., 2020; Servidio, 2021). Thus, future studies may explore more comprehensive models with additional mediating and moderating variables.

Overall, the present findings contribute to the literature by giving empirical evidence from Filipino senior high school students and showing that sadness, anxiety, and stress are essential psychological processes relating FOMO to academic performance. The findings highlight the significance of integrating digital wellness efforts, mental health programs, and resilience-building treatments in schools to foster students' academic performance and psychological well-being.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that senior high school students exhibited very high levels of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), particularly in terms of their need to belong, desire for popularity, anxiety when disconnected, and tendencies toward excessive social media engagement. The results further demonstrated that students experienced notable levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, indicating the presence of psychological distress within the population. Correlation analysis showed that higher levels of FOMO were associated with lower academic performance. More importantly, mediation analysis revealed that depression, anxiety, and stress fully mediated the relationship between FOMO and academic performance, suggesting that the negative influence of FOMO on students' academic outcomes operates primarily through psychological distress rather than through a direct pathway.

These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on digital behavior and student well-being by providing empirical evidence from the Filipino senior high school context. The study supports the assumptions of Self-Determination Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, which suggest that unmet social needs and the desire for social connection may encourage excessive online engagement that subsequently affects psychological well-being. By demonstrating the mediating role of depression, anxiety, and stress, the study extends existing knowledge and highlights the psychological mechanisms through which FOMO influences academic performance. This contribution is particularly relevant in the Philippine setting, where social media engagement remains among the highest in the world.

The findings also have important practical implications. Educational institutions may strengthen digital wellness initiatives, mental health support programs, counseling services, and resilience-building





interventions to help students manage the emotional challenges associated with excessive social media use. Encouraging healthy online behaviors and promoting psychological well-being may contribute to improved academic outcomes and overall student development.

Recommendation

For Students. Students are encouraged to participate in digital literacy and digital wellness programs that promote responsible social media use and healthy online behaviors. They may benefit from utilizing screen-time tracking applications, digital self-monitoring tools, and structured study schedules to manage online engagement effectively. Developing self-regulation skills and setting daily limits for social media use may help reduce FOMO-related distractions and improve academic focus and productivity.

For Teachers. Teachers are encouraged to integrate digital literacy concepts into classroom instruction by educating students about the psychological effects of excessive social media use, including FOMO, anxiety, and stress. They may implement technology-assisted learning activities that promote purposeful rather than excessive digital engagement. Additionally, teachers can incorporate reflective exercises, time-management strategies, and digital wellness discussions into their lessons to help students develop healthier online habits.

For Parents. Parents are encouraged to establish structured family digital-use plans that include clear expectations regarding screen time, social media use, and technology-free study periods. They may also use parental monitoring applications and engage in regular discussions with their children about online experiences, digital pressures, and emotional well-being. Creating a supportive home environment that encourages balanced technology use may help reduce the negative effects of FOMO and psychological distress.

For School Administrators. School administrators are encouraged to institutionalize comprehensive digital wellness and mental health programs within the school. Specifically, schools may develop Digital Literacy and Responsible Social Media Use Curricula that educate students on the psychological and academic consequences of excessive online engagement. Furthermore, schools are encouraged to implement Mental Health Screening Protocols at the beginning of each semester using validated instruments such as the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) to identify students who may be at risk of psychological distress. Early identification may facilitate timely counseling interventions, mental health referrals, and student support services. Schools may also establish peer-support programs, resilience-building workshops, and digital wellness campaigns to promote positive student well-being.

For Guidance Counselors and Mental Health Practitioners. Guidance counselors and school mental health professionals are encouraged to design targeted intervention programs for students exhibiting high levels of FOMO and psychological distress. These interventions may include psychoeducational seminars, stress management workshops, cognitive-behavioral coping strategies, mindfulness activities, and individual or group counseling sessions. Regular monitoring and follow-up assessments may further support students' psychological well-being and academic success.

For Future Researchers. Future researchers are encouraged to replicate this study using larger and more diverse samples from different educational institutions and regions to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal research designs are also recommended to examine how FOMO, psychological distress, and academic performance evolve. Additionally, future studies may investigate other potential mediating and moderating variables such as study habits, academic motivation, self-regulation, teacher support, family environment, peer influence, and socioeconomic status to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' academic performance. Researchers may also evaluate the effectiveness of digital literacy interventions, screen-time management programs, and mental health initiatives in reducing FOMO and improving academic outcomes.

[12/14]

Citation:



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