When Fear of Missing Out Becomes a Good Thing

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Abstract. **Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is considered to be affecting internet users negatively, such as social media addiction, increasing smartphone usage problems, sleep disturbances, driving disturbances, and low academic performance in students. This research was conducted to understand the concept of FoMO among college students who used smartphones. Indigenous psychology approach was used in this research, with two stages of data collection. An open-ended questionnaire given to 101 participants was used as the first stage data collection, along with an in-depth interview with four selected participants. Content analysis technique was used to analyse the data. The result showed that three things were responsible for FoMO in the life of Indonesian college students, i.e. personal life, news/information, and work/academic task. The three categories determined which type of content was accessed when using a smartphone. In this research, we found that FoMO had a positive impact on education. In other words, FoMO could be positive in the academic life if students used their feeling of fear of missing information, worry, and anxiety when they found out that they lagged behind from other students about an important event related to academic (work/academic task) as a motivation to take various actions.**

Keywords: ***fear of missing out, positive FoMO on education, Indigenous Psychology approach***

INTRODUCTION

According to Internet World Stat, Indonesia ranked the fifth among the top 20 countries in terms of high internet users, numbering 137.2 million users or equal to 50.4% of Indonesia's entire population [1]. Polling Indonesia addressed, of all Indonesia's internet users, 10.3 million are college students who also have the highest internet penetration rate of 89.7% in terms of occupation. This shows that almost all college students in Indonesia use the internet [2].

Polling Indonesia mentioned that smartphone becomes the most used device to access the internet in Indonesia, approaching 63.1 million users [2]. The widespread and high penetration rate is because smartphones can be used anytime, anywhere, by anyone for various activities, and have many sophisticated displays when connected to the internet [3], [4].

The use of the internet brings positive impacts in life, such as for communication, helping complete academic tasks more effectively, and enhancing students' knowledge [5]. Nevertheless, the use of the internet also has negative impacts; in the development of internet-use disorder classification, new symptom arises, called Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) [6].

The previous study conducted in many European countries demonstrated that FoMO was positively associated with time spent on social media in college students and the rise of social media engagements in college students [7]. On the other hand, FoMO has predicted one's addiction to a smartphone and has a significant, positive relationship with the increasing problem of smartphone use in college students [6], [8], [9]. Research held in Latin America has shown that FoMO served as a mediator linking psychopathological symptoms such as depression and anxiety, and negative outcomes of smartphone use [10]. FoMO also mediated the link between fear of evaluation, positive or negative, and the increasing problem of smartphone use in college students [6]. In other words, FoMO is considered to have a significant role in and be responsible for the negative influences caused by the use of the internet.

Based on the literature review, the majority of FoMO researches in Indonesia and abroad refer to the FoMO concepts and measurements developed by Przybylski et al. [11]. It is recorded that during the period of 2013 to June 2018, the research has been cited 404 times [12]. The study on FoMO done by Przybylski et al. [11] was followed by 1,013 participants ranging in age from 18 to 62 years. The participants came from the US, India, Australia, Canada and the UK. Przybylski et al. [11]

stated in the research that Self Determination Theory (SDT) referring to the three basic psychological needs, i.e. competence, autonomy, and relatedness, provides a useful framework for understanding FoMO.

The conceptualisation of FoMO has drawn considerable attention of not only Western researchers but also the Indonesian researchers. Four studies on FoMO refer to the concept and the measurement of FoMO developed by Przybylski et al. [11], [13] - [15]. The study held in SMAN 4 Bandung declared the positively significant relation between FoMO and internet addiction [14]. The study in Yogyakarta also indicated that FoMO contributed effectively to the tendency of internet addiction [13]. Another study done by Triani and Ramdhani showed the need to belong predicted FoMO positively [15]. In addition, the study conducted by Triani and Ramdhani found that self-esteem was not shown to be a moderator between the need to belong and FoMO; yet self-esteem became a negative predictor of FoMO [15]. The result of the study by Triani and Ramdhani is in line with Przybylski et al. stating that relatedness was one of individual's three basic psychological needs that positively associated with FoMO, which also supports the research done by Beyens et al [11], [15]. Beyens revealing that need to belong had a positive correlation with FoMO [16]. In the same manner, the study is in line with the research done by Buglass et al. stating that self-esteem became a longitudinal predictor to the emergence of FoMO [17].

According to Yuniarti, in order to understand Indonesian people, researchers need to include their cultural context. If the use of FoMO in Indonesia, especially in the context of academic life, uses no attempt to conceptualise FoMO based on the context of academic life in Indonesia, the result will possibly be biased and not represent the real situation of the society in the context of academic life [18]. Given that there is not yet a concept of FoMO in the context of academic life in Indonesia, we aim to conceptualise FoMO based on that context.

METHOD

This explorative study was conducted by using Indigenous Psychology approach with two-step data collection. The first step was completed with an open-ended questionnaire given to 101 participants with the main questions were "When you know what you lag behind, what do you feel? And in the range 1-10, how strong is your feeling?". The second one was done by interviewing for four of the 101 participants as follow up. They were determined the respondent's answers at the open-ended questionnaire stage implying that they understood the concept of FoMO and have experienced FoMO. Content analysis technique from Straus and Corbin was used to analyse the data.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Referring to the keywords found in the responses to the open questionnaire, researchers categorised the responses into several groups.

1. **The figures who cause fear of missing out (fomo)**

Pointing to the role, the figures who caused FoMO listed from the first position were friends (53.39%), followed by public figures (16.10%), family (11.86%), and co-workers (3.39%). The figure who contributed to cause FoMO was not only categorised by the role, but also by the relation they had. In friendship, ordinary friends (36.44%) went in the first place to become the cause of FoMO, followed by idols (18.64%) in the parasocial relationship, lovers (6.78%) in a romantic relationship, parents (6.78%) in the parents-children relationship, and brothers or sisters (3.39%) in the sibling's relationships. Beside the figure who cause FoMO, this study also found other objects that caused FoMO. These objects referred to social media accounts that varied in several topics of interests. The object occupying the first position to cause FoMO was related to sports (4.24%), particularly football.

2. **Social media which trigger FoMO**

There are three categories of social media which became the trigger of FoMO. Instant message media services (48.00%) such as WhatsApp, Line and Blackberry Messenger were in the first place. Then, content-sharing media services (40.80%) such as Instagram, Youtube, Twitter ranked second as a trigger. Social networking media services (8.04%) like Facebook became the last.

3. **Types of contents which trigger FoMO**

Overall, chat (24.18%), images (21.43%), videos (17.58%) and stories (14.84%) became the four main contents which triggered FoMO. Chats occupied the first position as the type of contents triggering FoMO on instant message media services like WhatsApp (49.37%) and line (61.54%). On content-sharing media services like Instagram, images (36.84%) ranked the first as videos did on Youtube (75.00%) and tweets (40.00%) on Twitter. On social networking media services, statuses (43.00%) on Facebook went in the first place.

4. **Events which cause FoMO**

There were three categories of events which led to FoMO. The 1st is personal life (49.34%) including social relations with friends, family, and public figures, varying from events/activities (28.29%), physical/psychological conditions

(18.42%), achievements (1.32%) and position of other individuals (1.32%). The 2nd is related to news/information (22.37%) of various fields of interesti.i.e. arts (6.58%), sports (5.26%), education (3.95%), social-politics (3.29%), lifestyle (3.29%), technology (0.66%), and tourism (0.66%). The 3rd is related to work/academic task (14.47%) that become obligations or responsibilities for the profession or education taken. School-related events varied from academic activities (10.53%) to non-academic activities (1.32%), while work task including meetings (1.97%) and trading (0.66%).

5. Feelings on experiencing FoMO

Through the results obtained, it is revealed that the feelings when experiencing FoMO include curiosity (50.48%), fear of missing information (22.86%), worry (9.52%), regret/ feeling upset about missing valuable information (7.62%), and anxiety (0.95%). In this study, researchers also found other feelings that had not appeared in previous literature studies and preliminary studies. They are longing (1.90%), and jealousy (0.95%).

6. Actions taken when experiencing FoMO

The actions being taken when FoMO attacked were gathering contents (47.73%) and communicating (35.61%). On curiosity, fear of missing information, regret/feeling upset about missing valuable information, and worry; the most taken action was gathering contents with the number of responses for each: 40 (30.03%), 13 (9.85%), 8 (6.06%), and 1 (0.76%). As for anxiety and longing with 13 (9.85%) and 1 (0.76%) responses, the actions taken were likely in the forms of interactions with other people such as asking questions or contacting those who concerns.
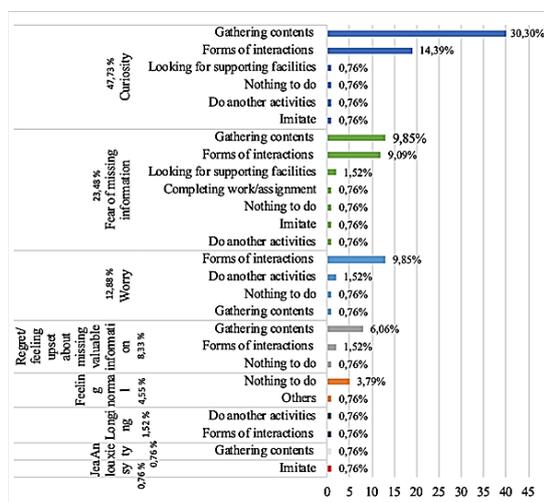

Figure 1. Actions Taken during FoMO

Furthermore, based on the interview conducted the result not only confirm the finding in the previous stage but also explore the construct of

FoMO. There were three phases of experiencing FoMO. The 1st phase is Recognition of Lagging in which a person knows he is lagging behind someone about something by seeing the pop-up notifications on social media or smartphone. The 2nd phase is Experiencing Feelings. After knowing he is lagging behind, a person with FoMO will start feeling various things such as fear of missing information, anxiety, and worry. The last phase is doing the action. Having multiple feelings at once encourages someone to do many things, either taking actions or doing nothing.

The concept of FoMO found in this study is discussed through five points. *First*, it is discovered that friends (53.39%) as the most significant figure to cause FoMO is supported by the research reported by Wortham and Miranda [19], [20]. Wortham in his report revealed that co-workers is one of those causing FoMO as well (3.39%) [19]. Interestingly, we found something new, that public figures (16.10%) and family (11.86%) may cause, too. *Second*, the finding of social media which trigger FoMO is confirmed by multiple types of research, e.g. Miranda [20] declaring social media that cause FoMO are Facebook and Twitter while Wortham [19] mention the social media are Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare and Instagram. Importantly, we categorised it in three categories, i.e. instant message media services (48.00), content-sharing media services (40.80%), and social networking media services (8.04%). *Third*, the types of contents which trigger FoMO are chats (24.18%), images (21.43%), videos (17.58%) and stories (14.84%). It is inline with the statement from Wortham stated the contents causing the emergence of FoMO are Twitter messenger, status update, news, and photographs [19]. The finding was also clarified by Miranda stated that every post on social media is a trigger to the emergence of FoMO [20].

The forth discussion is about the cause of FoMO. The personal life is the main cause including social relations with friends, family and public figures supported by the study which reports that in smartphone usage, the most frequent activity done is socialising [21] [22]. Furthermore, Aoki and Downes show that the purpose of using a smartphone is to stay connected with family and friends [23]. The 2nd cause is news/information in line with the research done by Oulasvirta dan Rattenbury showing that reading news as one of the most common habits in using the internet [24]. Wei and Lo stated that an individual's usage of the internet is correlated with browsing for information about some news [25]. The 3rd cause is associated with work/academic task as obligation or responsibility for the occupation or education. It is supported by Palen, Salzman, and Youngs reporting smartphone usage in the work area is associated with white-collar professionals in which

smartphone helps individuals with their work while Peters and Allouch stated the use of smartphone is to communicate with other college students, co-workers, or clients anywhere and at any time [21], [22]. In the previous study, FoMO is considered to be responsible for the negative influences of the internet usage, such as internet addiction [14] [13], the increasing problem of smartphone use in college students [9] [6], even addiction to smartphones [8].

We continued to deeply analyse the research result related to the three categories of the cause FoMO, namely personal life, news/information, and work/academic task does not only cause of FoMO but also have important role correlated with the

FoMO experienced by someone. It is because the category determines the types of contents that are hard to be missed. For instance, Subject #4 in the interview felt worried and anxious when knowing that he missed out the news related to college activities (work/academic task) from his college friends. Then he took some actions such as gathering the information and communicating it with his colleagues. Therefore, we believe that FoMO can be a positive thing especially in terms of academic life if the feelings during lagging behind someone about something significant related to education become an encouragement to take actions in gathering information that he missed. Besides, to
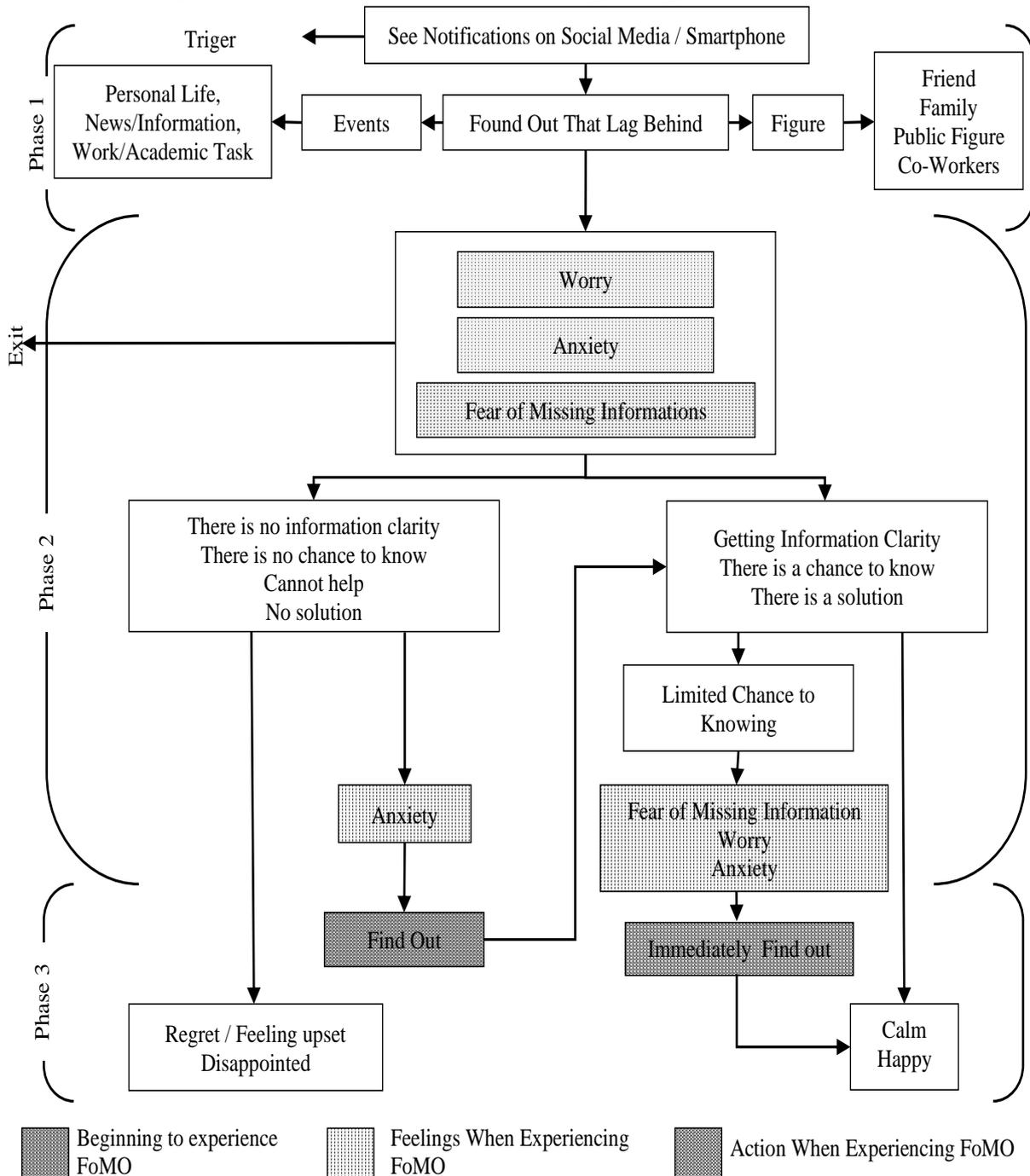

Figure 2. The Dynamic of FoMO

fulfil the lack of information, the participants also take action when experiencing FoMO by browsing contents (47.73%) and making contact/communicating (35.61%). The act of browsing is done once (checking) or within a certain period (monitoring). It is done all alone, which means it has no interaction with anyone. The act of communicating tends to have interaction with other people, such as asking a question and contacting those who are concerned. This process is done directly through chats, texts, phone calls, or on the comment box on social media. It is supported by Przybylski et al. who states a person with FoMO had the urge to keep up with what others be doing [11]. Imitating was also found in this study (2.27%). It is in line with Miranda who showed that someone with FoMO would be triggered by the vicarious participant (the urge to participate) or get motivated to behave in real life [20].

The fifth discussion is about the various feelings when experiencing FoMO, i.e. fear, worry, and anxiety. The finding shows that fear is the main affection felt by someone experiencing FoMO. It is supported by Przybylski et al. [11] that someone with FoMO would fear the upcoming things (pervasive apprehension).

CONCLUSION

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) on smartphone users of college students is represented by the emergence of several feelings namely fear of missing information, worry, and anxiety caused by people or other objects in recognition of lagging about something related to certain events on social media in various forms. The feelings have motivated someone to browse for information and communicate about the things that have been missed.FoMO can be a positive thing in college students' academic life if they make use of their feeling of fear in missing information, worry, and anxiety after knowing they lag behind other students about something important related to education as motivation to take actions to gather the information they missed.

Based on the study conducted and the result obtained, the researchers suggest that academics conduct research using the Indigenous Psychology approach to gain the aspects composing FoMO and develop the FoMO Scale so that it becomes a suitable measurement model to the academic context that meets the psychometric requirements.

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