

Urban-Rural Differences in Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Its Social Consequences Among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has emerged as an important psychological and social experience among young adults in the digital era. With the rapid expansion of smartphones and social media platforms, young individuals are increasingly exposed to the activities and experiences of others, which may intensify feelings of social comparison and the need to remain constantly connected. The present study aimed to examine urban-rural differences in Fear of Missing Out among young adults in Western Gujarat and to explore its possible social implications. A total sample of 120 young adults was selected using a purposive convenience sampling method. The sample included 60 participants from urban areas and 60 from rural areas. The Fear of Missing Out Scale developed by Przybylski et al. (2013) was used to measure FOMO levels among participants. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test. The results indicated that rural participants ($M = 23.42$, $SD = 6.56$) reported slightly higher FOMO scores than urban participants ($M = 22.27$, $SD = 6.84$). However, the difference was not statistically significant, $t(118) = 0.94$, $p = .349$. The findings suggest that FOMO may be a shared experience among young adults regardless of their residential background, reflecting the growing influence of digital connectivity and social media engagement across different social contexts. The study highlights the importance of promoting balanced social media use and digital awareness to support healthier social interactions and psychological well-being among youth.

Keywords: *Fear of Missing Out, young adults, urban-rural differences, social media, social impact*

In today's digital age, a mental state called FOMO is rapidly becoming common among young people. FOMO means that other people are experiencing some joyful or important event and we are being deprived of it. It is defined by Przybylski et al. (2013) as the anxiety in which a person feels that others are having more enjoyable experiences without them and this feeling leads to a desire to constantly be connected to other people's activities. Due to the constant development of social media and digital communication, young people increasingly feel the need to stay updated about the activities or achievements of their peers or friends. This constant connection may lead to dissatisfaction and anxiety among young people.

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Previous research suggests that FOMO is strongly associated with emotional dissatisfaction and social comparison in young people (Blackwell et al., 2017). As users frequently stay connected to other people's lives, they perceive that others are enjoying more rewarding experiences, which can intensify feelings of exclusion and anxiety. Environmental and social factors can also influence the experience of FOMO. Urban youth generally have more access to digital technology and internet connectivity compared to rural youth. This may contribute to higher levels of FOMO among people living in urban areas.

Blackwell et al. examined the relationship between social media use, fear of missing out, and psychological well-being among university students in 2017. Using a survey-based research design, the study explored how patterns of online engagement are associated with FOMO experiences. Results suggested that FOMO was positively associated with increased levels of anxiety and decreased life satisfaction. The authors emphasized that constant exposure to other people's online experiences can lead to social comparison, which impacts emotional well-being in young people.

Oberst et al. conducted a research in 2017 to find the relationship between FOMO, social media use and psychological well-being among young adults. The result indicated that people who experienced higher levels of FOMO were more likely to engage excessively in social media activities. The study also revealed that FOMO was associated with negative emotional outcomes such as anxiety and dissatisfaction. The researchers concluded that constant social media engagement may increase the tendency to experience FOMO, which in turn can influence the psychological well-being and social behavior of young individuals.

Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, and Gladwell (2013) conducted a study to examine the psychological characteristics associated with FOMO. The findings suggested that people with higher levels of FOMO tend to remain continuously connected with others through digital communication and social networking platforms. The study also indicated that social and environmental factors can influence the experience of FOMO. Individuals who are more exposed to social interactions and online activities may experience higher levels of FOMO compared to those with relatively limited exposure. These findings suggest that differences in social environment and access to digital communication may play an important role in shaping the experience of FOMO among individuals.

Vaishnavi K R et al. conducted a study in 2025 to examine the relationship between FOMO and Social Interaction Anxiety among 141 young adults in Chennai. The result revealed a significant positive correlation ($r=0.298$, $p<0.01$) between the two variables. This indicates that as the level of FOMO increases, so does Social Interaction Anxiety. The researchers also observed no significant gender differences in the level of FOMO and SIA (Vaishnavi et al., 2025).

Akhtar (2023) investigated the relationship between social media use, academic performance, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among college students in Kashmir. The results revealed that the rural-urban background of students did not significantly influence their levels of FOMO. The study highlighted that with the rapid expansion of internet access and social media usage, youth from both rural and urban areas may experience similar psychological effects associated with online engagement.

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Wahab et al. examined the relationship between internet addiction and Fear of Missing Out among rural secondary school students in 2023. The findings demonstrated a significant positive relationship between internet addiction and FOMO, suggesting that adolescents who spend more time online are more likely to experience anxiety related to missing social interactions and updates on social media platforms.

In 2025, Krishnan and Jayaprakash conducted a study among youth in Kerala to examine the relationship between social media use, loneliness, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). The findings indicated that individuals residing in urban areas reported comparatively higher levels of FOMO than those living in semi-urban and rural regions. The authors suggested that greater exposure to social media platforms and higher digital connectivity in urban settings may contribute to increased feelings of missing out on social experiences.

Many studies have examined FOMO in the context of social media use, psychological well-being and behavior patterns in youth. However, relatively limited attention has been paid to urban and rural differences. Therefore, the current study aims to examine urban-rural differences in FOMO and its social consequences among young adults, in order to contribute to a better understanding of how residential context may shape this contemporary psychological phenomenon.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

1. To examine the difference in Fear of Missing Out between urban and rural young adults.
2. To understand the social implications of Fear of Missing Out among young adults.

Hypothesis

- **H₀₁**: There is no significant difference in Fear of Missing Out between urban and rural young adults.

Research design

The present study adopted a quantitative comparative research design to examine the differences in FOMO between urban and rural youth. The study aimed to compare two naturally existing groups which were urban and rural youth, in order to determine whether there is a significant difference in their level of FOMO. Since no variables were manipulated and the study focused on observing differences between existing groups, the research can be categorized as a non-experimental comparative study. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to describe the FOMO scores of participants, while an independent samples t-test was calculated to examine the significance of the difference between the two groups.

Participants

The sample for present study consisted of 120 young adults selected from urban and rural areas of Western Gujarat, India. Among them, 60 participants belonged to urban areas and 60 belonged to rural areas. The participants were within the age range of 18 to 35 years. The participants were selected using a purposive convenience sampling method.

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Tools

Fear of Missing Out was measured using the Fear of Missing Out scale developed by Przybylski et al. (2013). The scale consists of 10 items and uses a 5-point Likert scale. Previous studies have reported good internal consistency for the original scale, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.87, 0.90 and 0.89 across three different studies. For the purpose of the study, the scale was translated into Gujarati by the researcher to ensure better understanding among participants. The reliability of the Gujarati version was examined using Pearson's correlation and obtained reliability coefficient was $r = .89$, which is satisfactory reliability. Both English and Gujarati version were used during data collection. Higher scores indicate greater FOMO.

Procedure

The participants were contacted from urban and rural areas of Western Gujarat, India and were briefly informed about the purpose of the study. They were requested to participate voluntarily in the research. After their consent, the FOMO scale was administered to them. The completed responses were collected and scored according to the guidelines of the scale for statistical analysis.

Statistical analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation to determine the level of Fear of Missing Out among participants. Further, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference in FOMO scores between urban and rural young adults.

RESULTS

Table 1 Difference between Urban and Rural Youth in Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Residential Area	N	Mean	SD	t	Df	P
Urban Youth	60	22.27	6.84	0.94	118	0.349
Rural Youth	60	23.42	6.56			

Level of significance was set at 0.05.

The results show that rural participants reported slightly higher FOMO levels compared to urban participants. However, the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant ($t=0.94$, $p=.349$). Since the obtained p-value was greater than the level of significance (0.05), the null hypothesis was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The results indicated that there was no significant difference in FOMO levels between two groups. This suggests that the experience of FOMO levels may not necessarily depend on the residential background. With the increasing availability of smartphones and internet access youth from both areas may experience similar online environments. This finding is similar to Akhtar (2023), who also reported no significant urban-rural difference in FOMO. However, the results differ from Krishnan and Jayaprakash (2025), who found higher FOMO in urban youth. The variation may be explained by the growing spread of internet connectivity across rural areas. This may reduce differences in digital experiences among youth.

Social implications

The present study examined the urban-rural differences in Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among young adults. The findings indicated that there was no statistically significant

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difference in FOMO between urban and rural participants. These results suggest that FOMO may be widely experienced by young adults across different residential settings. The study contributes to the growing understanding of FOMO as a contemporary social phenomenon among youth. However, the study was limited by the use of a convenient sampling method and a relatively small sample size. Future research may explore additional factors such as gender differences, personality traits, and patterns of social media usage to gain a deeper understanding of the determinants and consequences of FOMO among youth.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the urban–rural differences in FOMO among young adults. The findings revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in FOMO levels between urban and rural participants. This suggests that FOMO is not limited to a particular residential setting but may be widely experienced by young adults regardless of their geographical background. The increasing availability of smartphones, internet connectivity, and social media platforms has created similar digital environments for youth across both urban and rural areas, which may contribute to comparable levels of FOMO.

However, the present study has certain limitations such as the use of a convenient sampling method and a limited sample size. Future research may explore additional factors such as gender differences, personality traits, and patterns of social media usage to gain a deeper understanding of the determinants and consequences of FOMO among youth.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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