

## Influence of Identity Crisis on Fear of Missing Out Among College Students

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### ABSTRACT

The current research endeavored to experimentally explore the correlation between identity achievement, identity moratorium, identity foreclosure, identity diffusion, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). The participants of the study (211) were sampled using purposive sampling where the criteria included college students of ages 17 to 22 and who know the language of English. The participants completed the survey which included the FOMO scale and Modified Marcia Identity Questionnaire. Statistical tools such as Person's Product Moment Correlation and Hierarchical Regression analysis were used to analyze the findings and the results of the study indicated that the relationship between identity moratorium, Identity foreclosure, identity diffusion and FOMO was significantly positive. Nonetheless, a notable inverse association was observed between identity achievement and FOMO. Considering the study's focus on the Indian population, further investigations are warranted to explore additional significant predictors of FOMO.

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### Introduction

Viewed from the perspective of mental health development across the life course, emerging adulthood presents a pivotal stage characterized by both opportunities for choice and exploration, as well as challenges stemming from increased educational and social role expectations among college students. However, emerging adults experience hopelessness, anxiety, (Rana et al., 2014), negative emotions; sleep disturbance, less productivity (Gupta & Sharma, 2021) and FoMO (Savitri, 2019). According to a recent survey conducted by One Poll, a majority of emerging American adults, accounting for 69%, have reported experiencing FOMO in various manifestations, with social media emerging as a prominent factor contributing to this phenomenon. (Taheer, 2023). Emerging adults have adjustment issues, interpersonal and intrapersonal issues such as having a difficulty to identify who they are and to understand themselves causing more distress, negative feelings towards themselves and sleep problems. This research focuses on identifying whether Identity Crisis has a significant relationship with FOMO.

Recently, the concept of FOMO has gained traction, particularly within the context of Gen-Z discourse, leading to increased research attention in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in India, not many studies are done with regard to FOMO. Being in

a collectivistic culture, Indian people do have a high need to belong and conform when compared to individualistic culture which also has been an eye opener for researchers. Based on the above observations, the research questions and hypothesis of the study are discussed. The analysis is focused on identifying the relationship between FOMO and Identity Crisis

### Definition

**Fear of Missing Out:** According to Przybylski, A. K. et al., (2013) "In scholarly literature, FOMO is delineated as encompassing two primary elements: first, the concern that others are enjoying fulfilling experiences in one's absence, and second, the continual urge to maintain connections with individuals within one's social circle."

**Identity Crisis:** It is considered normal and beneficial for adolescents to undergo a phase of identity exploration, with increased maturity often stemming from this process." (Erikson, 1950).

### Theoretical background

#### FEAR OF MISSING OUT

FOMO was conceptualized using Self Determination Theory (Ryan et al., 1985). Self Determination theory talks about how people are motivated intrinsically and

extrinsically. People who have extrinsic motivation seem to have higher levels of FoMO than compared to people with intrinsic motivation.(Przybylski et al., 2013).FoMO can manifest as a fleeting sensation during a conversation, a persistent disposition over time, or a state of mind characterized by heightened identity crisis and social anxiety. Building on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study aims to assess the influence of identity crisis on FoMO.

## **IDENTITY CRISIS**

It's common and beneficial for adolescents to undergo an identity crisis phase, which often leads to increased maturity (Erikson, 1950). The notion has been broadened to encompass challenges such as adult midlife crises and other transitional phases characterized by self-questioning or ambiguity.

According to Ashtaputre (2021), the concept of identity crisis emerged from Erikson's theory of Identity where Erikson talks about 8 developmental stages of a child to their adulthood; it is not specific to adolescents that an individual will face identity crisis only in adolescence. Erikson saw that each stage of development presents its own unique challenges, which he called crisis which is a challenge to one's individual identity. The fifth stage of the Erikson's Theory states about identity crisis which is called as Identity versus Role Confusion

This phase aligns with Freud's fifth developmental stage, associated with puberty onset and concluding when individuals establish a unique identity within their social context, typically occurring between ages 12 and 18. Questions concerning about one self and their identity arise and the adolescent tries to answer questions related to themselves such as Who am I? What are the characteristics of the group I gravitate towards or interact with? (Alawnah, 2004). Erikson suggests that adolescent affection often stems from a quest to establish a cohesive sense of self by projecting aspects of their identity onto another person and observing this reflection in return. (Qashqosh, 1980). According to Erikson, adolescence introduces a novel psychosocial dimension characterized by either the development of a positive ego identity or the adoption of negative role-playing tendencies. This dichotomy, between identity formation and role confusion, underscores the significance of the ego and its impact on social interactions, especially within peer groups. (Ahmed, 2001). Erikson terms this stage the attainment of a "true sense of identity" because it's crucial for adolescents to establish their identity in order to make mature decisions, such as selecting a career path or choosing a life partner (Qnawi & Abdelmatti, 2001). During this stage, Erikson emphasizes the importance of integrity, allegiance, and adherence to societal standards. Upholding honesty is deemed as essential for societal cohesion, fostering a sense of belonging and enabling individuals to contribute meaningfully to their communities (Nasser, 2003)

Erikson talks about role versus identity confusion,  
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Individuals develop identity crisis when they do not find or serve the role that has been assigned to them, it can be either within themselves or the society. Erikson states that everyone faces a development conflict; it depends on how the individual copes with the conflict and address the issue in order to have a positive psychosocial wellbeing (Cherry, 2022). People who use unhealthy coping strategies to cope up with the development conflict are more likely to have identity crisis in the later stage of their life. So with regards to identity, FoMO can also be interpreted as the fear of losing their identity in the social setting, thus engage in having the innate desire to have the rewarding experiences and identity crisis is the difficulty in trying to discover who they are to themselves and the society. So if the social needs of the individuals are not met, the person is more likely to have FoMO.

## **Review of Literature**

Savitri (2019) conducted a study to explore the impact of FoMO on the psychological well-being of social media users in the emerging adulthood stage. Employing a quantitative correlational approach, the research involved an online questionnaire administered to 400 individuals selected through accidental sampling. The study utilized scales adapted from Przybylski's FoMO scale and Ryff's Psychological Well-being scale to measure FoMO and psychological well-being, respectively. Analysis of the data was conducted through simple linear regression, revealing that FoMO had predictive power over psychological well-being.

Gupta & Sharma (2021) investigated the relationship of FoMO and mental health. This study was done using systematic review of 65 research articles. The discussion led to the conclusion that FoMO affects the identity formation process of children and adolescents, while social media usage correlates with varying levels of FoMO and mental health outcomes within the population.

## **Significance of the study**

Identity Crisis is an important developmental milestone for an adolescent. However the relationship between FoMO and Identity Crisis has been rarely studied in the Indian population. The objective of this study is to determine which identity status exhibits a stronger and positive correlation with FoMO among college students.

## **Need for the Study:**

### **College students experience Fear of Missing**

Out and this shift is attributed to the change in the academic environment. Not many studies have been done on FoMO especially in the Indian context. Thus, it appears that FoMO significantly influences the identity formation process of college students.

In the Indian context, research on FoMO primarily

centers on its correlation with social media addiction and usage, where individuals exhibit compulsive phone usage to alleviate FOMO. Thus, this study aims to investigate the relationship between Identity Achievement, Identity Moratorium, Identity Foreclosure, Identity Diffusion (Identity Crisis), FOMO, and Identity crisis within the Indian milieu.

**Research Problem:**

This study aims to explore the correlation between Identity Crisis components—Identity Achievement, Identity Moratorium, Identity Foreclosure, Identity Diffusion—and FOMO among college students.

**Objectives of the Study**

The study seeks to establish the association between Identity Crisis components—Identity Achievement, Identity Moratorium, Identity Foreclosure, Identity Diffusion—and FOMO among college students.

**Research Methodology:**

College students are referred to individuals belonging to the emerging adulthood stage where they transition themselves from adolescence to adulthood. FOMO encompasses two primary elements: a) the fear that others are enjoying rewarding experiences in one's absence, and b) the continual urge to maintain social connections. College students often encounter FOMO due to the introduction of new environments and individuals. Participants completed a FOMO scale and a Modified Marcia Identity Status questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Purposive sampling was utilized to select the sample.

**Research Design:**

A survey methodology will be employed to ascertain the presence of any notable correlation between Identity Crisis and FOMO among college students.

**Sample Selection:**

The study will involve collecting data from colleges located in Chennai to be specific the data will be collected from Women's Christian College, Loyola College and Madras School of Social Work. The researcher will obtain permission to collect data from the principals of the institution. Then the researcher will go to a particular department allotted by the principals and share the google form in person. After the sample has filled the Google form, the researcher will debrief the study. These colleges were selected based on the availability of resources and convenience of the researcher.

**Data Collection:**

**Questionnaires:** The study utilized established tools including the FOMO and the Modified Marcia Identity Questionnaire to collect data via Google Forms. These instruments gauged the extent of FOMO and determined the identity status of the participants, facilitating the exploration of the relationship between Identity Crisis and FOMO.

**Data Analysis:**

Quantitative Data: Statistical analysis that is correlational analysis will be conducted to analyze the quantitative data obtained from questionnaires. This analysis will provide numerical data on the associations of the specified two variables. SPSS 16 and Excel 16 will be used to calculate the data

**Research Hypothesis:**

H1. No statistically significant correlation was found between Fear of Missing Out and Identity Crisis.

H1.1: There is no significant relationship between Identity Achievement and Fear of Missing Out

H1.2: There is no significant relationship between Identity Moratorium and Fear of Missing Out

H1.3: There is no significant relationship between Identity Foreclosure and Fear of Missing Out

H1.4: There is no significant relationship between Identity Diffusion and Fear of Missing Out

**Research Gap:**

FOMO has received considerable attention in Western research, particularly regarding its association with social media usage.

Not much of research has been established in regards to identity crisis of college students.

**Results**

The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between Identity crisis and FOMO among college students. Researches done in the past have found that higher scores in Identity Crisis can increase in the levels of FOMO (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Since India is a collectivistic country which gives a lot of value to belongingness and unity, the sample aimed for the study is Indian students. As Identity crisis ultimately addresses and explains how the need to belong contributes to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Therefore the current study which is done attempts to examine whether Identity Crisis has a significant relationship with FOMO and to identity which identity status has a stronger relationship with FOMO.

**Discussion**

**Table 1**

*Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis between Identity Achievement and FOMO*

| Variables (N=198)    | Fear of Missing Out | Identity Achievement |
|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| FOMO                 | 1                   | -.294**              |
| Identity Achievement |                     | 1                    |

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 1 displays the findings concerning the correlation between Identity Achievement and FOMO. The study comprised 198 college students. The results indicate a noteworthy negative association between Identity Achievement and FOMO ( $r=-0.294$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

As a result, the null hypothesis H1.1, which posited no significant correlation between Identity Achievement and FOMO among college students, is rejected.

**Table 2**  
*Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis between Identity Moratorium and Fear of Missing Out.*

| Variables (N=198)   | Fear of Missing Out | Identity Moratorium |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| FOMO                | 1                   | -.353**             |
| Identity Moratorium |                     | 1                   |

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 2 presents the findings regarding the association between Identity Moratorium and FOMO. The analysis reveals a substantial positive correlation between Identity Moratorium and FOMO ( $r=0.353$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Consequently, the null hypothesis H1.2, suggesting no significant relationship between Identity Moratorium and FOMO among college students, is rejected.

**Table 3**  
*Pearson's Product Correlation Analysis for Identity Foreclosure and Fear of Missing Out*

| Variables (N=198)    | Fear of Missing Out | Identity Foreclosure |
|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| FOMO                 | 1                   | -.253**              |
| Identity Foreclosure |                     | 1                    |

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 3 illustrates the findings regarding the correlation between Identity Foreclosure and FOMO. The analysis indicates a noteworthy positive relationship between Identity Foreclosure and FOMO ( $r=0.253$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Consequently, the null hypothesis H1.3, which posited no significant relationship between Identity Foreclosure and FOMO among college students, is rejected.

**Table 4**

| Variables (N=198)  | Fear of Missing Out | Identity Diffusion |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| FOMO               | 1                   | .218**             |
| Identity Diffusion |                     | 1                  |

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 4 displays the findings regarding the correlation between Identity Diffusion and FOMO. The analysis demonstrates a notable positive relationship between

Identity Diffusion and FOMO ( $r=0.218$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Consequently, the null hypothesis H1.4, which suggested no significant relationship between Identity Diffusion and FOMO among college students, is rejected.

Hence from the above tables, it can be concluded that when Identity crisis is considered to have a significant positive relationship with FOMO, Identity Moratorium has a relatively higher significant positive relationship ( $r=.353$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) followed by Identity achievement ( $r=-.294$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), Identity foreclosure ( $r=.253$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and Identity diffusion ( $r=.218$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) i.e. Individuals who have achieved the status of Identity Moratorium appear to exhibit either an increase or decrease in the occurrence of higher or lower levels of FOMO compared to those with Identity Achievement, Identity Foreclosure, and Identity Diffusion statuses. Consequently, the null hypothesis H1, which proposed no significant relationship between Identity Crisis and FOMO among college students, is rejected.

**Conclusion**

The results of this study suggest a notable correlation between Identity Crisis and FOMO. Specifically, fluctuations in Identity Crisis levels appear to correspond with changes in FOMO levels, indicating a dynamic relationship between the two constructs. Individuals with Identity Moratorium experience higher levels of FOMO when compared to Identity Achievement, Identity Foreclosure and Identity Diffusion. Emerging Adults do undergo Identity Crisis which is an important process to achieve the developmental milestone. However FOMO springs from the need for belonging which seems to play an important role in an identity of an individual. An important key take way is that college students do experience FOMO which might possibly increase the doubts about one's individual and might lead to self-criticisms.

More researches can be done to establish the cause and effect between Identity Crisis and FOMO and the other effects of FOMO. Awareness programs and intervention programs about Identity Crisis, FOMO is to be given to college students to help them with their overall wellbeing.

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