

Always Checking: Constant Connectivity and Fear of Missing Out among Generation Z Social Media Users

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Constant Connectivity; Fear of Missing Out; Social Media Use; Digital Anxiety; Generation Z

Social media's rapid proliferation has engendered a pervasive culture of constant connectivity, particularly among Generation Z—digital natives immersed in hyper-connected environments from birth. Although perpetual online presence facilitates instantaneous communication and information access, it simultaneously precipitates psychological distress, including fear of missing out and digital anxiety. This study rigorously examines the causal relationship between constant connectivity and FOMO among Generation Z social media users, addressing a critical gap in understanding the emotional toll of digital nativity. A quantitative survey of 130 university students in Indonesia, was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling, which robustly delineates structural paths and causal influences among latent constructs. Empirical results unequivocally confirm that constant connectivity exerts a significant positive effect on FOMO, with path coefficients indicating strong predictive power. A substantial majority (more than 70%) of respondents exhibited compulsive notification-checking and persistent online vigilance—emblematic of an entrenched "always-on" digital imperative. Correspondingly, prevalent reports of acute anxiety arising from disconnection or missing peer updates substantiate heightened emotional vulnerability. These findings compellingly demonstrate how unrelenting connectivity pressures amplify FOMO, eroding psychological well-being and distorting social perceptions. From a communication vantage point, this illuminates the transformative—and often maladaptive—role of digital platforms in reshaping Generation Z's behavioral norms and affective responses. By furnishing novel empirical evidence on these dynamics, the study advances digital communication scholarship and urgently advocates evidence-based interventions to foster healthier, more balanced social media engagement. Furthermore, the study provides a strategic framework for developers and policymakers to mitigate the deleterious psychological effects inherent in current platform design architectures. Future research should investigate the long-term cognitive implications of these habitual engagement patterns, particularly regarding degradation of attention span and sleep quality.

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital communication technologies has transformed how individuals interact and maintain social relationships. Social media platforms have become central to everyday life, particularly among Generation Z, who are considered digital natives and have been exposed to technology from an early age (Auxier & Anderson, 2021; Twenge, 2019). These platforms enable users to communicate instantly, express themselves, and maintain social networks in real time.

However, alongside these benefits, digital communication has introduced new psychological challenges. One emerging phenomenon is constant connectivity, defined as the continuous engagement with digital platforms and the persistent need to remain online (Vorderer et al., 2018).

This condition reflects a shift in communication norms, where individuals feel compelled to respond quickly and remain socially visible.

This continuous connectivity is closely associated with the concept of fear of missing out (FoMO), which refers to the anxiety that others may be having rewarding experiences without one's involvement (Przybylski et al., 2013). Recent studies indicate that frequent social media use increases exposure to social comparison and external validation, which can intensify FoMO and negatively affect psychological well-being (Beyens et al., 2020; Dhir et al., 2021).

Generation Z is particularly vulnerable to these effects. Their high reliance on digital communication increases their exposure to social pressures and online comparison, making them more susceptible to anxiety and digital stress (Lim et al., 2023). In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, these pressures may be amplified due to the importance of social belonging and group interaction.

Despite growing interest in digital behavior, empirical studies examining the relationship between constant connectivity and FoMO in non-Western contexts remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of constant connectivity on FoMO among Generation Z in Indonesia.

The last decade has seen digital communication become increasingly “ambient”—present not only when people intentionally go online, but also continuously in the background through smartphones, push notifications, and algorithmically curated feeds. In Indonesia, this always-available digital environment is now the norm at population scale. DataReportal’s *Digital 2026: Indonesia* report (published late 2025) estimates that Indonesia had 230 million internet users (about 80.5% of the population) and 180 million social media user identities (about 62.9% of the population) in late 2025, illustrating both high connectivity and the breadth of social media reach across everyday life (Digital 2026: Indonesia DataReportal Global Digital Insights)

This context is particularly salient for Generation Z, a cohort widely defined (in Pew Research Center’s generational cutoff) as those born from 1997 onward. As “mobile-first” social media users, Gen Z commonly integrates social platforms into identity expression, peer interaction, entertainment, and information seeking—sometimes with limited separation between online presence and social belonging. Contemporary connectivity therefore does not merely increase communication volume; it can also shift the *psychological conditions* under which social life is experienced, especially for cohorts whose adolescence and emerging adulthood unfolded inside social media ecosystems (Digital 2026: Indonesia DataReportal Global Digital Insights).

In the Indonesia context, collectivist cultural values may further reinforce the need to stay connected and socially engaged, thereby increasing vulnerability to FoMO (Sari&Prasetyo, 2022).

“Constant connectivity” is increasingly used in communication research to describe a *condition* rather than a single behavior: people are reachable, updated, and socially monitored across time, including moments that used to be offline or private. A closely related framing is the “Permanently Online, Permanently Connected (POPC)” perspective, which positions ubiquitous mobile internet as a paradigm shift reshaping communication patterns, attention, and social expectations (Vorderer, et.al, 2017). Complementing this, sociological work characterizes “digital hyperconnectivity” as a defining feature of contemporary life that transforms social interaction and the self, including how selves are represented and governed within sociotechnical systems (Brubarker, 2020).

Importantly, constant connectivity is not only about *time spent* on devices; it also involves continuous potential access (and the felt obligation to remain responsive), which can make disconnection increasingly difficult. Experimental evidence supports the idea that “status quo” constant connection can carry measurable psychological costs. A large preregistered randomized controlled trial reported in *PNAS Nexus* found causal evidence that blocking mobile internet access for two weeks reduced smartphone use and improved well-being and sustained attention, explicitly framing “constant connection to the internet” as a potentially detrimental baseline for time use, cognitive functioning, and well-being (Castelo, et.al, 2025). The same paper synthesizes prior experimental evidence that smartphone notifications can impair performance on attention-demanding tasks and that even smartphone presence can sometimes undermine attention or working memory (with meta-analyses indicating small but significant “mere presence” effects). These

findings are consistent with the idea that constant connectivity produces frequent attentional switching and intermittent interruptions—conditions that may amplify anxieties about missing updates and reinforce habitual checking.

Within this connectivity ecology, fear of missing out (FoMO) has become one of the most widely studied psychological constructs linking social media engagement to subjective distress. Przybylski and colleagues introduced FoMO as a motivational-emotional phenomenon tied to the concern that one is absent from rewarding experiences happening to others, and they positioned FoMO as a pathway that helps explain why some individuals are particularly drawn to social media engagement (Przybylski, et.al, 2013). Their conceptual argument is frequently connected to Self-Determination Theory (SDT): when basic psychological needs (e.g., relatedness, competence, autonomy) are not sufficiently satisfied, individuals may become more prone to FoMO and thereby seek compensatory connection or validation through social media (Przybylski, et.al, 2013).

Recent research has further refined FoMO measurement by emphasizing that FoMO is not only “worry about missing out,” but may also include a *connectivity-oriented component*. For example, an open-access study in the *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* tested a two-factor FoMO model consisting of “apprehension of missing out” and “constant connection desire,” finding that the two-factor model fit better than a one-factor model and that problematic social media use was more strongly correlated with the constant connection desire factor (Elhay&Bond, 2025). This distinction is especially relevant for studies like Always Checking, because “constant connectivity” as a behavioral and cultural condition directly resonates with FoMO’s connection-desire dimension: the perceived need to remain continuously linked to social networks to avoid being left out.

The empirical literature consistently shows that FoMO is entangled with patterns of frequent social media engagement, compulsive checking, and problematic use. At the synthesis level, a systematic literature review in *Internet Research* argues that FoMO research has expanded rapidly and highlights the need for stronger conceptual integration, broader theoretical lenses, and more attention to cultural variation in how FoMO is experienced and operationalized (Tandon, et.al, 2021). This call for cross-cultural and context-sensitive research directly supports studying Gen Z FoMO in emerging, high-growth digital contexts such as Indonesia. In an emerging, highly connected Indonesian urban context, to what extent does constant connectivity function as a psychological-behavioral driver of FoMO among Gen Z social media users?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a survey method to examine the relationship between constant connectivity and FoMO.

2.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 130 university students in Indonesia, representing Generation Z. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who actively use social media.

2.3 Measures

Constant connectivity was measured using indicators related to frequency of internet use, daily social media use, and compulsive checking behavior. FoMO was measured using indicators related to anxiety when disconnected and dependence on social validation.

All items were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

2.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The analysis included evaluation of the measurement model (validity and reliability) and structural model (hypothesis testing).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Measurement Model

Table 1. Measurement Model (Reliability & Validity)

Construct	Indicator	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Constant Connectivity	X1	0.880	0.676	0.860	0.755
	X2	0.858			
Fear of Missing Out	X3	0.682	0.628	0.798	0.570
	X4	0.824			
	X5	0.751			

The measurement model demonstrated acceptable validity and reliability. All indicator loadings exceeded 0.60, with most above 0.70. Composite reliability values were above 0.70, and AVE values exceeded 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Construct	Constant Connectivity	FoMO
Constant Connectivity	-	
Fear of Missing Out	0.498	-

Discriminant validity was confirmed using the HTMT criterion (0.498), which is below the recommended threshold of 0.90.

3.2 Structural Model

Table 3. Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	f ²	Result
H1	CC → FoMO	0.334	4.399	0.000	0.126	Supported

The structural model results indicate that constant connectivity has a positive and significant effect on FoMO ($\beta = 0.334$, $t = 4.399$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 4. Coefficient of Determination

Endogenous Variable	R ²
Fear of Missing Out	0.112

The R² value for FoMO is 0.112, indicating that constant connectivity explains 11.2% of the variance in FoMO. The effect size ($f^2 = 0.126$) suggests a small to moderate effect.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the relationship between constant connectivity and fear of missing out (FoMO) among Generation Z. The results indicate that constant connectivity has a positive and statistically significant effect on FoMO, suggesting that individuals who are more frequently engaged with digital platforms are more likely to experience anxiety related to missing out on social interactions and information. This heightened engagement, often driven by the curated content prevalent on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, can intensify FoMO, leading to lower self-esteem and increased anxiety among university students (Elsayed, 2025; Graham & Lews, 2025).

One of the key interpretations of this finding is that constant connectivity has evolved from a mere technological affordance into a social norm. Generation Z, having grown up in a digitally saturated environment, perceives continuous online presence as an expected and even necessary aspect of social participation. This aligns with Vorderer et al. (2018), who describe constant connectivity as a condition where individuals feel obligated to remain accessible and responsive in digital environments. This persistent obligation can foster an environment where individuals constantly compare their experiences with others, exacerbating feelings of inadequacy and the fear of being excluded from rewarding experiences (Elsayed, 2025).

This result supports previous research showing that increased social media use intensifies social comparison and reliance on external validation (Beyens et al., 2020; Dhir et al., 2021). Constant connectivity exposes individuals to continuous updates about others's activities, which may trigger feelings of exclusion and inadequacy.

However, the relatively low R^2 value suggest that constant connectivity is not the sole determinant of FoMO. Other factors, such as personality traits, self-esteem, and social environment, may also play significant roles (Lim et al., 2023).

In this context, behaviors such as frequently checking notifications, responding immediately to messages, and continuously monitoring social media updates are not only habitual but also socially reinforced. The high prevalence of notification-checking behavior observed in this study reflects an internalized expectation to remain constantly informed and engaged. This behavioral pattern indicates that connectivity is no longer optional but embedded within daily routines. Furthermore, the pervasive nature of smartphones and ubiquitous internet access facilitate continuous social comparisons, amplifying the pressure to remain engaged in rewarding experiences and contributing to increased FoMO (Littman-Ovadia & Russo-Netzer, 2024). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among university students, who are in a critical developmental period marked by new social environments and a propensity for risky behaviors, making them more susceptible to smartphone addiction and the accompanying fear of missing out (Büyükbayraktar, 2020).

The significant relationship between constant connectivity and FoMO can be explained through several psychological mechanisms. First, continuous exposure to social media content increases opportunities for social comparison. Individuals are constantly presented with curated representations of others' lives, which often highlight positive experiences and achievements. This exposure can create a perception that others are more socially active or successful, thereby triggering feelings of inadequacy and exclusion. This aligns with the concept of FoMO as an apprehension that others are having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, thereby fostering a desire to stay continually connected (Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2023; Yao et al., 2025).

Second, constant connectivity reinforces the need for external validation. Social media platforms are designed to provide immediate feedback through likes, comments, and shares. As individuals become accustomed to these forms of validation, their sense of self-worth may become increasingly dependent on digital interactions. This dependence contributes to FoMO, as individuals fear losing visibility or relevance within their social networks. The constant influx of information and the pressure to stay updated on current trends and social events can create a sense of urgency and anxiety, contributing to the fear of missing out (Almoallim & Sas, 2023).

This perpetual engagement is further exacerbated by the omnipresent nature of smartphones, which act as a constant conduit to social information, reinforcing the compulsion to remain updated on others' activities (Ceobanu et al., 2023; Lee, 2021).

Third, the anticipation of social interaction plays a critical role. The expectation that something important might occur at any moment creates a state of heightened alertness. This anticipation leads individuals to remain continuously connected, as disconnecting may result in missing out on meaningful social opportunities. This aligns with the conceptualization of FoMO as a form of anticipatory anxiety. This intrinsic link between constant digital engagement and the apprehension of social exclusion underscores the multifaceted nature of FoMO, rooting it in both psychological predispositions and technological affordances (Du et al., 2024; Littman-Ovadia & Russo-Netzer, 2024).

Despite the significant relationship identified in this study, the relatively low R^2 value (0.112) indicates that constant connectivity explains only a small portion of the variance in FoMO. This suggests that FoMO is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a range of psychological and social factors beyond digital behavior. For instance, individual differences such as personality traits, levels of self-esteem, and the "need to belong" may also significantly contribute to the development and intensity of FoMO, indicating a need for a more holistic explanatory framework (Hattingh et al., 2022; Holte et al., 2024).

Previous research highlights the importance of individual differences such as personality traits, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. For example, individuals with lower self-esteem or higher levels of neuroticism may be more prone to experiencing FoMO. Similarly, those who rely heavily on social comparison as a means of self-evaluation may be more vulnerable to anxiety arising from perceived social exclusion. This suggests that a comprehensive understanding of FoMO requires considering how these individual psychological factors interact with the pervasive nature of constant connectivity and social media platforms (ÖZCAN & KOÇ, 2022).

In addition, environmental factors such as peer influence and cultural expectations play a significant role. In collectivist societies, where social belonging and group harmony are highly valued, individuals may feel increased pressure to remain connected and engaged with their social networks. This cultural dimension may amplify the effects of constant connectivity on FoMO, as individuals strive to maintain their social presence and avoid being perceived as disengaged.

The Indonesian context provides a unique perspective on the relationship between constant connectivity and FoMO. As a collectivist society, Indonesia places strong emphasis on social relationships and community belonging. This cultural orientation may intensify the psychological impact of digital connectivity, as individuals feel obligated to maintain continuous interaction with their social groups (Hofstede, 2011; Triandis, 2018; Putri et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the rapid adoption of digital technology in Indonesia has created an environment where online and offline social interactions are increasingly intertwined. For Generation Z, social media serves as a primary platform for communication, identity expression, and social validation (Auxier & Anderson, 2021; Przybylski et al., 2013; Buglass et al., 2017). This integration of digital and social life may increase the salience of FoMO, as individuals perceive online engagement as directly linked to their social standing (Beyens et al., 2016; Blackwell et al., 2017; Dhir et al., 2021).

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research indicating that FoMO is more pronounced in contexts where social connectivity is highly valued. The pressure to remain active and visible in digital spaces may lead to increased anxiety and reduced psychological well-being (Elhai et al., 2020; Rozgonjuk et al., 2020; Fioravanti et al., 2021).

The results of this study have important implications for digital well-being. The positive relationship between constant connectivity and FoMO suggests that excessive engagement with digital platforms may have unintended psychological consequences. While social media provides opportunities for connection and self-expression, it may also contribute to stress, anxiety, and reduced satisfaction with real-life interactions (Elhai et al., 2020; Dhir et al., 2021; Kross et al., 2021).

Promoting balanced digital usage is therefore essential. Individuals should be encouraged to develop healthy boundaries around technology use, such as limiting screen time, reducing notification frequency, and engaging in offline activities (Twenge et al., 2019; Montag & Elhai, 2020; Radesky et al., 2022). Educational initiatives that raise awareness about the psychological effects of constant connectivity may also be beneficial (OECD, 2021; World Health Organization, 2021).

From a design perspective, social media platforms could consider implementing features that support digital well-being, such as usage tracking, customizable notification settings, and prompts encouraging users to take breaks. These interventions may help mitigate the negative effects associated with constant connectivity (Alter, 2017; Harris, 2020; Google Digital Wellbeing Team, 2022).

Given the limitations of this study, several directions for future research can be identified. First, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term effects of constant connectivity on psychological well-being. Such studies would provide a deeper understanding of how digital behaviors evolve over time and their cumulative impact on mental health.

Second, future research should incorporate additional variables to improve the explanatory power of the model. Factors such as self-esteem, social comparison, and emotional regulation could provide a more comprehensive understanding of FoMO.

Third, qualitative approaches could complement quantitative findings by exploring individuals' subjective experiences of constant connectivity and FoMO. This would provide richer insights into the emotional and social dynamics underlying digital behavior.

Finally, cross-cultural studies would be valuable in examining how cultural differences influence the relationship between connectivity and FoMO. Comparing individualistic and collectivist societies could reveal important variations in how digital technologies are experienced and interpreted.

4. Conclusion

The research results show that Constant Connectivity has a positive and significant effect on Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). This means that the higher the intensity of individuals in using the internet and social media continuously, the higher the level of anxiety individuals will have about missing out on information or social interactions.

This finding is in line with the theory that high digital connectivity increases exposure to the social activities of others. This exposure can trigger social comparison and feelings of fear of missing out (FoMO). However, the relatively low R-Square value indicates that Constant Connectivity is not the only factor influencing FoMO. There are other factors at play as well, such as individual personality, the need for social recognition, and social pressure from the environment.

Thus, although Constant Connectivity has been proven to have a significant effect on FoMO, its contribution is still limited, indicating the need for further research by incorporating additional variables to obtain a more comprehensive model. This study shows that constant connectivity has a positive and significant effect on FoMO among Generation Z. Although the effect is statistically significant, its explanatory power is limited, indicating the need for further research by incorporating additional variables.

The findings highlight the importance of promoting balanced digital engagement to support psychological well-being. Future research should explore longitudinal effects and include broader psychological and social variables.

5. References

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