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The Relationship Between State Fear of Missing Out and Need for Social Approval Among University Students in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The widespread use of social media allows university students to continuously observe their peers' experiences, which may heighten Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and concern about others' approval. This study aimed to examine the relationship between state FoMO and need for social approval among university students in Indonesia. A quantitative correlational cross-sectional design was used with 99 university students aged 18–24 years (60.6% women) recruited through purposive sampling. State FoMO was measured using the Indonesian State Fear of Missing Out Inventory (eight items, α = .946), and need for social approval was measured using the need-for-social-approval dimension of the Indonesian Dysfunctional Attitude Scale-26 (11 items, α = .935). Because both scores departed from normality, Spearman's rank-order correlation was used as the primary hypothesis test, supplemented by Pearson's correlation. The results showed a strong positive relationship between state FoMO and need for social approval (ρ = .839, p < .001; r = .821, p < .001). These findings suggest that students who experience greater state FoMO also tend to report a stronger need for social approval, although the cross-sectional design does not permit causal conclusions.

Keywords: *fear of missing out; need for social approval; social media; state FoMO; university students*

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INTRODUCTION

Digital communication has made social information continuously accessible, allowing individuals to observe other people's activities, interactions, and experiences with very little delay (Elhai et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2025). In Indonesia, DataReportal reported 230 million internet users and 180 million social-media user identities as of October 2025, although platform-defined user identities should not be treated as an exact count of unique individuals (DataReportal, 2025).

For university students, this digital environment means that peer experiences can be observed beyond face-to-face interaction through persistent feeds, notifications, and visible social feedback (Elhai et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2025). The continuous availability of such information can make individuals more attentive to what other people are doing and to whether they themselves are participating in rewarding social experiences (Przybylski et al., 2013; Johanda et al., 2026).

This experience is known as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), defined as a pervasive apprehension that others may be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, accompanied by a desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing (Przybylski et al., 2013). Most FoMO research has treated the construct as a relatively stable disposition, whereas state FoMO refers to FoMO as a momentary experience that can fluctuate across situations (Holte, 2023). The State Fear of Missing Out Inventory was developed to capture this situational experience (Holte, 2023), and its Indonesian adaptation replicated the original unidimensional structure among university students (Johanda et al., 2026). This adaptation complements earlier Indonesian work that validated a trait-oriented FoMO scale among adolescents (Kaloeti et al., 2021).

FoMO is important to study because it has been associated with problematic smartphone use and problematic social-media use among young people (Elhai et al., 2020; Servidio et al., 2024). Longitudinal evidence further shows a reciprocal association between FoMO and social-media fatigue, indicating that these experiences may reinforce one another over time (Yao et al., 2025). FoMO has also been linked to loneliness and emotion dysregulation among adolescents (Koçyiğit & Türk, 2025), as well as to lower self-control and self-regulation among college students (Amelisastri et al., 2025). These findings indicate that FoMO is not only a digital-use phenomenon but also a psychological experience with potential consequences for young people's well-being (Servidio et al., 2024; Koçyiğit & Türk, 2025).

One interpersonal factor that may be related to FoMO is the need for social approval (Akbay et al., 2026). Need for social approval reflects sensitivity to others' judgments and efforts to leave a positive impression, with higher levels indicating a stronger dependence on others' evaluations (Karaşar & Öğülmüş, 2016). In the Indonesian context, this construct can be measured through the need-for-social-approval dimension of the Indonesian Dysfunctional Attitude Scale-26 (Agustiya et al., 2024).

The theoretical connection between FoMO and need for social approval can be explained through Self-Determination Theory and the contingent self-worth perspective (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Self-Determination Theory proposes relatedness as a basic psychological need, while the FoMO framework links frustrated relatedness with stronger concerns about being disconnected from others (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Przybylski et al., 2013). The contingent self-worth perspective further suggests that when self-worth depends heavily on others' approval, individuals become more sensitive to cues of acceptance, rejection, and social evaluation (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

Previous studies have provided empirical support for this connection (Akbay et al., 2026; Servidio et al., 2024). In a study of 365 university students aged 18–23 in Türkiye, Akbay et al. (2026) reported a positive association between need for social approval and FoMO. Other studies have shown that FoMO operates through interpersonal processes such as social comparison, self-esteem, and attachment insecurity (Servidio et al., 2024; Tseng & Huang, 2025).

However, direct evidence on the relationship between FoMO and need for social approval has been reported mainly outside Indonesia (Akbay et al., 2026). In addition, most available evidence has measured FoMO as a trait, while evidence on state FoMO, particularly among Indonesian university students, remains limited (Holte, 2023; Johanda et al., 2026). This indicates a context gap and a variable gap regarding the relationship between state FoMO and need for social approval in Indonesia (Kaloeti et al., 2021; Johanda et al., 2026).

Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between state FoMO and need for social approval among university students in Indonesia (Akbay et al., 2026; Johanda et al., 2026). Based on the theoretical framework and previous findings, the hypotheses of this study are: (H0) there is no relationship between state FoMO and need for social approval among university students; (H1) there is a relationship between state FoMO and need for social approval among university students, with the relationship expected to be positive (Przybylski et al., 2013; Akbay et al., 2026).

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a quantitative approach with a correlational cross-sectional design (Savitz & Wellenius, 2023). This design was used to test the relationship between state FoMO and need for social approval measured at a single point in time, without manipulating either variable or drawing causal conclusions (Savitz & Wellenius, 2023; Janse et al., 2021). Data were collected using Likert-type psychological scales and analyzed statistically to test the research hypotheses.

Participants

Participants were 99 university students in Indonesia aged 18–24 years (M = 20.56, SD = 1.24), consisting of 60 women (60.6%) and 39 men (39.4%) from various higher-education institutions. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling with the following inclusion criteria: (1) enrolled as a university student in Indonesia, (2) aged 18–25 years, (3) an active social-media user, and (4) willing to participate voluntarily. Respondents who did not agree to participate were excluded from the analysis.

Instruments

1. State Fear of Missing Out

State FoMO was measured using the Indonesian version of the State Fear of Missing Out Inventory (SFOMOI), originally developed by Holte (2023) and adapted into Indonesian by Johanda et al. (2026). The instrument consists of eight items measuring a single dimension, namely FoMO as a momentary experience (Holte, 2023). The Indonesian adaptation replicated the unidimensional structure of the original instrument and showed very good internal consistency among university students (Johanda et al., 2026).

Responses are given on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). All items are scored in the same direction, and item responses are summed to produce a total score ranging from 8 to 48. Higher scores indicate a higher level of state FoMO at the time of responding. In the present study, the scale showed high internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .946).

2. Need for Social Approval

Need for social approval was measured using the need-for-social-approval dimension of the Indonesian version of the Dysfunctional Attitude Scale-26 (DAS-26) described by Agustiya et al. (2024). This dimension consists of 11 items reflecting the need to obtain approval and acceptance from others (Agustiya et al., 2024). Responses are given on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Items 8 and 11 are reverse scored, after which item responses are summed to produce a total score ranging from 11 to 77. Higher scores indicate a stronger need for social approval. In the present study, the dimension showed high internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .935).

3. Procedure

Data were collected online using an electronic questionnaire. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were presented with information about the study and asked to indicate whether they voluntarily agreed to participate. Participants who agreed then completed demographic items (age, gender, and institution), the eight SFOMOI items, and the 11 need-for-social-approval items. Of the 100 responses received, one respondent did not agree to participate and was excluded, leaving 99 responses for scoring and statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using JASP. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum, were used to describe the scores of each variable. Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the internal consistency of each instrument after reverse scoring was applied. The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to examine whether the scores of each variable were normally distributed (Khatun, 2021). Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to test the hypothesis if the normality assumption was not met, because it is based on ranks and does not require normally distributed data (Janse et al., 2021). Pearson's product-moment correlation was conducted as a supplementary analysis to check whether the conclusion was consistent across correlation methods (Janse et al., 2021). All tests were two-tailed with a significance level of α = .05.

RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

A total of 99 participants were included in the analysis. Participants were aged 18–24 years (M = 20.56, SD = 1.24); 60 were women (60.6%) and 39 were men (39.4%).

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and internal consistency estimates for both variables. State FoMO scores ranged from 8 to 43 (M = 32.09, SD = 10.56), and need-for-social-approval scores ranged from 13 to 71 (M = 46.65, SD = 17.06). Both instruments showed high internal consistency (α = .946 for the SFOMOI and α = .935 for the need-for-social-approval dimension).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of the Study Variables

Variable	Items	Possible range	M	SD	Observed range	Cronbach's α
State FoMO (SFOMOI)	8	8–48	32.09	10.56	8–43	.946
Need for Social Approval (DAS-26 dimension)	11	11–77	46.65	17.06	13–71	.935

Note. N = 99. FoMO = Fear of Missing Out; SFOMOI = State Fear of Missing Out Inventory; DAS-26 = Dysfunctional Attitude Scale-26. Need-for-social-approval scores were calculated after reverse scoring items 8 and 11.

Normality Test

Table 3.2 presents the results of the Shapiro–Wilk normality test. Both the state FoMO scores (W = .819, p < .001) and the need-for-social-approval scores (W = .914, p < .001) significantly departed from normality. Therefore, Spearman's rank-order correlation was used as the primary hypothesis test.

Table 2 Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test Results for Composite Scores

Composite score	Shapiro–Wilk W	p
State FoMO	.819	< .001
Need for Social Approval	.914	< .001

Note. N = 99. A p value below .05 indicates a significant departure from normality.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 3.3 presents the results of the hypothesis test. Spearman's rank-order correlation showed a positive and significant relationship between state FoMO and need for social approval (ρ = .839, p < .001, N = 99). Therefore, H0 was rejected and H1 was accepted, indicating that higher state FoMO was associated with a higher need for social approval. The supplementary Pearson correlation showed a consistent result (r(97) = .821, p < .001, 95% CI [.744, .876]).

Table 3 Spearman and Pearson Correlations Between State FoMO and Need for Social Approval

Analysis	N	Coefficient	p
Spearman rank correlation	99	ρ = .839	< .001
Pearson correlation (supplementary)	99	r(97) = .821	< .001

Note. N = 99. The Spearman coefficient was used for the primary interpretation because both scores were not normally distributed. The 95% CI for the Pearson coefficient was based on Fisher's z transformation.

Discussion

The results of this study showed that state FoMO was positively related to need for social approval among university students in Indonesia, a pattern consistent with previous evidence linking FoMO to concerns about others' approval (Akbay et al., 2026). This finding indicates that students who more intensely felt that they were missing rewarding peer experiences also tended to place greater importance on being accepted and positively evaluated by others (Przybylski et al., 2013; Karaşar & Öğülmüş, 2016). Because the Spearman and Pearson coefficients led to the same conclusion, the relationship did not depend on the choice of correlation method (Janse et al., 2021).

This finding is in line with Akbay et al. (2026), who reported a positive association between need for social approval and FoMO among university students in Türkiye. It also aligns with Servidio et al. (2024), who showed that FoMO is connected to social comparison and self-esteem, processes in which individuals evaluate themselves through others. Similarly, Tseng and Huang (2025) found that FoMO links attachment insecurity with problematic social network site use, suggesting that FoMO is rooted in interpersonal concerns. However, the size of the coefficients should be compared with previous studies cautiously, because correlation coefficients cannot be readily compared across studies that differ in samples and measures (Janse et al., 2021). Unlike many previous studies that measured FoMO as a relatively stable disposition (Kaloeti et al., 2021; Holte, 2023), the present study used a state measure that captures FoMO as a momentary experience (Johanda et al., 2026).

This relationship can be explained through Self-Determination Theory, which identifies relatedness as a basic psychological need (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When the need for relatedness is not satisfied, individuals may become more concerned about being disconnected from others' rewarding experiences (Przybylski et al., 2013). From the contingent self-worth perspective, individuals whose self-worth depends on others' approval are more sensitive to cues of acceptance, rejection, and social evaluation (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Consequently, information about peers' activities on social media may be perceived not only as missed experiences but also as signals of one's social acceptance (Servidio et al., 2024; Akbay et al., 2026). Nevertheless, these explanations remain interpretive because correlational data cannot establish the underlying mechanism or the direction of the relationship (Janse et al., 2021).

The use of a state measure also shapes how the findings should be interpreted, because state FoMO reflects a momentary experience that can fluctuate across situations rather than a stable tendency (Holte, 2023). Therefore, the present results should not be generalized directly to trait FoMO (Holte, 2023; Johanda et al., 2026). Future studies could compare state and trait FoMO or use repeated measurements to examine whether fluctuations in FoMO co-occur with changes in need for social approval over time (Holte, 2023; Yao et al., 2025).

Theoretically, this study extends the FoMO literature by showing that the state form of FoMO is related to need for social approval in an Indonesian student sample (Holte, 2023; Akbay et al., 2026). This supports the view that FoMO is a socially embedded experience related to relatedness needs and social evaluation rather than merely a digital-use phenomenon (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tseng & Huang, 2025). Practically, digital literacy and student well-being programs could address not only the duration of social-media use but

also students' dependence on others' approval (Servidio et al., 2024; Akbay et al., 2026). Strengthening self-control and self-regulation may also help students manage the urge to keep monitoring peers' activities that accompanies FoMO (Amelisastri et al., 2025).

Several limitations should be considered, the first being that the cross-sectional design does not allow conclusions about causality or the temporal order of the variables (Savitz & Wellenius, 2023). Second, purposive sampling and a sample of 99 participants mean that the findings can be generalized only to students with characteristics similar to those of the sample (Andrade, 2021). Third, both variables were measured with self-report questionnaires at the same time, so common method bias and socially desirable responding may have inflated the observed correlation (Kock et al., 2021). Fourth, the factor structure of the need-for-social-approval dimension was not examined in this sample, so its construct validity in this population requires further testing (Agustiya et al., 2024). Fifth, active social-media use was an inclusion criterion that was not recorded separately, so the extent to which the sample met this criterion could not be verified (Andrade, 2021). Future research could therefore use longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples, and multi-method measurement (Savitz & Wellenius, 2023; Kock et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that state FoMO is positively related to need for social approval among university students in Indonesia, meaning that students who experience more FoMO at a given moment tend to report a stronger need for approval from others. This finding highlights the importance of considering students' dependence on social approval when understanding and addressing FoMO in digital environments, although the relationship should not be interpreted as causal.

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