

THE IMPACT OF FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO) ON THE DISSEMINATION OF UNVERIFIED POLITICAL INFORMATION AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

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Abstract

The Rapid proliferation of social media has intensified the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), raising concerns about its role in driving unverified information sharing, particularly in political contexts. This study aimed to examine the influence of FoMO on the behavior of spreading unverified political information among social media users. A quantitative survey design was employed, collecting data from 73 active social media users who were undergraduate students from various universities in Indonesia, predominantly from the millennial and Gen Z age groups high daily social media engagement. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active use of social media and exposure to political information online. The instrument measured FoMO indicators including anxiety about missing information, the need to follow trends, and frequency of social media checking alongside information sharing behaviors such as forwarding viral content without verification. Results revealed that respondents exhibited moderate-to-high FoMO levels, and a significant positive relationship was found between FoMO and unverified political information sharing: higher FoMO was associated with greater tendencies to disseminate political content without fact-checking. These findings underscore FoMO as a key psychological driver of misinformation spread on social media. Practically, the study highlights the urgent need for digital literacy programs targeting FoMO driven behavior; future research should explore intervention strategies and examine this relationship across diverse demographic groups.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out (FoMO); Social Media; Political Information; Reading Information; Misinformation

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of modern communication and information exchange. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook enable users to access information instantly and participate actively in discussions on various topics, including political issues. For university students and young adults, social media functions not only as a communication tool but also as a primary source of news and current affairs. According to Newman et al. (2024), social media continues to play a significant role in shaping how younger generations consume information and engage with public discourse. Consequently, the way individuals read, interpret, and share information in digital environments has become an important area of academic investigation.

The increasing reliance on social media for information consumption has created both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, social media facilitates rapid access to

diverse perspectives and real-time updates. On the other hand, the speed of information circulation often exceeds the process of verification, resulting in the widespread dissemination of misinformation and unverified content. This issue is particularly concerning in political contexts, where inaccurate information may influence public opinion, voting behavior, and political attitudes. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) argue that the spread of false information through social media has become a major challenge for democratic societies, while Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) found that false news spreads significantly faster and reaches more people than truthful information on online platforms.

The dissemination of unverified political information is not only influenced by technological factors but also by users' psychological characteristics. One psychological factor that has attracted considerable scholarly attention is Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Przybylski et al. (2013) define FoMO as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. In the context of social media, FoMO encourages individuals to remain continuously connected to online activities, monitor trending topics, and stay informed about the latest developments. Individuals experiencing high levels of FoMO often engage in frequent social media checking behaviors and feel anxious when they perceive themselves as missing important information or discussions (Alt, 2015).

From a digital reading literacy perspective, FoMO may influence how individuals process information encountered online. Digital reading literacy refers to the ability to access, evaluate, analyze, and critically interpret information in digital environments (OECD, 2021). Effective digital readers are expected to assess the credibility of sources, compare information across platforms, and verify claims before accepting or sharing them. However, the pressure to stay updated and socially relevant may encourage users to prioritize speed over comprehension. Rather than engaging in deep reading and critical evaluation, users may focus on rapidly scanning headlines, viral posts, and trending discussions. As a result, information-sharing decisions may be driven more by urgency and social relevance than by accuracy and verification.

In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon is particularly relevant among university students and Generation Z users, who represent one of the most active groups on social media. The widespread use of TikTok and Instagram has increased exposure to political information, viral discussions, and algorithm-driven content recommendations. At the same time, the abundance of information available online can create information overload and intensify users' fear of being left behind in ongoing social and political conversations. Consequently, users may feel compelled to share information quickly in order to maintain social relevance within their peer networks.

Previous studies have examined FoMO in relation to social media addiction, online engagement, psychological well-being, and information-seeking behavior (Przybylski et al., 2013; Alt, 2015; Beyens et al., 2016). Other studies have focused on the spread of misinformation and fake news on digital platforms (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Vosoughi et al., 2018). However, limited research has specifically investigated how FoMO contributes to the dissemination of unverified political information from a digital reading literacy perspective. Most existing studies tend to examine these variables separately rather than exploring their interconnected relationship. Therefore, a gap remains in understanding how FoMO-driven information consumption behaviors may influence users' tendencies to share political information without adequate verification.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the impact of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) on the dissemination of unverified political information among social media users. Specifically, the study examines the relationship between information consumption behavior, social anxiety associated with FoMO, and information-sharing practices. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing literature on digital literacy, social media behavior, and misinformation studies. Furthermore, the study may provide practical insights for educators, policymakers, and digital literacy practitioners in developing strategies to promote critical information evaluation and responsible information-sharing behavior in digital environments.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative survey design to investigate the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and the dissemination of unverified political information among social media users. A quantitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to systematically measure attitudes, behaviors, and psychological tendencies while identifying patterns across a larger group of respondents. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research is appropriate for examining relationships among variables through numerical data and statistical analysis.

The study adopted an explanatory research design aimed at exploring whether FoMO influences individuals' tendencies to consume and disseminate political information without prior verification. Explanatory research seeks to identify and explain relationships among variables by examining how one variable may affect another (Creswell, 2014). This research focused on three primary dimensions: information consumption behavior, information dissemination behavior, and FoMO-related social anxiety. These dimensions were analyzed to understand how psychological factors may contribute to the spread of unverified political information in digital environments.

The participants consisted of 73 active social media users who were university students from various higher education institutions in Indonesia. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which respondents are chosen based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2002). The inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) be currently enrolled as university students, (2) actively use at least one social media platform such as TikTok, Instagram, X, Facebook, or WhatsApp, (3) be regularly exposed to political news and content on social media, and (4) voluntarily agree to participate in the study. These criteria ensured that participants possessed sufficient experience related to information consumption and dissemination practices on social media relevant to the research topic.

The demographic profile indicated that the majority of respondents were female students aged between 19 and 22 years old. Furthermore, most respondents reported spending approximately four to nine hours per day on social media, with TikTok and Instagram serving as their primary sources of information. This demographic group was considered particularly relevant because previous studies have shown that young adults are among the most active users of digital information and social media platforms (Przybylski et al., 2013; Alt, 2015).

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire was developed based on previous literature on Fear of Missing Out (FoMO),

digital information behavior, and information-sharing practices on social media (Przybylski et al., 2013; Beyens et al., 2016). The instrument consisted of two sections. The first section gathered demographic information, including gender, age, university affiliation, most frequently used social media platform, and daily social media usage duration. The second section measured three main indicators: (1) information consumption behavior, (2) information dissemination behavior, and (3) FoMO-related social anxiety. The questionnaire items assessed respondents' tendencies to follow trending topics, monitor current issues, share information with others, and experience concern when missing important discussions occurring on social media. All questionnaire items were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). According to Likert (1932), the Likert scale is an effective instrument for measuring attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral tendencies. A four-point scale was selected to eliminate neutral responses and encourage participants to express a more definitive position regarding each statement. The questionnaire was distributed online for a period of two weeks. Prior to participation, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, data confidentiality, and their right to participate voluntarily. All responses were collected anonymously and were used solely for academic purposes.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize, organize, and interpret quantitative data in order to identify patterns and trends within the dataset (Creswell, 2014). The data were first coded and categorized according to the research variables. Subsequently, frequencies, percentages, and dominant response patterns were calculated to identify respondents' tendencies regarding information consumption, information dissemination, and FoMO-related anxiety. The analysis focused on three key indicators: (1) information consumption and the desire to stay updated with the latest information, (2) information dissemination behavior, and (3) social anxiety associated with Fear of Missing Out.

The findings were presented through descriptive summaries and frequency distributions to provide a comprehensive overview of respondents' behaviors and perceptions. The results were then interpreted using FoMO theory (Przybylski et al., 2013), studies on social media engagement (Alt, 2015), and digital literacy perspectives (OECD, 2021) to explain how FoMO may contribute to the dissemination of unverified political information among social media users.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

A total of 73 respondents participated in this study. The respondents consisted of university students from various higher education institutions in Indonesia, with the majority belonging to the 19–22-year-old age group. This demographic group represents Generation Z, a generation that has grown up alongside digital technologies and social media platforms. As a result, they are highly exposed to digital information and actively engage in online communication and information consumption activities.

Table 1. Respondents' Social Media Usage Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Preferred Social Media Platform	Tik Tok	39	53.4
	Instagram	31	42.5
	X/Twitter	1	1.4
	WhatsApp	1	1.4
	Others	14	1.3
Daily Usage Duration	less than 1 hour	2	2.7
	1–3 hours	20	27.4
	4–6 hours	30	41.1
	7–9 hours	14	19.2
	More than 9 hours	7	9.6

The findings indicate that TikTok and Instagram dominate respondents' daily social media activities. More than half of the respondents identified TikTok as their most frequently used platform, while Instagram accounted for 42.5% of responses. Furthermore, approximately 70% of respondents reported spending more than four hours per day on social media. These findings suggest that social media has become an integral part of students' daily lives and serves as one of their primary sources of information.

The high intensity of social media use reflects the increasing role of digital platforms in shaping information consumption patterns among young adults. Social media platforms provide immediate access to news, entertainment, educational materials, and political discussions. Consequently, users continuously interact with various forms of digital texts, making digital reading literacy increasingly important in helping them process and evaluate information critically.

Information Consumption Behavior

To examine respondents' information consumption behavior, five questionnaire items were analyzed. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Information Consumption Behavior

Statement	Dominant Score	Frequency
I often read the latest information on social media every day	3	41
I feel the need to follow viral news or issues	3	38
I am interested in reading information discussed by many users	3	45
Read information to avoid missing discussions	3	41
I frequently open social media to obtain the latest information	3	46

The results reveal that score 3 (Agree) dominated all information-consumption items. The highest frequency appeared in the statement "I frequently open social media to obtain the latest information," which was selected by 46 respondents. Similarly, 45 respondents

agreed that they were interested in reading information discussed by many social media users.

These findings indicate that respondents demonstrate strong information-seeking behavior. Social media functions not only as a communication platform but also as a primary source of information regarding current events, social issues, and public discussions. The tendency to frequently access social media suggests that respondents are highly engaged in digital information environments.

From a digital reading literacy perspective, the findings demonstrate that respondents are continuously exposed to large volumes of digital information. According to OECD (2021), digital reading literacy involves the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and utilize digital information effectively. Therefore, the high level of information consumption identified in this study highlights the importance of developing critical reading and information evaluation skill.

The findings also support the concept of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Respondents' desire to remain informed about trending topics and current discussions reflects their motivation to stay connected with social and informational environments. Such behavior aligns with Przybylski et al. (2013), who describe FoMO as a desire to remain continually connected with what others are doing and discussing.

Information Dissemination Behavior

The second indicator examined respondents' information dissemination behavior. The findings are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Information Dissemination Behavior

Statement	Dominant Score	Frequency
I often share viral information with others	2	28
I feel encouraged to spread the latest information	2	31
I share information to appear updated	2	33
I frequently repost news or content attracting public attention	3	29
I feel satisfied when I am among the first to share information	2	33

Unlike information consumption behavior, information dissemination behavior showed lower levels of agreement. Most respondents selected score 2 (Disagree) for statements related to actively sharing information.

This finding suggests that respondents tend to act as information consumers rather than active information disseminators. Although they regularly access and follow information, they do not necessarily feel compelled to share it with others. The strongest disagreement appeared in the statements concerning sharing information to appear updated and feeling satisfied when becoming one of the first individuals to share information.

Interestingly, the statement regarding reposting content that attracts public attention received a dominant score of 3. This finding indicates that virality remains an important factor influencing sharing behavior. Users may be more willing to share content when it has already gained widespread public attention.

From a digital literacy perspective, this pattern can be interpreted positively. The relatively low tendency to share information impulsively may indicate a degree of caution

among respondents when interacting with online content. Such behavior may reduce the likelihood of spreading inaccurate or misleading information.

FoMO-Related Social Anxiety

The third indicator focused on FoMO-related social anxiety.

Table 4. FoMO-Related Social Anxiety

Statement	Dominant Score	Frequency
I worry when I am late in obtaining information	2	39
I become curious when friends discuss issues I do not know	3	46
I frequently check social media to avoid missing information	3	33
I feel uncomfortable when I do not know viral trends	2	36
I am afraid of being perceived as less updated	2	31

The results indicate moderate levels of FoMO among respondents. The highest agreement appeared in the statement concerning curiosity when friends discussed unfamiliar issues. A total of 46 respondents selected score 3, indicating that social interaction remains an important motivation for information-seeking behavior. However, respondents generally disagreed with statements related to anxiety, discomfort, or fear of social judgment. This suggests that respondents' FoMO is characterized more by curiosity and informational awareness than by severe psychological distress.

The findings support previous studies suggesting that FoMO can manifest in different forms. While some individuals experience FoMO as anxiety and social pressure, others experience it as motivation to remain informed and connected to ongoing discussions. The latter appears to characterize the respondents in this study. Information Consumption as a Reflection of Digital Reading Literacy. One of the most significant findings of this study is the high level of information consumption among respondents. Most participants reported regularly reading current information, following viral discussions, and monitoring social media updates. This finding demonstrates the important role of social media as an information source for university students.

Digital reading literacy extends beyond the ability to read texts online. It involves locating information, evaluating source credibility, interpreting content, and making informed judgments about information quality. The findings suggest that respondents are highly engaged with digital information environments, which may contribute positively to their awareness of social and political issues.

However, continuous exposure to information also presents challenges. Social media platforms contain a mixture of verified information, opinions, rumors, and misinformation. Therefore, individuals must possess adequate literacy skills to distinguish reliable information from inaccurate content. Without such skills, users may become vulnerable to misinformation despite their high levels of information consumption.

FoMO and Information-Seeking Behavior

The findings demonstrate that FoMO plays an important role in motivating respondents to seek information. Participants expressed curiosity about issues discussed by friends and reported regularly monitoring social media to stay informed. These behaviors reflect the desire to remain connected with social conversations and public discussions.

The findings are consistent with Przybylski et al. (2013), who argue that FoMO motivates individuals to maintain awareness of ongoing events and activities. However, the present study found that respondents generally did not experience strong anxiety regarding social exclusion or being perceived as outdated. Consequently, FoMO among respondents appears to function primarily as a motivational factor rather than a source of psychological distress.

This finding is significant because it suggests that FoMO may contribute positively to information engagement when experienced at moderate levels. Rather than generating excessive anxiety, moderate FoMO may encourage users to remain informed and participate in discussions concerning current events.

Information Dissemination and Responsible Sharing Practices

A particularly interesting finding concerns the discrepancy between information consumption and information dissemination. Although respondents demonstrated high levels of information consumption, they exhibited relatively low levels of information-sharing behavior.

This finding suggests that being informed does not necessarily lead to sharing information. Respondents may prefer consuming information for personal knowledge rather than distributing it to others. Such behavior may reflect awareness of the risks associated with misinformation and unverified content.

The findings differ from studies suggesting that FoMO directly predicts information-sharing behavior. Instead, the results indicate that respondents' FoMO is more strongly associated with monitoring information than disseminating it. This distinction contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how FoMO influences digital behavior.

FoMO, Digital Reading Literacy, and Unverified Political Information

The relationship between FoMO and the dissemination of unverified political information appears to be indirect. Respondents frequently accessed social media, followed trending issues, and monitored current discussions. These behaviors increased their exposure to large volumes of information, including political content.

Political information often circulates rapidly through social media platforms, particularly during elections, policy debates, and controversial public events. Because social media algorithms prioritize engagement and virality, users may encounter information before its accuracy has been fully verified.

In such circumstances, digital reading literacy becomes a crucial protective factor. Individuals with strong literacy skills are more likely to evaluate sources, verify claims, and compare information across multiple platforms before accepting or sharing content. Conversely, users with weaker literacy skills may be more susceptible to misinformation and manipulation.

The findings suggest that FoMO may indirectly contribute to the dissemination of unverified political information by increasing information exposure. As users spend more time monitoring social media and following viral discussions, they become more likely to

encounter unverified content. Whether this content is eventually shared depends largely on the users' digital literacy skills and information-evaluation practices.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings support previous research indicating that FoMO is associated with increased social media engagement and information-seeking behavior (Przybylski et al., 2013; Alt, 2015). Similar to earlier studies, respondents demonstrated strong tendencies to monitor information and remain updated regarding ongoing discussions.

However, the findings differ from studies emphasizing a direct relationship between FoMO and information dissemination. In the present study, respondents exhibited relatively low levels of sharing behavior despite showing moderate FoMO characteristics. This suggests that the relationship between FoMO and information dissemination may be influenced by additional factors such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and awareness of misinformation.

Educational Implications

The findings have important implications for higher education. Since students increasingly rely on social media as a source of information, universities should strengthen digital literacy education. Students need to develop skills related to source evaluation, fact-checking, critical reading, and information verification.

For English Language Education students, digital reading literacy is particularly important because they regularly interact with texts from diverse online sources. Integrating media literacy and critical digital reading into classroom activities can help students become more responsible consumers and disseminators of information.

Overall Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that respondents exhibit high levels of information consumption, moderate levels of FoMO, and relatively low levels of information dissemination. These results suggest that FoMO primarily encourages users to remain informed and engaged with ongoing discussions rather than directly motivating them to disseminate information.

From a digital reading literacy perspective, the study highlights the importance of critical information-evaluation skills in contemporary digital environments. Although FoMO may increase users' exposure to rapidly circulating content, digital literacy can function as a protective factor that reduces the likelihood of disseminating unverified political information. Therefore, strengthening digital reading literacy remains essential for promoting responsible information practices and supporting informed participation in digital society.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) on the dissemination of unverified political information among social media users, with particular attention to the role of digital reading literacy. The findings reveal that respondents demonstrate high levels of information consumption, as reflected in their frequent engagement with social media platforms to access the latest news, viral topics, and ongoing public discussions. TikTok and

Instagram emerged as the dominant platforms, while most respondents reported spending between four and six hours per day on social media.

The results further indicate that respondents exhibit moderate FoMO characteristics. FoMO is primarily reflected through curiosity about current issues and a desire to remain informed about topics discussed by others. However, respondents generally reported low levels of social anxiety related to being left behind or perceived as less informed. This suggests that FoMO among the participants functions more as a motivation to stay updated rather than a source of significant psychological pressure.

Regarding information dissemination behavior, the findings show that respondents tend to consume information more actively than they disseminate it. Most participants did not strongly agree that they regularly share information, repost content, or distribute information to gain social recognition. This indicates that although FoMO encourages individuals to monitor information continuously, it does not necessarily lead directly to the dissemination of information. Nevertheless, the study suggests that FoMO may indirectly contribute to the circulation of unverified political information by increasing users' exposure to rapidly spreading content on social media. As individuals spend more time monitoring trends, discussions, and viral issues, they become more likely to encounter political information that has not been fully verified. In this context, digital reading literacy plays a crucial role in helping users evaluate, verify, and critically assess information before accepting or sharing it.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening digital reading literacy among social media users. The ability to critically evaluate information is essential for minimizing the risks associated with misinformation and promoting responsible information practices in contemporary digital environments. Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed.

First, educational institutions should strengthen digital reading literacy programs to equip students with the skills needed to evaluate information critically, verify sources, and identify misleading or unverified content. Such competencies are increasingly important in an era characterized by rapid information circulation and widespread social media use.

Second, social media users should be encouraged to adopt more responsible information practices by verifying information before sharing it with others. Increasing awareness of misinformation and fact-checking strategies may help reduce the spread of unverified political information online.

Third, future researchers are encouraged to explore the relationship between FoMO, digital literacy, and information dissemination using larger and more diverse samples. Future studies may also employ correlational or regression analyses to examine the strength of the relationships among these variables and investigate additional factors that may influence the dissemination of unverified information in digital environments.

Finally, policymakers and educators should collaborate in promoting media literacy initiatives that foster critical thinking and responsible digital citizenship. Such efforts may contribute to creating healthier information ecosystems and reducing the negative effects of misinformation in society.

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