

# Does Meeting Belongingness Needs Through Social Media Impact One's Fear of Missing Out and Self-Esteem?

Kylee E. Malouf<sup>2</sup>, Timothy Buckles<sup>1</sup>, Mercades Nelson<sup>2</sup>, Mary Pritchard<sup>1</sup>, Heather Schoenherr<sup>2</sup>

Department of Psychological Sciences, Boise State University <sup>1</sup>

Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, College of Western Idaho <sup>2</sup>

## *Suggested bibliographic reference*

Malouf, K. E., Buckles, T., Mercades, N., Pritchard, M., Schoenherr, H. (2022). Does meeting belongingness needs through social media impact one's fear of missing out and self-esteem? *Psi Beta Journal of Student Research*, 2(1), 23-28.

<https://doi.org/10.54581/XODO5493>

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore how meeting belongingness needs through social media use may impact one's fear of missing out (FoMO) and self-esteem. It was predicted that individuals with increased levels of FoMO would have higher levels of the need to belong. It was also predicted that individuals with lower levels of self-esteem would have higher levels of FoMO and the need to belong. A total of 592 participants (447 female, 137 male) in various psychology courses at a community college and a university participated in an online survey. Consistent with the hypothesis, increased FoMO is related to a higher level of need to belong. Additionally, lower levels of self-esteem are related to higher levels of FoMO and a higher level of the need to belong. Based on these findings, perhaps lower levels of self-esteem further exacerbate the positive feedback loop between one's desire for belongingness and their FoMO when utilizing social media. As such, these results may caution college students from meeting their need for belongingness through social media usage, and more so, those with a lower level of self-esteem.

*Keywords:* fear of missing out, FoMO, need to belong, self-esteem, social media

## **Does Meeting Belongingness Needs with Social Media Impact One's Fear of Missing Out and Self-Esteem?**

The Pew Research Center reports that 75% of Americans use some form of social media today, detailing a stark contrast to the 5% of Americans who reported use in 2005 (Brooke & Anderson, 2021). With social media being accessible to practically anybody at any time or location, this may result in benefits such as increased global connections and feeling supported online (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Wright et al., 2021). Thus, social media may become attractive and

valuable as a self-management tool for satisfying one's needs. However, negative ramifications can arise when social media fails to fulfill those needs, leaving many vulnerable. Unfortunately, numerous risks associated with using social media only inhibit one from meeting their needs (Chai et al., 2018; Ostendorf et al., 2020). Further, fear and addiction stemming from those unmet needs may foster increased levels of worry and low self-image (Greenaway et al., 2016).

The need to belong is the innate drive to form enduring, mutually positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. In general, one must

fulfill two requirements to satisfy the need to belong and increase well-being. First, one must regard most of their relationships as neutral, positive personal interactions, and second, have a genuine perception of a close bond within those relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When looking to satisfy their desire for belongingness, people may turn to social media to compensate (Lai et al., 2019; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Wang et al., 2018). In support, researchers find that persons with a greater need to belong use social media more frequently, and it is crucial to highlight that specific habits of social media usage are seen to satisfy the need to belong online (i.e., information seeking and communication; Beyens et al., 2016; Elhai et al., 2018; Rollero et al., 2019). However, it is still unclear whether using social media to cope with unmet belongingness needs is a viable or healthy coping strategy as it does come with risk (Iannone et al., 2018). Although researchers Lai et al. Wang (2019) find certain social media usage correlates with enhanced well-being when being used with the intention of information seeking or communication, other studies display negative results, such as anxiety about what experiences others may be having without them and a lowered self-concept (Buglass et al., 2017; Neira & Barber, 2014).

FoMO is the intrusive anxiety that others may be having more gratifying experiences; FoMO is often displayed as the all-consuming desire to continuously connect and learn what others are doing (Przybylski et al., 2013). Social media has become valuable as a self-management tool offering one the ability to gather information and connect to a seemingly endless number of people. Thus, social media use and FoMO become inter-reliant: as social media use increases, so does one's FoMO, and as one's FoMO increases, so does their social media use (Beyens et al., 2016; Przybylski et al., 2013). As previously said, one can satisfy their desire for belongingness by using social media, but this is a confined road. For example, when one is unable to meet their need for belongingness online,

meeting the need may compromise the practice of self-regulation behaviors that protect one from FoMO and problematic social media usage (Chai et al., 2018; Ostendorf et al., 2018). Researchers find that those higher in their need to belong are also higher in FoMO, both associated with increased social media use (Elhai et al., 2018) (Beyens, Frison, & Eggermont 2016; Elhai et al., 2018). This suggests that when a person's psychological needs are unmet, they become more susceptible to FoMO. Although the cyclic nature of social media use and FoMO is well understood in existing literature, little research explores the cyclic nature of FoMO and the need to belong.

Unmet needs and increased social media use can also have additional negative consequences impacting how one feels about oneself (Neira & Barber, 2014). According to Baumeister and Leary (2000), self-esteem is a human adaptation that gauges where they stand in their sense of belonging or social inclusion. More to this point, Timeo et al. (2020)'s research finds that those who receive fewer likes than others reported an increased threat to their needs (i.e., belonging, self-esteem) as well as negative emotions. We understand social inclusion through social exclusion: being ostracized or rejected by someone you associate with leaves an unpleasant feeling (Twenge, 2001). Existing research shows that social media allows one to self-measure and cope with unmet SE needs (Chou & Edge, 2012; Hou et al., 2019). For example, Chou & Edge (2012) found that those who spend more time on Facebook may view others as being happier and having better lives than they do, especially if they have a significant number of "friends" on Facebook whom they do not know personally. Moreover, those who experience chronic ostracism (feeling excluded and ignored frequently) will have a higher need to belong, driving social media usage to increase, which may lower SE (Hou et al., 2019; Iannone et al., 2018). Social media allows for almost endless social comparison opportunities (Dijkstra et al., 2010). As increased social media use becomes a

mediator for coping with unmet needs, FoMO may also increase with low self-esteem (Buglass et al., 2017).

Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to explore the process of the modern approach to meeting belongingness needs (e.g., social media) alongside the analysis of several variables indicative of the unsuccessful meeting of needs such as lowered self-esteem and FoMO. First, we hypothesized that individuals with lower levels of self-esteem would have higher levels of FoMO (Buglass et al., 2017). Second, we hypothesized that individuals with lower self-esteem would have higher levels of need to belong (Greenaway et al., 2016). Third, we hypothesized that individuals with increased levels of FoMO would have higher levels of need to belong (Wang et al., 2018).

### Method

#### Procedure

A correlational design was used to test the posed hypotheses. After receiving approval by the Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited from introductory psychology courses at a community college and a university to take part in an omnibus study by completing an online survey for course credit or a chance at winning one of four \$25 Amazon gift cards. A total of 592 (447 Female, 137 Male, and 8 Non-binary) undergraduate students completed the survey. Our sample ranged in age from 18 to 61, with an average age of 21.24 ( $SD = 6.76$ ). Completion of the survey served as the participants' consent; data were collected over a period of approximately 8 weeks. Participants who wished to enter the prize drawing were asked to enter their e-mail address; however, this information was separated from survey responses to ensure anonymity. The data was securely stored electronically and only accessible to the research team.

### Measures

Participants indicated their sex by typing their response to "What is your gender?" and their age by typing their response to "What is your age?" The need to belong was measured using the Need to Belong Scale (Leary et al., 2012), including 10 statements rated using a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). This scale was scored by averaging the answers to all items, with higher scores denoting a greater need for belonging. FoMO was measured using the Fear of Missing Out Scale (Pryzbylski et al., 2013), which includes 10 statements rated using a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = *not at all true of me* to 5 = *extremely true of me*). This scale was scored by averaging the answers to all items, with higher scores denoting greater FoMO. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), containing 10 items rated using a 4-point Likert Scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). This scale was scored by reverse scoring appropriate items and summing all items, with a higher score denoting higher self-esteem.

### Results

In testing our first hypothesis, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed to evaluate the negative relation between self-esteem ( $M = 28.44$ ,  $SD = 5.79$ , with scores ranging from 11 to 40) and FoMO ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = .87$ , with scores ranging from 1 to 5). A statistically significant, moderate negative correlation was found,  $r(489) = -.386$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r^2 = .146$ , indicating that participants with lower levels of self-esteem tend to be higher in FoMO.

In testing our second hypothesis, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed to evaluate the negative relation between participants with low levels of self-esteem and need to belong ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = .74$  with scores ranging from 1.1 to 5). A statistically significant, moderate negative correlation was found,  $r(489) = -.361$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r^2 = .127$ , indicating that participants with lower levels of self-esteem tend to be higher in need to belong.

Finally, in testing our third hypothesis, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed to evaluate the positive relation between participants with increased FoMO and need to belong. A statistically significant, moderate positive correlation was found,  $r(489) = .623, p < .001, r^2 = .384$ , indicating that participants higher in their FoMO tend to be higher in need to belong.

### Discussion

Results showed support for all hypotheses in the present study. Participants with lower levels of self-esteem exhibited higher levels of FoMO as well as the need to belong. Those with higher FoMO also displayed greater levels of the need to belong. These findings are consistent with previous research (Buglass et al., 2017; Greenaway et al. (2016); Chai et al., 2018; Ostendorf et al., 2018). Researchers Buglass et al. (2017) and Greenaway et al. (2016) found significant relationships among low self-esteem, FoMO, and the need to belong. These results suggest that low levels of self-esteem may have a significant impact on one's overall level of FoMO and desire for belongingness. It may be possible that in the context of social media use, those who have low self-esteem are more vulnerable to the negative implications of using social media. In fact, previous research supports the notion that such risks can inhibit one from meeting their needs (Chai et al., 2018; Ostendorf et al., 2020). This unsuccessful meeting of needs can also be linked to those who experience FoMO alone.

Similar to Wang et al. (2018), we found that those with higher FoMO also have higher belongingness needs. With the cyclic nature of social media use and FoMO being well understood in existing literature, the results of our study are important because they add to the literature regarding what drives a person's FoMO (Beyens et al., 2016; Przybylski et al., 2013). Our results suggest that those who have a desire for belonging experience FoMO, lending to the idea that when one cannot meet their need for belongingness online, they may no longer use the self-regulatory

behaviors that could allow for benefits of social media use and use social media to the degree that invokes FoMO (Chai et al., 2018; Ostendorf et al., 2018). Since over 90% of emerging adults have a social media profile, and nearly all (97%) use the internet (Mander, 2020), understanding the potential implications of social media use is important for collegiate populations. Social media doesn't seem to be going anywhere any time soon and having the resources to create safeguards or caution students with low self-esteem from depending on social media to fulfill their need for belonging seems to be more problematic than helpful. Our research suggests that perhaps a higher need to belong and lower levels of self-esteem exacerbate social media and FoMO's positive feedback loop.

Despite the fact that the results of this study are consistent with previous research and have practical implications such as cautioning those with low self-esteem against using social media to fulfill their desire for belongingness, it is important to note that it has limitations. First, although consistent with the make-up of our sampled population, the average age of our participants was 21 years old. Given this, results cannot be generalized to older populations. Second, and again consistent with our sampled population, the majority of participants were female (76%). In light of this, our results may not be as generalizable to male or non-binary collegiate populations. However, as gender differences have been noted in self-esteem (Kling et al., 1999) and FoMO (Gezgin et al., 2017), future research in this area would benefit from exploring gender differences within the context of the need to belong, self-esteem, and FoMO.

With social media use only growing, it is essential that we proceed with caution and create safeguards, resources, and information accessible to those most at risk (e.g., those with low self-esteem; Brooke & Anderson, 2021). The results of our study suggest that those with low self-esteem may not be able to use social media to meet their

need for belonging, therefore missing out on the potential benefits social media can offer when used appropriately. Thus, based on the results of the current study, we urge caution for those with low self-esteem when using social media.

#### References

- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Beyens, I., Frison, E., Eggermont, S. (2016). "I don't want to miss a thing": Adolescents' fear of missing out and its relationship to adolescents' social needs, Facebook use, and Facebook related stress. *Computer in Human Behavior*, 64, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.083>
- Brooke, A., & Anderson, M. (2021, April 7). Social media use in 2021. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/04/07/social-media-use-in-2021/>
- Buglass, S. L., Binder, J. F., Betts, L. R., & Underwood, J. D. M. (2017). Motivators of online vulnerability: The impact of social network site use and FOMO. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 66, 248-255. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.09.055>
- Chai, H., Niu, G., Chu, X., Wei, Q., Song, Y., & Sun, X. (2018). Fear of missing out: What have I missed again? *Advances in Psychological Science*, 26(3), 527-537. <https://doi.org/10.3724/SP.J.1042.2018.00527>
- Chou, H. T. G., & Edge, N. (2012). "They are happier and having better lives than I am": The impact of using Facebook on perceptions of others' lives. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(2), 117-121. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2011.0324>
- Dijkstra, P., Gibbons, F. X., & Buunk, A. P. (2010). Social comparison theory. In J. E. Maddux & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Social psychological foundations of clinical psychology* (pp. 195–211). The Guilford Press.
- Elhai, J. D., Levine, J. C., Alghraibeh, A. M., Alafnan, A. A., Aldraiweesh, A. A., & Hall, B. J. (2018). Fear of missing out: Testing relationships with negative affectivity, online social engagement, and problematic smartphone use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 89, 289-298. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.08.020>
- Gezgin, D. M., Hamutoglu, N. B., Gemikonakli, O., & Raman, I. (2017). Social network users; Fear of missing out in preservice teachers. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(17), 156-168.
- Greenaway, K. H., Cruwys, T., Haslam, S. A., & Jetten, J. (2016). Social identities promote well-being because they satisfy global psychological needs. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 46(3), 294-307. <https://doi.org/10.1002.ejsp.2169>
- Hou, Y., Xiong, D., Jiang, T., Song, L., & Wang, Q. (2019). Social media addiction: Its impact, mediation, and intervention. *Cyberpsychology*, 13(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2019-1-4>
- Iannone, N. E., McCarty, M. K., Branch, S. E., & Kelly, J. R. (2018). Connecting in the Twitterverse: Using Twitter to satisfy unmet belonging needs. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 158(4), 491-495. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2017.1385445>
- Kling, K. C., Hyde, J. S., Showers, C. J., & Buswell, B. N. (1999). Gender differences in self-esteem: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125(4), 470-500. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.125.4.470>
- Mander, J. (2020, March 12). Coronavirus: How consumers are actually reacting. GWI. <https://blog.gwi.com/trends/coronavirus-and-consumers/>
- Nadkarni, A., & Hofmann, S. G. (2012). Why do people use Facebook? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52(3), 243-249. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2011.11.007>
- Neira, C. J. B., & Barber, B. L. (2014). Social networking site use: Linked to adolescents' social self-concept, self-esteem, and depressed mood. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 66(1), 56-64. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12034>
- Lai, H. M., Hsieh, P. J., & Zhang, R. C. (2019). Understanding adolescent students' use of Facebook and their subjective well-being: A gender-based comparison. *Behavior & Information Technology*, 38(5), 533-548. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929x.2018.1543452>
- Ostendorf, S., Wegmann, E., & Brand, M. (2020). Problematic social-networks-use in German children and adolescents-the interaction of need to belong, online self-regulative competences, and

- age. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(7), Article 2518.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17072518>
- Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4), 1841-1848. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.014>
- Rollero, C., Daniele, A., & Tartaglia, S. (2019). Do men post and women view? The role of gender, personality and emotions in online social activity. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 13(1).  
<https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2019-1-1>
- Timeo, S., Riva, P., & Paladino, M. P. (2020). Being liked or not being liked: A study on social-media exclusion in a preadolescent population. *Journal of Adolescence*, 80, 173-181.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.02.010>
- Twenge, J. M., Baumeister, R. F., Tice, D. M., & Stucke, T. S. (2001). If you can't join them, beat them: Effects of social exclusion on aggressive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81(6), 1058-1069.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.6.1058>
- Wang, P., Xie, X., Wang, X., Zhao, F., Chu, X., Nie, J., & Lei, L. (2018). The need to belong and adolescent authentic self-presentation on SNSs: A moderated mediation model involving FoMO and perceived social support. *Personality & Individual Differences*, 128, 133-138.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.02.035>
- Wright, R. R., Evans, A., Schaeffer, C., Mullins, R., & Cast, L. (2021). Social networking site use: Implications for health and wellness. *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*, 26(2), 165-175. <https://doi.org/10.24839/2325-7342.jn26.2.165>