Academic Adjustment, Emotional Intelligence, and Fear of Missing Out among Undergraduate Students: A Descriptive Correlational Study

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Fear of missing out (FOMO) is the tendency of individuals to remain connected and updated with what others behave and think. During their academic life, students may find themselves disconnected from real social interactions and wish for a unique platform of social support. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between FOMO, academic adjustment (AD), and emotional intelligence (EI). *Methods*: The study adopted a descriptive correlational design. The total sample size was 339 based on defined inclusion criteria. The questionnaires were distributed over one month during the 2019 summer semester by the research team at the Sultan Qaboos University colleges. The study used a self-reported instrument as a measurement tool to investigate the extents of the research phenomena, consisting of three major sections: the FOMO Questionnaire, EI Questionnaire, and the AD Scale. *Results:* The mean age of the participants was 21.5 years. The majority were single (93.5%), lived off-campus (56.0%), in their fifth academic year (33.9%), and had a GPA grade B (48.1%). The participants displayed mild FOMO, AD, and EI rates. The findings demonstrated significant gender differences between research participants in FOMO and EI. They also showed substantial experiences of FOMO among different living arrangements. This study also postulated that EI and AD in students who are feeling a high degree of FOMO were substantially higher. *Conclusions:* Further researches and strategies should be developed to help students control the technology they use so they can be utilized effectively for the right purposes.

Smartphone utilities and applications have become the soul of human connections and socialization. With its tremendous operational benefits, smartphones are growing to perform meaningful tasks for the purposes of information transmission, active socialization, and entertainment.[1] The rapid revolution in communication, especially social networking, provide a virtual platform for social connection to the entire world in many forms.[2] College students are more likely to benefit from the ubiquitous uses of smartphones compared to others.[3] Due to its flexibility and instant connectivity, students spend an excessive amount of time on their smartphones for learning and entertainment purposes.[4,5]

Prolonged and continued used of these devices may impact students psycho-social and physical well-being and leads to fear of missing out (FOMO).[6,7]

FOMO is "a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent."[8] It is characterized by the tendency of individuals to remain updated with how others are behaving and thinking via constant social media connections.[9] Students experience a higher level of FOMO compared to others,[10] they spend sufficient time on their learning responsibilities, which involves a reasonable period of contacting others via social media. In that context, students can find a platform of emotional support and social engagements.[11]

In modern social networking, students effortlessly tend to disclose things are happening in their surroundings,[12] they may find themselves disconnected from real social interactions, and wish for a unique platform of social support, emotional support, self-expression, and self-presentation.[13,14]

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the individual competencies to establish a sense of communication and intrapersonal relationship. Through social skills, interpersonal competencies, and emotional awareness and maturity, EI reflects the ability of the individual to sharply and steadily

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perceive, understand, direct, and react to emotions that can override thoughts, promote relationships, and influence behavior.[15,16]

EI acts as a background for understanding the association between cognition and emotions.[17] People with high EI can develop more successful social relationships[18] that are close and supportive promoting a feeling of belonging and well-being.[19] Without EI, a prosperous life becomes more confused.[20]

EI is associated with internet and smartphone use.[21] Smartphone use can function as a rewarding system for its users through its notifications, posts, news-fields, and other functions user can experience feelings of satisifaction.[22] The result is that social interaction via constant online subscriptions and smartphone use is accelerated. In contrast, users may diminish the actual real-life connections.

Being abroad from family and friends may add additional burdens to students' well-being and academic achievements.[23] Students are then required to behave accordingly and adjust their actions to meet educational demands and self-satisfaction.[24] Students adjustment refers to their ability and efforts to maintain harmony and stability between their needs, desires, and environmental requirements.[25,26] The process of adjustment requires fulfilling emotional, social, and moral needs,[26] and re-adjusting personal relations and social connections to the new college environment.[27]

Smartphones, with their applications, are a double-edged sword. Despite the rapid investments in these technologies worldwide, adverse health conditions float to the surface and become a rich platform for many types of research. There is minimal empirical data to discuss the phenomena of FOMO,[8] and no existing studies exploring FOMO and its relationship with academic adjustment (AD) and EI. The study was keen to explore more beyond this phenomenon, and is a response to the lack of knowledge that exists and aims to examine the extent of such behaviors among college students with AD and EI.

METHODS

The Research Ethics Committee of the College of Nursing at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) approved the study. The researcher used a descriptive correlational study design to achieve the research purpose among SQU undergraduate students. They used power analysis to detect a total sample of 400 students. Students must be enrolled in the undergraduate program, have completed their foundation programs, and have at least one smartphone device continuously connected to the internet to be eligible for inclusion in the study. The study utilized a convenience sample. After obtaining approval from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee and Deans of Colleges, the investigator approached students to obtain written informed consent, in which the study design, purpose, methods, and potential benefits were explained, assuring their voluntary and confidential participation. The questionnaires were distributed over one month during the 2019 summer semester by the research team at SQU colleges during a designated time after lectures. Each student required approximately 20–25 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

The study used a self-reported measurement tool to investigate the extents of the research phenomena, and it consists of six sections: demographical data, academic profile, smartphone usage profile, the FOMO Questionnaire, Brief-EI Scale, and the AD Scale. Ethical approval to use the three mentioned scales was obtained from the original authors.

The FOMO scale consisted of 10 items developed by Przybylski and her team.[8] The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'not at all true of me' to 5 'extremely true of me'. An example item is: "When I have a good time, it is important for me to share the details online (e.g., updating status)." The FOMO scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$) with higher scores indicating higher levels of FOMO.[8]

A brief- EI scale is a revised version of the EI scale created by Davies and his team.[28] It consists of 10 items using a five-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 5 = 'strongly agree.' An example item is: "I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles." The score ranged from 10 to 50. A lower score indicates lower EI and the brief-EI scale demonstrates evidence of content validity, factorial validity, and test-retest reliability.[28]

Anderson, Guan, and Koc developed the AD Scale to focus on local and sojourners students who are temporarily relocated to a new learning environment.[29] It consists of three subscales: academic lifestyle, academic achievement, and academic motivation. Participants are requested to rate their responses on nine items using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'Rarely applies to me' to

5 'Always applies to me.' An example item is: "I am satisfied with my ability to learn at university". The score ranged from 9 to 45. The lowest score indicates lower AD. The scale demonstrates a strength of test-retest correlation coefficients, temporal stability, and internal consistency.[29]

The data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics (IBM Corp. Released 2013. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 22.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.) at a $p < 0.050$ level of significance. Mean and standard deviations represented students' age, GPA, number of smartphones, and the scores of the FOMO questionnaire, AD questionnaire, and EI questionnaire. In contrast, percentages and frequencies were used to describe students' gender, marital status, living arrangement, and level of academic years. Further, multiple regression was used to determine whether academic adjustment and EI predict the experiences of FOMO. All the statistical tests used were based on their assumptions, and the data were checked for normality.

RESULTS

Three hundred fifty-four participants returned the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 88.5%. The researcher attempted to do data cleaning for all missing information, incomplete questionnaires, delayed submission, incorrect, and ineligible participation. The researcher excluded all students enrolled in postgraduate and diploma programs and those who did not complete the foundation program (English, computer skills, and mathematics, which is completed in the first academic year). After data cleaning, the investigators arrived at 339 samples, the age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 33 years. The mean age was 21.5 years. The study showed a homogeneous gender variation (female 50.1% (n = 170), and male 49.9% (n = 169)). The majority of participants were single (93.5%), lived off-campus (56.0%), in their fifth academic year (33.9%), and had a GPA B grade (48.1%).

The majority of the participants owned one smartphone (75.2%), fewer than a quarter had two smartphones (22.1%); only 2.7% had more than two. The participants preferred to put their device on silent mode while in class (82.0%), they also preferred to ignore any received notification (57.8) and to send a quick message indicating that they were in class (26.0%) compared to a responding with or without permission (4.4%, and 11.8%, respectively) [Table 1].

Table 1: Pattern of smartphone uses among undergraduate students.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Number of smartphones		
1	255	75.2
2	75	22.1
3	9	2.7
Reason of classroom use		
Studying	123	36.3
Working	78	23.0
Photos taking	23	6.8
Chatting	55	16.2
Video watching	18	5.3
Game playing	6	1.8
Call making	32	9.4
Shopping	4	1.2
Mobile status at college		
Loud	8	2.4
Off	20	5.9
Silent	278	82.0
Vibrate	33	9.7
Response to notification in class		
Ignore the notification	196	57.8
Send a message saying that I am in class	88	26.0
Ask permission to answer	15	4.4
Respond without permission	40	11.8

The reliability of the three tools was assessed in study sample and showed a high Cronbach's α value [Table 2]. A composite score of each tool was calculated by summarizing the students' responses to the questionnaire; the mean score of FOMO, EI, and AD was 23.8, 32.6, and 27.6, respectively. These scores indicated a moderate level of FOMO, AD, and EI.

The results of the study indicated no statistical differences between students' demographics and

Table 2: Results of reliability test for the three study tools.

Study tool	Cronbach's α value	Number of items	N
FOMO	0.854	10	339
EI	0.930	10	339
AD	0.877	9	339

FOMO: fear of missing out; EI: emotional intelligence; AD: academic adjustment.

Table 3: Distribution of fear of missing out (FOMO) experiences, emotional intelligence (EI), and academic adjustment (AD) based on students' demographical characteristics.

Variable	Frequency and Percentage,%	FOMO	EI	AD
Age, years				
18–21	159 (46.9)	Not significant $F = 0.866$ $p = 0.459$	Not significant $F = 1.319$ $p = 0.268$	Not significant $F = 0.095$ $p = 0.963$
22–25	172 (50.7)			
26–29	3 (0.9)			
30–33	5 (1.5)			
Gender				
Male	169 (49.9)	Significant $F = 6.893$ $p = 0.009$	Significant $F = 4.245$ $p = 0.040$	Not significant $F = 3.294$ $p = 0.070$
Female	170 (50.1)			
Marital status				
Single	317 (93.5)	Not significant $F = 2.402$ $p = 0.122$	Not significant $F = 0.001$ $p = 0.980$	Not significant $F = 0.912$ $p = 0.340$
Married	22 (6.5)			
Living arrangement				
In-campus	149 (44.0)	Significant $F = 7.522$ $p = 0.006$	Not significant $F = 1.477$ $p = 0.225$	Not significant $F = 0.031$ $p = 0.861$
Off-campus	190 (56.0)			
Academic year				
1	16 (4.7)	Not significant $F = 0.219$ $p = 0.954$	Not significant $F = 0.633$ $p = 0.675$	Not significant $F = 0.475$ $p = 0.705$
2	52 (15.3)			
3	54 (15.9)			
4	71 (20.9)			
5	115 (33.9)			
> 5	31 (9.1)			

Significance at $p < 0.050$.

students' experiences of FOMO, EI, and AD. However, the results also highlighted significant gender differences in FOMO and EI among study participants ($p = 0.009$ and $p = 0.040$, respectively). Also, significant FOMO experiences among different living arrangement groups ($p = 0.006$) [Table 3] were found.

The study used multiple linear regression to assess the ability of EI and AD to predict the level of FOMO among undergraduate students. After controlling for the influence of confounding variables, higher FOMO levels (total FOMO scores) were found to be positively and significantly associated with higher EI ($p < 0.001$) and AD ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that those with higher scores on these variables tend to have a higher FOMO score; the multiple regression model with the two predictors produced $R^2 = 0.110$, $F (2.336) = 20.762$, $p < 0.001$. EI and AD explained 11.0% of the variation in FOMO [Table 4].

DISCUSSION

Few studies have been conducted, especially among college students, concerning the problematic use of smartphones, specifically FOMO. This study is a preliminary step toward understanding the predictors of this phenomenon among college students in Oman. The research found that the mean score of FOMO, EI, and AD was 23.8, 32.6, and 27.6, respectively. These scores indicated a moderate level of FOMO, AD, and EI among undergraduate students, which is supported by previous studies.[10,24,30]

The authors found a significant difference in FOMO ($p = 0.009$) and EI across genders ($p = 0.040$); females possess higher EI compared to males. The mean EI score for females was 33.0, while males scored 31.0, which is congruent with other reports.[31,32] However, males experienced a higher level of FOMO compared to females. The mean male FOMO score was 24.8, while females scored 22.8, which is supported by the previous study.[10]

The main findings of this study are as follows; EI and AD were significantly higher in students experiencing a high level of FOMO. There were significantly positive correlations between the

Table 4: Result of the multiple linear regression analysis.

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significant	95% confidence interval for β	
		β	Standard Error	β			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	16.011	1.350		11.863	< 0.001	13.356	18.666
	EI	0.244	0.040	0.313	6.041	< 0.001	0.165	0.324
2	(Constant)	14.705	1.473		9.983	< 0.001	11.808	17.602
	EI	0.159	0.057	0.203	2.801	0.005	0.047	0.270
	AD	0.147	0.068	0.156	2.154	0.032	0.013	0.281

EI: emotional intelligence; AD: academic adjustment.

FOMO scores, EI, and AD. The higher the EI and AD level exhibited, the higher levels of FOMO. Regression analyses indicated that higher levels of EI and AD predicted the experiences of FOMO.

Several studies postulated a significant relationship between EI and AD,[33] as well as EI and smartphone overuse.[21] One study proved an inverse proportion exists between online social network usage and perceived quality of the interpersonal relationship ($r = -0.185$, $p = 0.001$).[34] The result is that it can be undoubtedly link the quality of one's mental health, campus life, and personal ties directly to his or her EI.

EI consists of a broad range of social skills and impulsivity control that are the fundamental and prominent skills for social bonding.[35] It can satisfy students' daily needs, direct their abilities, control their decisions, and configure the basic and essential values that help them to keep up with academic life successfully.[36] Among university students, emotional capacities linked positively with the quality of social interactions, social behavior, social adjustment, and academic achievement.[37]

Transition to the college environment forced students to face new challenges (physical, social, academic, and emotional) in which changes in their emotional detachment and social role can lead them to further distress.[38] Therefore, students desire to achieve a sense of balance in their new academic environment.[10] A study conducted among university students in Oman emphasized that the academic maladjustment can contribute negatively to the students' psychological well-being, leading them to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression due to the potential loss of traditional social support and supervision.[39] Thus, students desire to have a constant platform of social connection to their support system, family, or friends, in which they can post their updates continuously and observe others openly.[40]

The researcher may assume that the fulfillment of psychological needs is the primary factor involved in the relationship between FOMO and the excessive use of platforms in social media. More precisely, the psychological needs deficiency may lead individuals to indirectly misuse the use of social media through FOMO.[41] One plausible rationale is the tendency of other people's posts to yield false intentions to the individual with FOMO. Thus, they might misinterpret the posts about pleasurable events and successes improperly, further reinforcing the use of social media platforms to be continually updated.[42,43]

FOMO, as a unique feeling, plays a crucial role in decision-making processes and success.[44] The results suggest that students spend more time on smartphone for operation and everyday usage. By experiencing more self-recognition and positive acknowledgment, they are likely to develop frequent or addictive behaviors due to positive social rewards and feedback toward their academic achievement, interests, and motivational goals,[37] or they might start making some social comparison, leading them to feel inferior and have negative evaluations of themselves.[45] While the experience of FOMO is diversified among different personalities,[46] since it sometimes refers to an insatiable desire to belong to others, evident in over-reliance on the approval of others,[47] the perceived social rejections can trigger physical or social distress.[48,49] The ability of students to appropriately react to various emotional situations reduced by additional environmental demands can improve or enhance EI.

This article can define a limiting aspect of the relationship between the need for belonging and FOMO. Individuals instinctively want to belong to a social group or culture. But the degree of this urge varies and depends on many aspects. The result of this study makes a unique contribution to the literature on FOMO by proposing a relationship between FOMO and both AD and EI. The current research demonstrated that FOMO is positively associated with both variables. However, it was unable to determine whether FOMO experiences depend on the student's actions and emotion toward the others or themselves since the self-centered actions are motivated by self-interest, whereas the needs drive other-centered actions, wants, and desires of other people.[44]

This study also shows some other limitations. First, the self-reported questionnaires have the inherent limitation of accurate responses by the participants. Second, gathering data was only from one national university, which may limit the results generalization. Therefore, future studies should include more universities among different governorates. Future studies should also address more variables as predictors for experiencing FOMO, such as self-expectations, self-esteem, self-motivation, and social support.

CONCLUSION

In Oman, the number of daily smartphone users and the time spent on social media is growing day-by-day. The implementation of addiction research on at-risk young adults, in particular, is of considerable concern due to the negative consequences of smartphone use. Students are classed as a smartphone addiction at-risk category.

The native culture of Arabs, especially among the Omani population, emphasizes the desire of their family members, particularly the students, to be continuously linked to their support network, in which they can present their activities, be matched with those of others, and interact openly with their families. Previous studies among Omani college students indicated moderate to high levels of FOMO experiences. Since FOMO is a relatively new construct, and there are no existing studies in the literature that explored FOMO and its relationship with AD and EI, this study was keen to explore more beyond this phenomenon. The result of this study indicated a moderate level of FOMO, AD, and EI among undergraduate students. EI and AD were significantly higher in students experiencing a high level of FOMO. The study highlights the emerging phenomenon of the FOMO experience in terms of EI and AD. Thus, the study recommends frequent assessment of this matter for both academic and technology sectors on both a national and a global basis. Students should find a way to control their technology uses and utilize it effectively to make the most of its benefits and avoid its disadvantages.

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