

The Role of Self-Control in Moderating the Relationship Between the Need to Belong and Symptoms of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Among College Students: A Literature Review Approach

Nurul Azimah¹, Andini Sartika Permatasari Hendra², Dewi Sandra³, Sri Rahmadani⁴, Dr. Latang M.Pd⁵

Program Studi Pendidikan Masyarakat, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Negeri Makassar

Email korespondensi: nurnurulazimah@gmail.com

Abstract: This study examines the theoretical role of self-control as a potential moderator in the relationship between need to belong and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among university students through a systematic literature review. FoMO refers to the concern that others may be experiencing rewarding social experiences without oneself and is closely related to persistent monitoring of digital social activities. The literature reviewed suggests that need to belong is associated with sensitivity to social inclusion and exclusion, while self-control is related to the capacity to regulate attention, cognition, emotion, and behavior. Based on thematic synthesis, three pathways are proposed through which self-control may weaken the relationship between need to belong and FoMO: attentional regulation, cognitive reappraisal, and digital behavioral management. A four-profile heuristic typology is also proposed by combining need to belong and self-control. Importantly, the moderating relationship and the four-profile typology are theoretical propositions rather than statistical findings of this study because no interaction analysis was conducted. The proposed framework therefore provides a basis for future empirical research, particularly quantitative studies testing the interaction between need to belong and self-control in predicting FoMO.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out (FoMO); Need to Belong; Self-Control; Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation over the past two decades has changed the way people build, maintain, and interpret social relationships. One psychological phenomenon frequently discussed in the context of social media use is the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)—the worry that others are having more meaningful social experiences while one is not participating in them (Przybylski et al., 2013). For college students, this phenomenon is particularly relevant because the college years are a developmental period marked by the expansion of social networks, identity formation, and adjustment to a new environment.

The “need to belong” is a fundamental need to feel accepted and to be part of meaningful social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When this need is perceived as unmet, individuals may become more sensitive to signs of social acceptance or exclusion. In digital environments, this sensitivity can interact with constant exposure to the social activities of others. Thus, the need to belong can serve as a relevant motivational foundation for understanding the emergence of FoMO, although this relationship does not necessarily operate mechanically for every individual.

The need to belong is a fundamental need to feel accepted and to be part of meaningful social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When this need is perceived as unmet, individuals may become more sensitive to signs of both social acceptance and exclusion. In digital environments, this sensitivity can interact with constant exposure to the social activities of others. Thus, the need to belong can serve as a relevant motivational foundation for understanding the emergence of FoMO, although this relationship does not necessarily operate mechanically for every individual.

These differences in student responses open the door to considering factors that may influence the strength of the relationship between the need to belong and FoMO. One relevant candidate is self-control—an individual’s capacity to regulate their thoughts, emotions, attention, and behavior when faced with situational urges or demands. The literature on self-control has extensively discussed its role as a predictor or protective factor, but studies that specifically position it as a moderator of the relationship between the need to belong and FoMO still require further conceptual development.

In the context of civic education, this phenomenon can also be situated within the discussion of digital citizenship. The use of social media is not only related to communication and the fulfillment of social needs but also requires individuals to manage their digital behavior responsibly. The ability to control the urge to constantly monitor social activity on digital media can support a healthier, more reflective, and responsible use of technology. Thus, a study of the relationship between the need to belong, FoMO, and self-control provides a psychological perspective that can enrich the discussion on the formation of digital citizenship behavior among college students.

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) conceptually examine the relationship between the need to belong and symptoms of FoMO among college students; (2) explore the literature on the mechanisms underlying the proposition that self-control serves as a moderator; (3) formulate a conceptual typology based on the combination of the need to belong and self-control; and (4) discuss its implications for education and digital citizenship.

METHOD

A. Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative approach through a systematic literature review, supplemented by thematic synthesis and narrative synthesis. The purpose of the study is not to directly test statistical hypotheses, but rather to integrate findings from the literature and develop a theoretical argument regarding the potential role of self-control in the relationship between the need to belong and FoMO.

B. Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Garuda. The search focused on several keyword combinations to ensure that articles containing only some of the main constructs could still be identified. The keyword combinations used included: (1) "need to belong" AND "fear of missing out" AND students; (2) "self-control" AND "fear of missing out" AND students; (3) "need to belong" AND "self-control" AND students; and (4) "self-control" AND "social media" AND students. Indonesian keywords were also used to accommodate publications that use the terms "need for affiliation," "FoMO," "self-control," and "students."

C. Analysis Techniques

The analysis was conducted using the thematic synthesis method developed by Thomas and Harden (2008). The first stage involved open coding of concepts related to the need to belong, FoMO, self-control, social media use, and self-regulation. The second stage grouped similar codes into descriptive themes. The third stage developed analytical themes through cross-study interpretation to construct a theoretical argument regarding possible moderating mechanisms.

The strength of evidence in this study was assessed descriptively based on the number of studies, construct validity, research design, and consistency of findings supporting each pathway. This classification is not intended to serve as the result of a meta-analysis or an assessment of evidence quality using formal instruments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Relationship Between the Need to Belong and FOMO Among College Students

The "need to belong" describes the fundamental need to be accepted and to be part of meaningful social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When this need is perceived as unmet, individuals may become more sensitive to signs of social acceptance and exclusion. In social media environments, these signs can manifest through posts, group activities, or information about others' social experiences.

Exposure to curated representations of social life can also influence how individuals assess their own social standing. Chou and Edge (2012), for example, showed that Facebook use may be associated with the perception that others have better lives. In the context of FoMO, this perception can reinforce the desire to monitor social activities so that individuals do not feel left out.

Przybylski et al. (2013) situate FoMO within a motivational framework related to psychological needs and the tendency to stay connected to online activities. Elhai et al. (2018) also demonstrated a link

between FoMO and problematic smartphone use. These findings support a conceptual relationship between the need for social connection, FoMO, and digital monitoring behavior, but do not in and of themselves prove that self-control moderates this relationship.

B. The Proposition of Self-Control and Moderation

In this study, self-control is defined as an individual's capacity to regulate their thoughts, emotions, attention, and behavior when faced with urges or situations that demand an immediate response. Baumeister et al. (2018) discuss self-control within the framework of self-regulation, while

Tangney et al. (2004) demonstrate that higher levels of self-control are associated with various indicators of social adjustment and interpersonal functioning.

Based on this synthesis, self-control is conceptually positioned as a factor that has the potential to modify the strength of the relationship between the need to belong and FoMO. Students with a high need to belong are expected to have a greater urge to monitor social activities and seek connection through digital media. However, self-control capacity can help individuals manage this urge, so the relationship between the need to belong and FoMO is expected to be weaker when self-control is at a higher level.

This proposition is the result of a conceptual synthesis of the available literature and is not the result of statistical testing in this study. Testing it would require quantitative research that includes the interaction between the need to belong and self-control as a predictor of FoMO.

C. Theoretical Mechanisms Supporting the Moderation Proposition

1. Attention Regulation

Attention regulation is viewed as one conceptual pathway that can explain how self-control may potentially weaken the relationship between the need to belong and FoMO. Individuals with better self-regulation capacity are expected to be better able to divert their attention from repeatedly monitoring digital social activities. Rosenberg and Egbert (2011) provide relevant supporting evidence regarding self-monitoring and self-presentation management on social media; however, the construct of self-monitoring is not equated with self-control. Therefore, this source is positioned as indirect supporting evidence rather than direct evidence of moderation.

2. Cognitive Reappraisal

Cognitive reinterpretation offers another theoretical pathway. When individuals face digital social situations that may evoke feelings of being left out or excluded, self-regulation can help them reevaluate the meaning of those situations. Thus, individuals do not automatically interpret their absence from an activity as a threat to social connectedness. This pathway should be understood as a theoretical explanation closely related to emotional and cognitive regulation; the literature reviewed does not directly test cognitive reappraisal as a mechanism moderating the "need to belong" in relation to FoMO.

3. Digital Behavior Management

Digital behavior management relates to an individual's ability to limit and direct their social media usage in accordance with their goals. In the context of FoMO, this ability could theoretically help individuals reduce the habit of repeatedly checking social media in response to concerns about missing out on social activities. However, evidence regarding this pathway must be interpreted with caution, as much of the literature on self-control and digital media use is correlational. This pathway is therefore treated as a supporting theoretical explanation, rather than as direct evidence that self-control moderates the relationship between the need to belong and FoMO.

These three mechanisms can be understood as interconnected pathways: attention regulation can help individuals reduce unnecessary monitoring; cognitive management can alter interpretations of social information; and digital behavior management can help consistently enforce limits on social media use. However, the relationships among these mechanisms remain a conceptual model and require empirical testing.

Table 1. Mapping of Evidence for Self-Control Mechanisms

Mechanism	Available literature	The Connection to FoMO	Evidence status
Attention Regulation	Rosenberg & Egbert (2011) as indirect support; the construct of self-monitoring is not identical to self-control	Managing attention to digital social activities and reducing aimless scrolling.	Indirect supporters
Cognitive reinterpretation	Conceptual basis of cognitive/emotional regulation; no direct testing as a moderator has yet been conducted in the available corpus	Helping to reinterpret digital social situations that are perceived as a threat of exclusion.	Conceptual supporters
Digital Behavior Management	This needs to be supported by empirical studies that specifically measure self-control/self-regulation and social media usage behavior.	Limit repetitive social media use and guide digital use toward specific goals.	The evidence is still limited

D. Conceptual Typology of Student Personality Traits

The following typology is a conceptual framework constructed from a combination of two dimensions: the need to belong and self-control. This typology does not stem from cluster analysis, empirical categorization, or direct measurements of the students in this study. Therefore, the four types presented serve as a heuristic framework to explain possible psychological patterns that can be further investigated and should not yet be treated as an empirically validated classification of students.

Type	Profile	Potential Vulnerability to FoMO	Implications for Community Education	Primary references
Type A: Fully Vulnerable	High Need to Belong + Low Self-Control	Conceptually, it is relatively more vulnerable	Strengthening self-regulation, combined with peer support and the strengthening of meaningful social networks.	Alt (2015); Blackwell et al. (2017); Elhai et al. (2018)
Type B: Hidden Vulnerability	High Need to Belong + Moderate Self-Control	Potentially vulnerable, especially in certain social situations	Preventive psychoeducation and strengthening self-regulation strategies during the academic transition phase.	Meier & Reinecke (2021)
Type C: Socially Resilient	High Need to Belong + High Self-Control	Diperkirakan lebih mampu mengelola dorongan FoMO	Training of peer educators and community-based digital literacy activities.	Tangney et al. (2004); Baumeister et al. (2018)
Type D: Digital Self-Reliance	Low Need to Belong + High Self-Control	They are estimated to be relatively less vulnerable, but this is not evidence of superior psychological health	Providing opportunities for healthy social engagement to prevent social isolation.	Baumeister & Leary (1995)

Note: The vulnerability categories in the table are conceptual interpretations based on a combination of the “need to belong” and “self-control,” not the results of FoMO level measurements or empirical classifications of students. The validity of this typology still requires empirical testing.

E. Implications for Education and Digital Citizenship

The findings of this synthesis can serve as a basis for designing educational and mentoring programs that do not merely restrict social media use but help students develop self-regulation skills and healthy social engagement. From a public education perspective, these approaches can focus on digital literacy, strengthening peer support, managing digital habits, and creating spaces for meaningful social interaction. The connection to digital citizenship lies in the need to foster responsible technology use. Students’ ability to manage the urge for social monitoring, reflectively evaluate digital information, and maintain a balance between online and offline interactions can be part of shaping healthy digital behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study shows, based on a literature review, that the need to belong is associated with FoMO, particularly when the need for social connectedness relates to sensitivity toward social activities and

exclusion in digital environments. The reviewed literature also provides a basis for the notion that self-control is related to an individual's ability to manage attention, cognitive responses, and behavior. Based on this synthesis, this study proposes self-control as a potential moderator in the relationship between the need to belong and FoMO. Theoretically, higher self-control is expected to weaken this relationship because individuals have a greater capacity to manage the urge for digital social monitoring. However, this moderating relationship is a theoretical proposition and cannot yet be stated as a statistical finding because this study did not empirically test for interactions. The three identified mechanisms—attention regulation, cognitive reframing, and digital behavior management—offer potential explanations for how self-control might play a role in this relationship. The strength of the evidence for these three mechanisms is not entirely consistent; therefore, they should be viewed as theoretical pathways requiring further testing. The proposed typology of four student patterns is also a heuristic framework based on a combination of the need to belong and self-control, rather than a validated empirical classification. Future research should test these moderation propositions and the typology using quantitative designs, particularly by examining the interaction between the need to belong and self-control in predicting FoMO.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to thank everyone who provided support during the research and writing of this article, including the Community Education Program, Faculty of Education, Makassar State University.

REFERENCES

- Alt, D. (2015). College students' academic motivation, media engagement and fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 49, 111–119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.02.057>
- Barry, C. M., & Wentzel, K. R. (2006). Friend influence on prosocial behavior: The role of motivational factors and friendship characteristics. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(1), 153–163. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.42.1.153>
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Baumeister, R. F., Tice, D. M., & Vohs, K. D. (2018). The strength model of self-regulation: Conclusions from the second decade of willpower research. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(2), 141–145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617716946>
- Blackwell, D., Leaman, C., Tramposch, R., Osborne, C., & Liss, M. (2017). Extraversion, neuroticism, attachment style and fear of missing out as predictors of social media use and addiction. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 116, 69–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.04.039>
- Chou, H. T. G., & Edge, N. (2012). 'They are happier and having better lives than I am': The impact of using Facebook on perceptions of others' lives. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(2), 117–121. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2011.0324>
- Dogan, U., Çelik, E., & Sapmaz, F. (2020). Examining need to belong, academic self-efficacy and student engagement as predictors of academic achievement. *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences*, 12(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.15345/iojes.2020.01.001>
- Elhai, J. D., Levine, J. C., Dvorak, R. D., & Hall, B. J. (2018). Fear of missing out, need for touch, anxiety and depression are related to problematic smartphone use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 63, 509–516.
- Meier, A., & Reinecke, L. (2021). Computer-mediated communication, social media, and mental health: A conceptual and empirical meta-review. *Communication Research*, 48(8), 1182–1209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650220958224>

- Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4), 1841–1848. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.014>
- Rosenberg, J., & Egbert, N. (2011). Online impression management: Personality traits and concerns for secondary goals as predictors of self-presentation tactics on Facebook. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2011.01560.x>
- Tangney, J. P., Baumeister, R. F., & Boone, A. L. (2004). High self-control predicts good adjustment, less pathology, better grades, and interpersonal success. *Journal of Personality*, 72(2), 271–324. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00263.x>
- Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8(1), 45. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-228>