

# Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Adolescent Self-Esteem in the Digital Age: A Systematic Literature Review

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## **Abstract**

*The digital era has brought significant changes to adolescents' lives, including the emergence of the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) phenomenon increasingly linked to self-esteem. This study is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) aimed at analyzing the relationship between FoMO and adolescent self-esteem in the digital era, identifying contributing psychological factors, and formulating evidence-based implications for psychological and educational interventions. Following the PRISMA protocol, an initial screening of over 100 articles was conducted across Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar databases, yielding eight national journal articles published between 2021 and 2026 that met the established inclusion criteria, namely empirical design, adolescent or young adult populations, and relevance to social media contexts. Results show that the relationship between FoMO and self-esteem is complex: most studies found a negative association in which higher self-esteem suppresses FoMO by fulfilling intrinsic psychological needs, while some found a positive relationship driven by social enhancement motivation. Supporting factors including life satisfaction, social connectedness, self-compassion, and self-control also play significant moderating and mediating roles. Psychoeducation interventions proved effective in raising adolescent awareness significantly. This SLR concludes that structured school-based programs integrating self-esteem reinforcement, self-compassion training through mindfulness practices, digital self-control skills, and authentic social engagement are strategic approaches to reducing FoMO and maintaining adolescent mental health in the digital era.*

**Keywords:** *Fear of Missing Out, Self-Esteem, Adolescents, Social Media, Systematic Literature Review*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The rapid development of information and communication technology in the 21st century has fundamentally changed the way adolescents interact, form their self-identity, and assess their self-worth. Social media, as the main product of this digital revolution, has now permeated almost all aspects of adolescent life. Based on data released by We Are Social (2024), more than 90% of Indonesian teenagers use social media every day, with an average duration of use reaching seven to nine hours per day. This extremely high intensity of exposure not only brings benefits in terms of connectivity and access to information, but also gives rise to various new psychological phenomena that need serious attention from academics, education practitioners, and policy makers.

One of the most prominent psychological phenomena in the digital age is *Fear of Missing Out* (FoMO), which is an anxiety condition that arises when an individual feels that another person is having a more meaningful and enjoyable experience without them, accompanied by a strong urge to stay connected online. In the context of social media, this condition is further exacerbated by the platform's

algorithm that constantly displays viral content in the form of ideal lives, extraordinary achievements, and interesting moments belonging to others. As a consequence, the illusion is created that other people's lives are always better and more meaningful, so that adolescents who are in the search for identity phase are encouraged to engage in unhealthy and sustained social comparisons (Przybylski et al., 2013).

On the other hand, self-esteem is one of the most crucial psychological constructs in adolescent development. Self-esteem is defined as the positive or negative assessment that an individual has of himself or herself as a whole (Rosenberg, 1965). High self-esteem is closely related to emotional stability, better self-regulation skills, and a more optimal level of psychological well-being. In contrast, low self-esteem increases susceptibility to social anxiety, depression, and various other psychological disorders. In the context of the digital era, adolescents' self-esteem is now increasingly influenced by social interactions that occur on social media platforms, including responses in the form of likes, comments, and the number of followers which are new benchmarks for self-esteem (Moksnes & Reidunsdatter, 2019).

Various studies have attempted to examine the link between FoMO and adolescent self-esteem, but the findings are still diverse and not always consistent. There is empirical evidence to suggest that low self-esteem is a major predictor of increased FoMO, as individuals with negative self-judgments tend to seek external validation through social media excessively (Walangitan & Dewi, 2023; Priyono et al., 2025; Gumilar & Akbar, 2026). However, there is also evidence that points in the opposite direction, namely individuals with high self-esteem actually experience higher FoMO because they are motivated by motivation to maintain their image in the social environment. This difference indicates that the psychological mechanisms linking FoMO and self-esteem are complex and influenced by a variety of other variables that need to be identified more systematically (Farida et al., 2021; Sarwili et al., 2025).

A number of psychological variables have been shown to play a significant role in the dynamics of the relationship between FoMO and self-esteem, including life satisfaction, relatedness, *self-compassion*, and *self-control*. It is known that low life satisfaction increases vulnerability to FoMO through a decrease in the fulfillment of basic psychological needs (Przybylski et al., 2013). Social connectedness that is not authentically fulfilled in the real world also encourages individuals to seek compensation through superficial digital interactions, thus further exacerbating FoMO (Maulana et al., 2025). Meanwhile, *self-compassion* has been shown to play a protective role as a protective factor that stabilizes self-esteem in the midst of digital pressure (Sarwili et al., 2025), and *self-control* is an effective internal mechanism in reducing compulsive behavior in social media use. These four variables form a complex network of psychological relationships in adolescents' digital lives (Priyono et al., 2025).

Although studies on FoMO and adolescent self-esteem are growing, several specific gaps remain unaddressed. First, no systematic review has yet integrated the contradictory findings regarding the direction of the FoMO self-esteem relationship, which varies from negative to positive across studies, into a unified explanatory framework. Second, the roles of mediating and moderating variables such as life satisfaction, social connectedness, self-compassion, and self-control in the FoMO–self-esteem dynamic have been examined individually but never synthesized collectively. Third, the majority of existing studies have focused on Western populations, whereas Indonesia's distinctly collectivist culture, high social affiliation norms, and rapid digital penetration create a socio-cultural context that may produce fundamentally different psychological dynamics. Fourth, no evidence-based intervention framework specifically addressing FoMO and self-esteem among Indonesian adolescents has been formulated from a comprehensive synthesis of available literature. To address these gaps, this study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to: (1) systematically map the relationship

between FoMO and adolescent self-esteem based on available empirical evidence; (2) identify psychological variables that moderate or mediate this relationship; and (3) formulate practical implications for developing targeted, evidence-based interventions within the Indonesian educational and psychological context.

## METHODS

This study uses *the Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* design with reference to the PRISMA (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses*) guide. The SLR approach was chosen because it allows for a systematic, transparent, and replicable synthesis of a set of relevant literature, resulting in stronger evidence-based conclusions than a typical narrative review (Kitchenham, 2004). The literature search process was carried out through two main electronic databases, namely Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar, using the keywords: "*Fear of Missing Out*", "*FoMO*", "*self-esteem*", "*self-esteem*", "*adolescent*", along with their combinations in Indonesian and English.

The inclusion criteria set include four main aspects, namely: (1) journal articles published in the period 2021 to 2026; (2) discuss FoMO variables and/or self-esteem in adolescent or early adult populations; (3) published in indexed national or international journals; and (4) using structured research methods, both quantitative, qualitative, and systematic literature studies. On the other hand, articles that do not contain empirical data or systematic analysis, are not relevant to the social media context, as well as duplicate articles, are excluded from the selection process. The selection is carried out in stages according to the PRISMA procedure, starting from filtering based on titles and abstracts, then continuing with the reading of the full text to ensure suitability with the study objectives that have been set.

After going through all stages of PRISMA selection, eight (8) articles were obtained that met the inclusion criteria and were suitable for synthesis. Data extraction was carried out in a structured manner on the following elements in each article: the identity of the author and the year of publication, the design and method of the research, the characteristics and number of samples, the variables studied, the measurement instruments, and the main findings reported. The methodological quality of each article is critically evaluated before being included in the synthesis process, taking into account aspects of internal validity, instrument reliability, analytical accuracy, and relevance of findings. The synthesis was carried out in a narrative-thematic manner considering the heterogeneity of design and research methods between studies which did not allow for quantitative meta-analysis. The entire process is carried out by paying attention to the principles of transparency, objectivity, and reproducibility.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Characteristics of Included Studies*

The eight articles that passed the selection process cover publications from 2021 to 2026, consisting of seven quantitative studies and one descriptive qualitative study based on literature studies. The population studied was diverse, ranging from junior high school students, vocational school students, college students, to early adults, with an age range of 12 to 25 years and a sample number ranging from 70 to 400 respondents. The main variables studied included FoMO, *self-esteem*, life satisfaction, *self-control*, *self-compassion*, social connectedness, and *psychological well-being*. A complete description of the characteristics of each study is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Characteristics of Articles Reviewed in SLR**

Yes	Author & Year	Method	Sample	Variable	Key Findings
1	Farida et al. (2021)	Quantitative correlational	384 teenagers (12–23 yrs), Surabaya	Self-esteem, life satisfaction, FoMO	Positive relationship of self-esteem → FoMO; negative relationship of life satisfaction → FoMO
2	Untitled & Goddess (2023)	Quantitative correlation + mediation	385 early adults (18–25 yrs)	Self-esteem, life satisfaction, FoMO	Self-esteem mediates the hub. life satisfaction → FoMO; self-esteem (–) FoMO ( $r=-0.441$ )
3	Priyono et al. (2025)	Quantitative multiple regression	377 students Unsoed	Self-control, self-esteem, FoMO	Self-control and self-esteem have a significant effect (–) on FoMO; simultaneous contribution of 2%
4	Gumilar & Akbar (2026)	Pearson's quantitative correlation	80 students of SMK XII, Bandung	Self-esteem, FoMO, Psychological Well-Being	Self-esteem (+) PCB ( $r=0.74$ ); FoMO (–) PWB ( $r=-0.87$ ); self-esteem (–) FoMO ( $r=-0.66$ )
5	Sarwili et al. (2025)	Cross-sectional, Spearman	70 students of SMPN 37 Jakarta	FoMO, self-compassion, self-esteem	FoMO (+) self-esteem ( $r=0.25$ ); self-compassion (+) self-esteem ( $r=0.27$ )
6	Maulana et al. (2025)	Quantitative Spearman correlation	400 adolescents (14–21 yrs), Bekasi	Relatedness, FoMO	Social connectedness (+) FoMO ( $r_s=0.45$ ); 75% of samples low linkage
7	Hutasuhut et al. (2025)	Psychoeducation (pre-post test)	Students of Alwashliyah High School, Medan	Psychoeducation, FoMO, mental health	FoMO comprehension increased from 30% → 88% after psychoeducation; effective as a preventive intervention
8	Fitrialis et al. (2024)	Qualitative descriptive literature study	Literature review (multiple)	The impact of social media, FoMO, self-esteem	Social media triggers FoMO, anxiety, depression; Low self-esteem as a major risk factor

Source: Author's Analysis Results, 2026

### ***The Relationship of FoMO and Self-Esteem: Negative and Positive Patterns***

The results of the synthesis of eight articles showed that the relationship between FoMO and adolescent self-esteem was complex, non-linear, and not always consistent between studies. In general, there are two opposing patterns of findings that are supported by strong empirical evidence.

A pattern of negative relationships in which high self-esteem is associated with lower FoMO is a dominant finding in the literature reviewed. In a study of 80 vocational school students in Bandung, a strong negative correlation was found between self-esteem and FoMO ( $r = -0.658$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) (Gumilar & Akbar, 2026). Similar findings were also obtained in a study involving 385 early adults, which reported a significant negative association between self-esteem and FoMO ( $r = -0.441$ ), while proving that self-esteem functions as a mediator in the relationship between life satisfaction and FoMO (Walangitan & Dewi, 2023). Furthermore, the results of the regression test on 377 students in Purwokerto revealed that each increase in one unit of self-esteem significantly decreased FoMO by 0.046 units ( $t = -2.720$ ;  $p = 0.007$ ) (Priyono et al., 2025). The theoretical mechanism behind this pattern can be explained through the framework of *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT): individuals with positive self-esteem have a more stable fulfillment of basic psychological needs, so they are not encouraged to seek external validation excessively through social media. This condition is emphasized by the finding that high self-esteem is also related to better self-control skills in the use of social media (Priyono et al., 2025), so that individuals are not easily trapped in compulsive behavior to monitor the activities of others.

Positive relationship patterns in which high self-esteem is actually associated with higher FoMO were found in different studies. A study of 383 adolescents in Surabaya found a positive correlation between self-esteem and FoMO ( $r = 0.103$ ;  $p = 0.044$ ) (Farida et al., 2021). The same relationship direction was also confirmed through a study on junior high school students in Jakarta who obtained a value of  $r = 0.252$  ( $p = 0.035$ ) (Sarwili et al., 2025). This pattern can be understood from the perspective of *Social Enhancement theory* (Abel et al., 2016): adolescents with high self-esteem are motivated to appear superior to others on social media as a strategy to maintain their self-image, so that increasingly intense engagement on digital platforms actually increases vulnerability to FoMO. The contradiction between these two patterns suggests that the source of self-esteem, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, plays an important role in determining the direction of the relationship. Younger adolescents tend to build self-esteem from the recognition of others on social media (extrinsic), while more mature individuals rely more on internal (intrinsic) values and achievements, and it is these differences that most likely explain the differences in the direction of findings between studies.

### ***Life Satisfaction as an Antecedent and Mediator***

A significant negative relationship between life satisfaction and FoMO has consistently been found in studies of adolescent and early adult populations in Indonesia (Farida et al., 2021; Untitled & Dewi, 2023). Individuals who experience low levels of life satisfaction tend to have deficits in meeting basic psychological needs of *relatability, competence, and autonomy* which ultimately encourages them to seek compensation through social media excessively, thus increasing their vulnerability to FoMO (Przybylski et al., 2013). An important contribution from the mediation study conducted on 385 early adults is the proof that self-esteem functions as a partial mediator in the relationship between life satisfaction and FoMO, with a statistically significant mediating effect (BootCI = 0.040 to 0.162, excluding zero values) (Walangitan & Dewi, 2023). This means that low life satisfaction not only directly increases FoMO, but also does so indirectly by lowering self-esteem first. The implication of these findings is quite important: interventions that only target self-esteem without regard to overall life satisfaction are unlikely to have optimal effects, as the two are intertwined in a chain of psychological causality.

### ***Social Connectedness in FoMO Dynamics***

A paradoxical phenomenon was found in a study of 400 adolescents who were active social media users in Bekasi, namely the existence of a positive and significant relationship between social connectedness (*relatability*) and FoMO ( $r_s = 0.446$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) (Maulana et al., 2025). The higher an individual's need for social connection, the higher the tendency to experience FoMO. This paradox can be understood in the framework of SDT: when the need for connectedness is not authentically met in the real world and most of the respondents in the study (75%) are indeed in the category of low linkness, individuals seek compensation through superficial digital interactions. These virtual interactions do not provide deep emotional satisfaction, leaving individuals trapped in a cycle of compulsive social media use to meet the constant insatiable need for connection. These findings have particular relevance in the context of Indonesian culture that upholds the value of togetherness: the weakening of face-to-face social relations due to urbanization and digitalization has actually exacerbated the condition of FoMO among adolescents.

### ***The Role of Self-Compassion and Self-Control as Protective Factors***

A positive and significant relationship between *self-compassion* and self-esteem was found in a study of 70 junior high school students in Jakarta ( $r = 0.266$ ;  $p = 0.026$ ) (Sarwili et al., 2025). Individuals who have *a high level of self-compassion* are better able to accept their shortcomings without over-judging themselves, so their self-esteem is more stable and less easily affected by intense social comparisons on social media. Furthermore, *self-compassion* acts as a protective factor against the negative impact of FoMO: when individuals face digital pressure and feelings of being left behind, a compassionate attitude towards oneself helps prevent a negative spiral of decreased self-esteem that then exacerbates FoMO. These findings are in line with the results of international research showing that *self-compassion* and *mindfulness-based* interventions are effective in reducing social comparisons and improving adolescent psychological well-being (Einstein et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, the negative and significant influence of *self-control* on FoMO was empirically proven in a study on 377 students of Jenderal Soedirman University ( $t = -2.011$ ;  $p = 0.045$ ), although the contribution was relatively small ( $R^2 = 1.1\%$ ) (Priyono et al., 2025). Good self-control skills allow adolescents to manage the schedule and intensity of social media use consciously, are less easily influenced by impulsive impulses to keep checking on other people's activities, and are better able to prioritize important activities. The small  $R^2$  value indicates that *self-control* is one of many factors contributing to FoMO, so a single reinforcement-based intervention needs to be combined with other multidimensional approaches to be more comprehensive and sustainable.

### ***FoMO in the Perspective of Psychological Well-Being***

A study involving 80 vocational school students in Bandung revealed that FoMO had a very strong negative correlation with *psychological well-being* ( $r = -0.867$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), making it the most dominant risk factor among all the variables studied. In contrast, self-esteem was strongly positively correlated with *psychological well-being* ( $r = 0.740$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), confirming its role as a major protective factor (Gumilar & Akbar, 2026). Referring to the multidimensional model *of psychological well-being* developed by Ryff, high FoMO systematically interferes with the achievement of all six dimensions of well-being—self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal growth because it pushes individuals into a chronic dependence on external validation and destructive social comparisons. These findings underscore that tackling FoMO is not just about reducing social anxiety, but rather about building comprehensive and sustainable psychological functioning.

### ***The Context of Social Media as a FoMO Ecosystem***

A literature review conducted on various scientific sources found that excessive use of social media correlates with various psychological disorders in adolescents, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, sleep disorders, and decreased academic achievement (Fitrialis et al., 2024). FoMO emerged as a central psychological mechanism that linked the intensity of social media use to these various negative impacts. From the perspective of social comparison theory, social media structurally encourages constant and unfavorable comparisons for adolescents: exposure to selectively curated content distorts their perception of the realities of other people's lives. This condition weakens self-esteem while simultaneously increasing FoMO, creating a mutually reinforcing psychological cycle that is difficult to break without structured, evidence-based external intervention.

### ***Psychoeducation as a Preventive Intervention***

Empirical evidence on the effectiveness of school-based psychoeducational interventions was obtained from a program implemented in Medan using an interactive lecture approach, group discussions, simulations, and simple *mindfulness* exercises. The results showed a very significant increase: the proportion of participants who understood the concept of FoMO increased from 30% to 88% after the program took place, while awareness about the impact of social media on mental health increased from 12% to more than 80% (Hutasuhut et al., 2025). The program has proven effective not only in transferring knowledge cognitively, but also in changing participants' perceptions of their ability to control online behavior. These results are consistent with the principles of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT): cognitive restructuring of FoMO is an important prerequisite for sustainable behavior change. This effectiveness also suggests that low-cost, broad-scoped school-based interventions have a great potential impact on adolescent mental health preventive efforts.

### ***Synthesis of Findings and Practical Implications***

Based on a thorough synthesis of eight articles, a conceptual understanding of FoMO dynamics and adolescent self-esteem in the digital era can be built. The two are in a relationship that mutually influences each other: low self-esteem increases vulnerability to FoMO through reliance on external social validation, while high FoMO in turn erodes self-esteem through unhealthy social comparisons. This negative cycle is exacerbated by low life satisfaction, inauthentic social connections, and a lack of *self-control* and *self-compassion*. On the other hand, strong self-esteem, especially those derived from intrinsic value, serve as a protective factor that breaks this cycle, supported by *self-compassion* that stabilizes self-judgment and *self-control* that governs digital behavior in a healthy way.

From these findings, a number of important practical implications were identified. First, it is necessary to develop a school-based self-esteem strengthening program that focuses on building self-value from intrinsic competencies, not from external validation on social media. Second, FoMO interventions need to be multidimensional by integrating self-esteem strengthening, *self-compassion* development, *self-control training*, and fulfilling the needs of authentic social connectedness in an integrated manner. Third, group-based psychoeducation has proven to be effective and efficient as a preventive measure, and needs to be adapted to various school contexts in Indonesia. Fourth, collaboration between counseling guidance teachers, parents, and the community is needed to create a digital social ecosystem that supports adolescent mental health holistically.

## **CONCLUSION**

This systematic study succeeded in synthesizing eight empirical articles that discuss the relationship between FoMO and adolescent self-esteem in the digital era. Based on the results that have

been obtained, four main conclusions can be drawn. First, the relationship between FoMO and adolescent self-esteem is complex and not always unidirectional: most studies find negative associations in which high self-esteem suppresses FoMO through intrinsic psychological need fulfillment mechanisms, but some other studies find positive associations explained by *social enhancement* motivation in individuals with self-esteem that stems from extrinsic recognition.

Second, several psychological variables have been shown to play an important role in the dynamics of FoMO and self-esteem together. Life satisfaction has a negative relationship with FoMO and acts as an antecedent that affects self-esteem. Unfulfilled social connectedness encourages overcompensation in the virtual world and exacerbates FoMO. *Self-compassion* acts as a protective factor that stabilizes self-esteem against digital pressure, while *self-control* functions as a self-regulation mechanism that suppresses compulsive social media use behavior.

Third, FoMO has been shown to be a very strong risk factor for adolescent psychological well-being as a whole, with a substantial negative correlation to all dimensions of *psychological well-being*. On the other hand, self-esteem is the most consistent protective factor in maintaining psychological well-being and suppressing FoMO. Fourth, school-based anti-FoMO psychoeducational interventions have been proven to be effective in significantly increasing adolescent awareness and understanding in a short period of time, emphasizing that education-based preventive approaches are feasible strategies and can be widely implemented in various educational contexts in Indonesia.

## ADVICE

Based on the findings of this study, a number of suggestions can be put forward for various parties. For education and psychology practitioners, it is necessary to develop school-based psychoeducation programs that integrate strengthening self-esteem through the exploration of intrinsic values, developing *self-compassion* through *mindfulness* practice, training *self-control* in the use of social media, and facilitating authentic social connectedness through face-to-face activities. This kind of program needs to be implemented periodically and sustainably so that the resulting changes are lasting. For parents and communities, it is important to actively create a healthy digital social environment for adolescents, including by setting time limits on social media use together and encouraging meaningful face-to-face social activities.

For subsequent researchers, this study identified a number of gaps that needed to be filled, including: (1) the need for longitudinal research to understand the dynamics of changes in FoMO and self-esteem over time; (2) the need for experimental studies with *randomized controlled trial designs* to test the effectiveness of interventions more rigorously; (3) the need for research that integrates the socio-cultural dimensions of Indonesia, including how collectivity values, gender norms, and socio-economic contexts affect the dynamics of FoMO; and (4) the need to expand the scope of research outside Java and big cities so that the picture of this phenomenon is more representative for all regions of Indonesia.

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