

## Relationship between Leisure Boredom, Fear of Missing Out and Social Media Addiction among young adults of Mumbai

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Social media addiction (SMA) has become a growing concern among young adults, often linked to underlying psychological and behavioural factors. Leisure boredom (LB) and fear of missing out (FOMO) have emerged as potential contributors to excessive social media use. The aim of the study was to identify the relationship between leisure boredom, fear of missing out and social media addiction among young adults.

**Methodology:** The sample consisted of 105 participants (61 females and 44 males) aged between 18- 26 years from Mumbai, India. The scales used in the study were Leisure boredom scale, fear of missing out and Bergens social media addiction scale (BSMAS).

**Results:** Pearson's product-moment correlation showed a significant positive correlation between leisure boredom and social media addiction ( $r = 0.28, p < 0.01$ ), and between FOMO and social media addiction ( $r = 0.51, p < 0.001$ ). Regression analysis further indicated that both leisure boredom ( $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.05$ ) and FOMO ( $\beta = 0.51, p < 0.05$ ) significantly predicted social media addiction.

**Conclusion:** The findings suggest that higher levels of leisure boredom and FOMO are associated with increased social media addiction among young adults. These results underscore the importance of designing interventions that offer engaging leisure alternatives and strategies to manage FOMO, thereby helping to reduce problematic social media use.

**Keywords:** Leisure boredom, Fear of missing out, social media addiction, young adults.

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### INTRODUCTION

Social media has become deeply embedded in daily life, serving as a primary communication tool for individuals across all age groups. This widespread adoption, particularly among young people, is driven by its accessibility and immediacy [1]. Consequently, excessive smartphone use has surged, with addiction rates increasing significantly, and a large percentage of Indians keeping their devices constantly at hand [2]. While not always classified as a psychopathological disorder, excessive social media use is increasingly recognized as a behavioural addiction, characterized by a compulsive lack of control despite potential harm [3]. Social Media Addiction (SMA), a subtype of internet addiction, is defined by an overwhelming preoccupation with social media that impairs other life areas [4]. Its prevalence is growing, with significant addiction rates observed in studies among young adults [5]. SMA exhibits typical addiction symptoms, including mood changes, preoccupation, increased use, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse [6].

Smartphones often facilitate this excessive use by providing constant access to social networking sites. These platforms, designed for connection, can inadvertently foster a 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) – a persistent worry" about others' rewarding experiences [7-8]. Similarly, individuals facing leisure boredom frequently turn to social media for arousal and to alleviate their lack of engagement.

This study investigates the relationship between leisure boredom (LB), fear of missing out (FOMO), and social media addiction (SMA) among Mumbai's young adults. SMA is defined as excessive social media use (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) negatively impacting daily life [8]. Leisure boredom refers to the perception of insufficient, unengaging, or unexciting leisure experiences, leading to negative effects [9]. FOMO, empirically defined by Przybylski [10], is the persistent worry of missing out on rewarding experiences, characterized by a desire for constant connection, and linked to lower mood and life satisfaction.

Several psychological theories offer insights into the relationship between leisure boredom, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and social media addiction. One of the most comprehensive models in recent years is the Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution (I-PACE) model proposed by Brand [10-11]. This model integrates psychological and neurobiological perspectives to explain how addictive behaviours develop and are maintained. According to the I-PACE model, a range of predisposing factors such as individual traits, psychological vulnerabilities, genetic influences, and social cognitions interact with a person's subjective perception of situational stressors. This interaction triggers affective, cognitive, and behavioural responses, which, over time, can lead to specific forms of Internet-related behavioural addictions, including compulsive social media use.

The Biopsychosocial Framework of the 'Components' Model of Addiction [12] provides another lens through which social media addiction (SMA) can be understood. Originally developed to explain substance-based addictions, this model has been extended to cover behavioural addictions such as SMA. It outlines six core components: mood modification (using social media to elevate mood), salience (preoccupation with the behaviour), tolerance (increased engagement over time), withdrawal (distress when restricted), conflict (negative consequences in personal or professional life), and relapse (return to excessive use after abstinence). These features mirror those seen in more traditional addictions and help explain how social media behavior can become compulsive and difficult to control.

From an optimal arousal perspective, leisure boredom arises when available activities are not sufficiently stimulating, engaging, or novel. According to this theory, individuals seek leisure experiences that are optimally arousing to maintain psychological well-being. When there is either too much free time or not enough engaging options, boredom ensues, which may lead individuals to seek stimulation through maladaptive behaviours like excessive social media use or other forms of addiction. Hill and Perkins [14] further emphasized that conflicting perceptions such as having too much time but not enough meaningful activities can exacerbate leisure boredom, increasing the risk of deviant coping behaviours in young adults. Lastly, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) [15] provides a motivational explanation for FOMO and its link to social media addiction. According to SDT, psychological well-being hinges on the fulfilment of three basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are unmet particularly the need for social connection individuals may experience FOMO, as conceptualized by authors. This persistent anxiety about missing out on rewarding experiences often drives people to remain constantly connected through social media. In turn, this compulsive connectivity may impair emotional well-being and contribute to the development of SMA, creating a cycle of dependence rooted in psychological need deficits.

Past research highlights leisure boredom as a key antecedent to problematic internet and smartphone use, including internet addiction (IA), smartphone addiction (SMA), and social networking site (SNS) addiction. Multiple studies [16-20] demonstrate that when individuals particularly adolescents and young adults experience boredom during their leisure time, they tend to turn to digital platforms for stimulation and gratification. Leisure boredom was found to predict a range of outcomes, including increased smartphone use, gaming addiction, and social media engagement, often at the cost of physical health, mental well-being, and real-world social interaction.

Closely related to leisure boredom is boredom proneness as a mediating factor between psychological distress (e.g., depression, anxiety) and problematic digital behaviour. Elhai and others [21] showed that boredom disposition, not just frequency, predicted problematic smartphone use (PSU), which mediated the relationship between psychological symptoms and tech addiction. Similar patterns were found in studies by authors [16-18], where college students and adolescents experiencing emotional distress due to leisure boredom reported higher digital dependency. These findings suggest a psychological feedback loop: individuals with poor emotional regulation or mental health issues are more likely to experience boredom and seek online activities as a maladaptive coping mechanism.

Another recurring theme is the role of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) in predicting social media addiction. Studies by Cargill and many other researchers [22-25] consistently report that FOMO positively correlates with SMA, especially in young adults and females. FOMO often mediates or moderates the relationship between social anxiety, self-esteem, and online behaviour, intensifying the compulsive use of social networking platforms. These studies collectively indicate that both boredom and FOMO are powerful psychological drivers of internet-related behavioural addictions, especially among youth, and highlight the need for interventions targeting emotional coping strategies and offline engagement.

### **Purpose & significance of the study**

This study explores the association between fear of missing out (FOMO), leisure boredom, and social media addiction among young adults. Internet overuse is common among college students seeking identity and connection. High FOMO leads to increased internet use due to fear of missing out on experiences and sensitivity to social media reactions, potentially fostering harmful behaviours. Similarly, boredom drives individuals to social media for constant arousal. This research addresses the limited combined study of these three variables.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research questions**

- Is there a positive relationship between leisure boredom and social media addiction among young adults?
- Is there a positive relationship between fear of missing out and social media addiction among young adults?
- Is leisure boredom a predictor of social media addiction among young adults?
- Is fear of missing out a predictor of social media addiction among young adults?

### **Aim**

The current research aims to examine the relationship between leisure boredom, fear of missing out and social media addiction among young adults of Mumbai.

### **Objectives**

1. To understand the relationship between fear of missing out and social media addiction among young adults
2. To understand the relationship between leisure boredom and social media addiction among young adults
3. To identify if leisure boredom is a significant predictor of social media addiction
4. To identify if fear of missing out is a significant predictor of social media addiction

### **Hypotheses**

- There will be a significant positive correlation between fear of missing out and social media addiction among young adults
- There will be a significant positive correlation between leisure boredom and social media addiction among young adults
- Fear of missing out will be a significant predictor of social media addiction among young adults
- Leisure boredom will be a significant predictor of social media addiction among young adults

### **Operational definitions**

Following were the operational definitions of the variables under study

- **Leisure boredom:** Leisure boredom, as defined by Iso-Ahola and Weissinger [10], is the negative affect resulting from the belief that available leisure experiences lack sufficient frequency, involvement, excitement, variety, or novelty.

- **Fear of missing out:** Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), defined by Przybylski and others [8] and measured by their FOMO Scale, is the "persistent worry that others may be enjoying rewarding experiences from which one is absent and is characterized by the desire to stay constantly connected with what others are doing."
- **Social media addiction:** Social Media Addiction (SMA), as defined by Walker [9], is excessive social media use (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) that negatively impacts a user's daily life, including school, work, relationships, and behaviours.

### Sample

The study sample consisted of 105 participants with 60% females and 40 % male participants. The age range of the participants was from 18- 26 years, and the mean age was 22 years.

### Inclusive criteria

Participants were Mumbai residents, aged 18-26, fluent in English (10th grade level), and active on at least one social networking site (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter).

### Exclusive criteria

Excluded participants included those who created social media videos (e.g., Instagram Reels), were underage of 18 or over 26, resided outside Mumbai, or had a diagnosed mental condition/illness.

**Research Design:** The study used correlational study design using survey methods for data collection.

**Sampling method:** Convenient sampling method was used to collect data.

### Research instruments

Following tools were used to measure study variables:

- **Leisure Boredom scale**

The Leisure Boredom scale is a 16-item, 5-point self-report measure assessing boredom in leisure, with a Cronbach's alpha of .94 and convergent validity shown through correlations with loneliness measures [10].

- **Fear of missing out scale (FOMOs)**

The FOMO scale, is a 10-item measure rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=not true at all, 5=extremely right). Total scores range from 10-50, computed by averaging all item scores, and it shows high internal consistency (coefficient alpha = 0.93) [8].

- **Bergens social media addiction scale: (BSMAS)**

The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) is a six-item self-report tool for assessing at-risk social media addiction, based on Griffiths' six addiction characteristics. The original study (Andreassen et al., 2016) reported a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.88 [26].

### Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected from 105 young adults (aged 18–26) using convenience sampling via Google Forms shared on social media, with informed consent and confidentiality ensured. Participants completed standardized measures of Leisure Boredom, Fear of Missing Out, and Social Media Addiction; responses were screened for eligibility. After data cleaning, correlation and regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses, while gender differences were not examined due to unequal group sizes.

### Ethical considerations

The researcher obtained permission for using data collection instruments from appropriate authorities. Participants were informed their participation was voluntary, they could withdraw anytime, and could receive results via email. Data, including demographics and scores, was kept anonymous and confidential, with an option for initials. Test protocols would be stored for 3-5 years before destruction. To minimize social desirability bias, a detailed debriefing occurred post-response, offering a final chance to withdraw data.

All ethical principles were upheld throughout the study, with researcher contact information provided for inquiries.

## RESULTS

Pearson product moment correlation was computed to test the first two hypotheses. A simple linear regression was then conducted to investigate whether leisure boredom and fear of missing out predicts social media addiction.

**Table 1: Correlation between leisure boredom, fear of missing out and social media addiction**

Variable	LB	FOMO	SMA
LB	1		
FOMO	0.09	1	
SMA	0.28**	0.51***	1

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

LB = leisure boredom, FOMO = fear of missing out, SMA = Social media addiction

As can be seen from Table 1 Leisure boredom and social media addiction showed a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.28$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), thus the results were in line with the hypothesis. Similarly, a significant positive correlation was found between fear of missing out and social media addiction ( $r = 0.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ), thus the results were in line with the hypothesis. The results are in line with the hypotheses. Since correlations were found significant, regression analysis was conducted.

**Table 2: Regression Coefficients Predicting Social Media Addiction from Leisure Boredom (N = 105)**

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	7.08	2.99	—	2.37	0.019
Leisure Boredom	0.23	0.08	0.28	2.97	0.003

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient.

Model Summary:  $R = 0.28$ ,  $R^2 = 0.08$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.07$ ,  $F(1, 103) = 8.83$ ,  $p = 0.003$

The regression analysis revealed that leisure boredom significantly predicted social media addiction among participants. The model accounted for approximately 8% of the variance in social media addiction scores ( $R^2 = 0.08$ ,  $F(1, 103) = 8.83$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). The predictor variable, leisure boredom, had a positive and significant standardized beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), indicating that higher levels of leisure boredom were associated with increased levels of social media addiction. The beta coefficient ( $B = 0.28$ ) suggests that for every one-unit increase in leisure boredom, social media addiction scores increased by 0.28 units. This finding supports the hypothesis that leisure boredom is a significant predictor of social media addiction.

**Table 3: Regression Coefficients Predicting Social Media Addiction from Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) (N = 105)**

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	8.04	1.38	—	5.84	< 0.001
FOMO	0.30	0.05	0.51	5.96	< 0.001

Note: B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error;  $\beta$  = standardized beta.

Model summary:  $R = .506$ ,  $R^2 = .256$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .248$ ,  $F(1, 103) = 35.47$ ,  $p < .001$

The regression analysis showed that Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) was a strong and significant predictor of social media addiction. The model explained 25.6% of the variance in social media addiction scores ( $R^2 =$

0.256,  $F(1, 103) = 35.47$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The standardized beta coefficient was  $\beta = .51$ , indicating a strong positive relationship — individuals with higher FOMO were significantly more likely to exhibit higher levels of social media addiction. The beta coefficient ( $B = 0.51$ ) suggests that for each one-unit increase in FOMO, social media addiction scores rose by 0.51 units. The results are in line with the hypothesis that fear of missing out is a significant predictor of social media addiction.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between leisure boredom (LB), fear of missing out (FOMO), and social media addiction (SMA) among young adults, particularly in the Indian context, where such combined research is limited. The findings reveal significant positive correlations between leisure boredom and social media addiction as well as between FOMO and social media addiction, with both leisure boredom and FOMO emerging as significant predictors of social media addiction.

The observed significant positive correlation and predictive power of leisure boredom on social media addiction align with existing literature. Individuals experiencing boredom, characterized by a lack of engaging activities, often gravitate towards social media for constant stimulation through features like reels and posts. This is consistent with studies [27], which linked excessive smartphone use in leisure to escape boredom, and studies [28] who identified leisure time boredom as a trigger for internet addiction. Furthermore, the optimal arousal theory suggests that high levels of leisure boredom can lead to engagement in deviant behaviors, including addiction. Research also supports this, demonstrating that leisure boredom predicts SNS-game use and addiction among undergraduates, emphasizing how unstructured free time can exacerbate boredom, leading to addictive online behaviours [29].

Similarly, the study found a significant positive correlation between fear of missing out and social media addiction, with FOMO significantly predicting social media addiction. This can be attributed to the innate human drive for social connection, where social media serves as a platform to maintain relationships and avoid perceived exclusion. Individuals with high FOMO are more likely to use the internet to stay informed and avoid missing rewarding experiences, and they may be more sensitive to negative emotional responses when their social media interactions lack engagement. This aligns with the "Belonginess hypothesis," which posits a fundamental human need to form and maintain lasting interpersonal relationships, suggesting FOMO drives increased social media use [30]. Furthermore, studies by researchers [31] on Snapchat usage underscore the link between social media platforms and the inherent need for recognition and connection. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, FOMO often arises from a deficit in basic psychological needs (competence, autonomy, relatedness), leading individuals to compensate through increased social media engagement [32]. Pontes and others [33] also found a strong association between social media addiction and FOMO, dysfunctional emotion regulation, and maladaptive cognitions, identifying FOMO as a highly significant predictor of social media addiction.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant roles of leisure boredom (LB) and fear of missing out (FOMO) in predicting social media addiction (SMA) among young adults in Mumbai. Both variables were found to be positively correlated with SMA, underscoring the psychological and behavioural mechanisms driving excessive social media use. While the findings contribute valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged, including reliance on self-reports, a restricted urban sample, exclusion of gender analysis, and lack of observational data or assessment of leisure activities. Despite these constraints, the study offers practical implications: it calls for targeted awareness programs and therapeutic interventions aimed at reducing FOMO and managing unstructured leisure time, especially among students and young employees. Future research should explore these variables across diverse populations and contexts, rural versus urban, adolescents versus adults and consider related factors such as self-esteem, body image, and leisure satisfaction. Incorporating observational methods and examining leisure time quality may also enrich our understanding of SMA's roots and inform more effective, evidence-based interventions.

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