

‘Fear of missing out’ driving social media addiction, study suggests

Fear of missing out, or ‘FOMO’, is among the biggest causes of social media addiction, a new study suggests.

Psychologists at Nottingham Trent University investigated the factors driving addiction to social networking sites among people in the UK.

The study investigated a range of factors relating to participants’ personalities and their social media use.

Writing in the international journal *CyberPsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, the team found that about 5% of participants could be classed as being at high risk of addiction.

When looking at the collective factors driving their addictive behaviour, FOMO, irrational beliefs and poor mental health explained participants’ social media addiction almost entirely.

And when they looked at each of the factors individually, the researchers found that FOMO was the most significant contributing factor to explain the emergence of social media addiction.

FOMO relates to a feeling that friends and connections are leading more interesting and rewarding lives, creating a desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing online.

Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and Tumblr were all used by participants, with Facebook being the most widely used (99% of participants) followed by Instagram (72%).

The majority of participants used four different social networking sites.

Almost a third of participants (32%) claimed to use social networking sites ‘a great deal’ every day – the most amount of time – with the same figure claiming to have suffered problems due to their social networking use.

The study also found that those at high risk of addiction used significantly more social media platforms.

‘When experiencing FOMO chronically, it could lead to addictive behavior towards social media use,’ said Dr Halley Pontes, a psychologist in Nottingham Trent University’s School of Social Sciences.

He said: ‘It is important to know that FOMO may be worsened by the fact that we are being constantly reminded about what we are missing out on via all the notifications we receive to our phones. One potential strategy to curb FOMO may be to manage which notifications we want to receive.’

‘Although the origin of FOMO may vary from one person to another, it is often a result of a deficit in psychological need, such as social connection. For this reason, living a socially fulfilling life where psychological needs toward social connections can be met may also help overcome anxiety associated with FOMO.’

‘Previous studies have tended to focus exclusively on Facebook addiction, but we have gone beyond this to examine a range of social networking sites. We hope the findings might also be of use to therapists in helping them to refine their treatment.’

Earlier this year, research by Dr Pontes revealed that addiction to video games was affecting people psychologically and physically, as well as having a negative impact on personal and social relationships.

The latest study also involved the Cairnmillar Institute in Australia and the University of Athens.

4 June 2018