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FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO) AMONG FINAL-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has become a pressing psychological concern among university students, especially those in their final academic year who navigate heightened academic pressure and uncertainty about future careers. FoMO refers to a persistent anxiety that others may be experiencing rewarding events without one's participation (Przybylski et al., 2013). This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) synthesizes empirical findings on the relationship between FoMO and self-efficacy and evaluates the moderating role of coping strategies among final-year students. Using PRISMA 2020 guidelines, literature was retrieved from Scopus, ScienceDirect, PubMed, APA PsycNet, and Google Scholar, covering publications from 2013 to 2025. From 178 initial records, 12 studies met the inclusion criteria. Across studies, FoMO consistently demonstrated a negative association with self-efficacy, indicating that higher FoMO predicts lower academic and personal self-efficacy (Abel et al., 2016; Buglass et al., 2017). Coping strategies were also found to moderate this relationship, with adaptive coping reducing the negative effects of FoMO and maladaptive coping intensifying them (Akbari et al., 2021; Yuen et al., 2022). These findings emphasize the need for higher education institutions to develop interventions that strengthen coping skills and self-regulation in digital environments. Implications and recommendations for future research are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Fear of Missing Out, self-efficacy, coping strategies, final-year students, academic stress, digital mental health.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital communication technologies has reshaped how individuals interact and access information. University students, as among the most active users of social media, are increasingly exposed to psychological pressures arising from constant online engagement. Within this context, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has gained substantial attention and is characterized as a persistent worry that others may be enjoying rewarding experiences without one's involvement, often prompting compulsive monitoring of online activity (Przybylski et al., 2013). FoMO has been associated with increases in social anxiety, emotional distress, cognitive disruption, and reductions in academic performance (Abel et al., 2016; Elhai et al., 2020).

Final-year students appear particularly susceptible to FoMO due to the academic and developmental demands of completing theses, preparing for examinations, and making career decisions. Social media exposure amplifies these pressures by displaying peers' achievements in real time, including internships, graduations, and job offers, which intensify comparison and perceived inadequacy (Riordan et al., 2020; Wegmann et al., 2017). Studies have shown that FoMO disrupts concentration, increases procrastination, and contributes to academic difficulties that are especially critical during the final year of study (Pontes et al., 2020; Sutanto & Hapsari, 2023).

Self-efficacy plays a crucial role in mitigating these effects. Based on Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to manage tasks and challenges (Bandura, 1997). Students with higher self-efficacy show stronger academic resilience, better attention regulation, and reduced susceptibility to FoMO-driven distractions (Buglass et al., 2017; Dhir et al., 2018). Conversely, lower self-efficacy increases reliance on external validation, amplifying FoMO.

Coping strategies further shape how FoMO influences self-efficacy. Research indicates that adaptive coping, such as planning and active problem-solving, reduces the psychological strain associated with FoMO, whereas maladaptive coping, such as avoidance and emotional disengagement, reinforces anxiety and academic disruption (Akbari et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2021). Yuen et al. (2022) additionally demonstrate that effective coping can buffer FoMO's negative emotional impact.

Although research interest in FoMO has increased, studies focusing specifically on final-year students remain limited. Moreover, investigations within collectivist contexts, including Indonesia, are scarce despite the cultural emphasis on social belonging that may heighten

FoMO (Rahmawati & Putri, 2023). Therefore, synthesizing evidence on FoMO, self-efficacy, and coping strategies in this population is both timely and necessary.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to integrate empirical findings on the relationship between FoMO and self-efficacy and to examine the moderating role of coping strategies among final-year university students. The SLR method enables comprehensive mapping of existing evidence and identification of research gaps, following recommendations by Kitchenham and Charters (2007) and Snyder (2019). The review adhered to PRISMA 2020 standards to ensure transparency, systematic reporting, and methodological rigor (Page et al., 2021).

2.2 Literature Search Strategy

A structured literature search was conducted across five academic databases: Scopus, ScienceDirect, PubMed, APA PsycNet, and Google Scholar. The search encompassed publications ranging from 2013, when FoMO was first formally conceptualized, to February 2025.

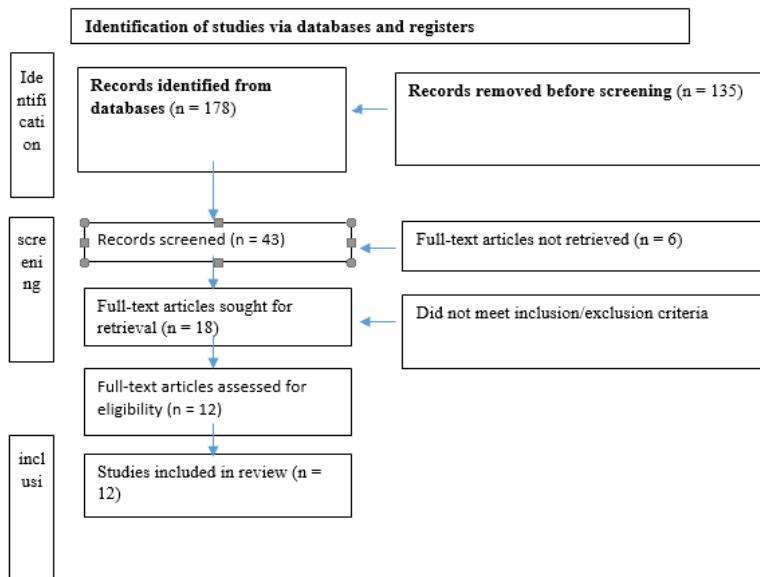


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram

2.3 Data Extraction and Analysis

Data extracted from each study included author information, publication year, country of study, sample details, research design and measurement instruments, variable relationships,

and major findings. Thematic synthesis was used to identify patterns in how FoMO correlates with self-efficacy and how coping strategies influence the strength and direction of this relationship (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The consistency of effect directions and the significance of moderating interactions were examined across studies.

3. RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

3.1 Synthesis of Key Findings

The synthesis of the twelve empirical articles that met the inclusion criteria reveals a consistent pattern concerning the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), self-efficacy, and coping strategies among final-year university students. The evidence indicates a significant negative association between FoMO and self-efficacy. Most studies show that higher levels of FoMO correspond with lower levels of perceived capability. Abel et al. (2016) found that FoMO disrupts academic concentration and reduces students' perceptions of their own competence. Buglass et al. (2017) reported that students with high digital self-efficacy maintain stronger control over their social media behaviors and experience lower FoMO. Dhir et al. (2018) noted that low self-esteem and low self-efficacy increase vulnerability to FoMO, as individuals rely more heavily on external validation. In the Indonesian context, Sutanto and Hapsari (2023) found that final-year students with intensive social media use experience greater FoMO as well as reduced confidence in their thesis completion abilities.

FoMO appears to influence self-efficacy through mechanisms of negative social comparison (Wegmann et al., 2017) and through academic distraction and procrastination (Riordan et al., 2020; Pontes et al., 2020). Students who perceive themselves as falling behind their peers experience diminished belief in their ability to meet academic demands.

3.2 Coping Strategies as a Moderating Variable

Five studies demonstrate that coping strategies function as a moderating variable that can either weaken or strengthen the relationship between FoMO and self-efficacy. Akbari et al. (2021) found that problem-focused coping reduces the psychological impact of FoMO on academic stress. In contrast, Beyens et al. (2016) and Rogers et al. (2021) observed that avoidance-based coping worsens FoMO's effects and increases anxiety. Yuen et al. (2022) showed that adaptive coping strategies can weaken the negative association between FoMO and well-being. Li et al. (2023) further demonstrated that mindfulness-based coping enhances resilience and strengthens self-regulation.

In summary, FoMO accompanied by maladaptive coping results in a stronger decline in self-efficacy, whereas FoMO accompanied by adaptive coping produces a weaker decline. These findings support the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which argues that the impact of stress is shaped not by the situation itself but by individuals' interpretations and coping capacities.

3.3 DISCUSSION

The findings identify FoMO as a socio-digital psychological stressor that affects academic functioning among final-year students. FoMO generates social pressure by amplifying peer comparisons, disrupting cognitive processes, and undermining self-regulation (Elhai et al., 2020). This is consistent with Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which states that individuals evaluate themselves based on comparisons with others, particularly when their academic identity is unstable or vulnerable.

FoMO as a Psychological Stressor in the Digital Era

FoMO functions as a digital-era stressor that heightens academic and emotional strain among final-year students. Continuous exposure to peers' achievements, career milestones, and academic progress amplifies feelings of inadequacy, reduces academic focus, and increases perceived pressures to keep up. The increasingly digital nature of academic and social interactions intensifies these effects, contributing to greater distraction and emotional dysregulation.

The Protective Role of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy emerges as a central psychological resource that shapes how students evaluate and respond to FoMO. According to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997), self-efficacy influences how individuals interpret stress and regulate their behavior in demanding situations. Students with high self-efficacy maintain stronger perceptions of control and are better able to sustain academic focus despite digital pressures. Students with low self-efficacy, however, tend to turn to social media as an emotional escape, reinforcing cycles of dependency and intensifying FoMO.

Moderating Role of Coping Strategies

Coping strategies consistently appear as a key factor explaining why students with similar FoMO levels may differ in academic outcomes. Adaptive coping strategies—such as problem solving, planning, and seeking social support—strengthen resilience and improve students'

ability to manage FoMO-related stress. In contrast, maladaptive strategies—such as avoidance, denial, withdrawal, or excessive digital escape—intensify emotional and academic difficulties. These distinctions illustrate how coping moderates the influence of FoMO on self-efficacy.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The theoretical contributions of this review involve integrating Social Cognitive Theory and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping into the study of academic FoMO, emphasizing that FoMO is not merely a social media phenomenon but a broader issue of self-regulation and cognitive appraisal.

Practically, the findings highlight the need for higher education institutions to implement interventions that promote adaptive coping and self-regulation. Digital literacy programs, mindfulness-based training, and structured academic counseling can help students reduce FoMO tendencies and strengthen their self-efficacy. Academic advisors should pay particular attention to social comparison behaviors among final-year students, given their significant influence on FoMO and academic stress.

A total of 178 articles were initially identified, of which 43 were screened based on titles and abstracts. Eighteen studies proceeded to full-text assessment, and twelve studies ultimately met the final inclusion criteria.

No	Researcher & Year	Sample	Main Variables	Key Findings
1	Przybylski et al. (2013)	1,013 university students	FoMO & psychological needs	FoMO increases when the needs for autonomy and social connectedness are not fulfilled.
2	Abel et al. (2016)	265 university students	FoMO & academic outcomes	FoMO is negatively correlated with academic performance and study focus.
3	Dhir et al. (2018)	355 university students	FoMO & self-esteem	Low self-efficacy and low self-esteem elevate the risk of experiencing FoMO.
4	Buglass et al. (2017)	182 university students	FoMO & self-efficacy	Digital self-efficacy reduces FoMO by strengthening self-regulation in social media use.
5	Pontes et al. (2020)	480 university students	FoMO & coping strategy	Maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance, intensify the negative effects of FoMO on psychological well-being.
6	Akbari et al.	410	FoMO, coping, &	Problem-focused coping reduces the

No	Researcher & Year	Sample	Main Variables	Key Findings
	(2021)	university students	well-being	psychological impact of FoMO on academic stress.
7	Sutanto & Hapsari (2023, Indonesia)	220 final-year students	FoMO & self-efficacy	Final-year students with low self-efficacy and high social media use exhibit greater FoMO during thesis preparation.
8	Rahmawati et al. (2024, Indonesia)	310 university students	FoMO, coping, & academic anxiety	Coping strategies act as a moderating factor between FoMO and academic anxiety.

The findings of this Systematic Literature Review indicate that Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has become increasingly prevalent among university students, particularly those in their final academic year who are entering the transition toward post-graduation life and simultaneously managing substantial academic pressure. FoMO manifests as a form of social anxiety characterized by persistent worries about missing out on experiences, information, or social interactions engaged in by others (Przybylski et al., 2013). This psychological mechanism becomes especially problematic for final-year students, whose academic responsibilities and social comparisons are heightened during this critical stage.

FoMO and the Academic Dynamics of Final-Year University Students

FoMO among final-year university students emerges from more than social media engagement alone; it is closely tied to the academic and social pressures that dominate the final stage of undergraduate study. As students face thesis completion, final examinations, and preparation for professional transitions, they become increasingly sensitive to the achievements and progress of their peers. Riordan et al. (2020) demonstrated that students who spend more than three hours daily on social media report heightened levels of FoMO and encounter concentration difficulties when completing academic tasks. Similar observations in Southeast Asian contexts show that exposure to peer achievements online elevates academic anxiety and reduces life satisfaction, particularly among students navigating the final year of their studies (Rahmawati & Putri, 2023). These pressures contribute to a cycle in which students routinely compare thesis progress, examination schedules, or job application outcomes, reinforcing perceptions of being left behind. Such comparisons amplify FoMO and position it as a psychological stressor that disrupts academic focus and destabilizes emotional balance.

The Impact of FoMO and Self-Efficacy on Student Academic Achievement

Student academic achievement is strongly influenced by self-regulation, learning focus, and persistence—all of which are key functions of self-efficacy. Students with high self-efficacy tend to be more confident in facing difficult tasks, persevere longer when faced with obstacles, use effective study strategies. Conversely, FoMO negatively impacts academic performance through several key mechanisms:

Impaired Focus and Concentration in Learning. FoMO encourages students to constantly check social media to avoid feeling left behind. Abel et al. (2016) and Rozgonjuk et al. (2021) found that FoMO is associated with cognitive distraction, excessive multitasking, and decreased concentration while studying, which directly decrease academic performance.

Decreased Academic Self-Efficacy. Students who constantly compare themselves to the achievements of others (e.g., friends who graduated earlier or landed jobs) tend to perceive themselves as incompetent. Riordan et al. (2020) showed that FoMO increases academic stress and decreases students' confidence in their academic abilities, which ultimately impacts grades and learning productivity.

Academic Procrastination and Poor Self-Regulation. FoMO is also associated with procrastination behavior. Studies by Wegmann et al. (2017) and Balkis & Duru (2019) showed that students with high FoMO more often procrastinate academic tasks due to their use of social media as a form of anxiety relief. This procrastination reduces academic performance and reinforces the cycle of low self-efficacy.

Cumulative Impact on Academic Achievement. The combination of high FoMO and low self-efficacy creates a psychological state that is not conducive to academic achievement. Pontes et al. (2020) stated that FoMO contributes to decreased academic achievement through increased stress, mental fatigue, and reduced academic engagement.

The Role of Self-Efficacy in FoMO

The review consistently indicates that self-efficacy holds a significant inverse relationship with FoMO. Students who possess strong confidence in managing academic and social demands are more capable of maintaining control over their digital behavior, limiting excessive engagement with social media, and avoiding emotional entanglement in online activities (Bandura, 1997; Alutaybi et al., 2020). Elhai et al. (2020) further noted that individuals with higher academic self-efficacy experience FoMO less frequently because they can prioritize academic obligations and resist distractions arising from online social interactions. In contrast, students with lower self-efficacy are more likely to rely on social media as a coping mechanism for perceived inadequacies, creating a dependence that

intensifies FoMO (Baker et al., 2016). These findings align with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which posits that individuals' beliefs in their ability to regulate their environment shape their interpretation of stressful stimuli. In this sense, FoMO may be conceptualized as a form of self-regulation failure rooted in diminished self-efficacy.

Coping Strategies as a Moderating Variable

The literature also highlights the moderating influence of coping strategies on the relationship between FoMO and student well-being. Students who adopt problem-focused coping strategies, including planning their study routines and managing social media use intentionally, tend to experience a reduced negative impact of FoMO on academic stress (Wegmann et al., 2017; Dempsey et al., 2019). By contrast, those who rely on avoidance or emotion-focused coping, such as seeking escape through online engagement, intensify the cycle of anxiety and negative social comparison (Beyens et al., 2016). These patterns underscore the importance of cultivating adaptive coping skills, particularly among final-year students who face concentrated academic and emotional demands.

Recent research by Yuen et al. (2022) provides additional support for this mechanism, showing that constructive coping strategies can temper the detrimental effects of FoMO on academic motivation, especially for students with high self-efficacy. The combined presence of strong self-efficacy and adaptive coping thus forms a robust buffer that protects students against FoMO's disruptive academic and emotional consequences.

Conceptual Integration: FoMO, Self-Efficacy, and Coping Strategy

The reviewed evidence demonstrates that FoMO, self-efficacy, and coping strategies interact in a dynamic psychological system. FoMO functions as an internal stressor driven by social anxiety and the need for connectedness. Self-efficacy operates as a personal resource that shapes how individuals evaluate and respond to these stressors. Coping strategies serve as behavioral pathways through which individuals manage FoMO's psychological effects. Together, these components align closely with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which emphasizes that stress reactions depend not solely on the stressor itself but on the individual's appraisal and coping capacity. In this framework, final-year students with strong self-efficacy and adaptive coping strategies are better equipped to maintain emotional stability, reduce FoMO-driven anxiety, and preserve optimal academic performance.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

The findings offer important implications for higher education practitioners. University counselors and educators may consider developing targeted programs that enhance digital literacy, strengthen self-regulation, and foster adaptive coping strategies among final-year students. Interventions designed to increase self-efficacy, such as academic skills training and structured counseling, can help students reduce FoMO tendencies and maintain psychological and academic well-being (Elhai et al., 2020).

Future research would benefit from longitudinal methodologies that trace FoMO trajectories across the undergraduate experience, enabling a deeper understanding of how FoMO evolves during the transition from early coursework to final-year demands. Quantitative explanatory approaches may also provide valuable insights into the mediating or moderating mechanisms of self-efficacy and coping strategies. Given the increasing centrality of digital platforms in academic and social life, further work in collectivist cultural contexts is warranted, particularly in Indonesia, where social belonging norms may intensify FoMO experiences.

FoMO has become an increasingly prominent psychological issue among young adults, especially those in the final stages of undergraduate education. Prior research links FoMO to anxiety, depression, and diminished psychological well-being (Baker et al., 2016; Elhai et al., 2021b). However, much of the existing literature centers on general social media use, leaving the unique academic pressures of final-year students insufficiently addressed. Studies such as Mishra et al. (2025) highlight social self-efficacy and psychological pressure as major predictors of FoMO among Generation Z, yet they do not fully explore the role of academic self-efficacy and coping strategies in shaping FoMO's impact on academic performance. As final-year students often confront complex academic stressors, including intense workloads, uncertainty about future prospects, and the redefinition of academic identity, a clearer understanding of how FoMO interacts with self-efficacy and coping is essential. This review contributes to such understanding and is particularly relevant in the post-pandemic digital era, where online interactions increasingly influence both academic engagement and social comparison processes.

4. CONCLUSION

This review synthesizes evidence from twelve empirical studies and demonstrates that FoMO has a consistently negative relationship with self-efficacy among final-year university students. Higher FoMO corresponds with diminished academic and personal self-efficacy and contributes to emotional strain, negative social comparison, reduced concentration, and

procrastination. Coping strategies significantly moderate this relationship, with adaptive coping reducing the negative effects of FoMO and maladaptive coping intensifying them.

Self-efficacy and coping strategies together operate as protective psychological mechanisms that support academic persistence and well-being during the transition toward graduation.

5. Practical Implications

Universities should develop interventions that strengthen students' self-efficacy, including training in self-regulated learning and counseling programs that foster constructive coping skills. Educators can promote healthier academic environments by reducing comparison pressures and incorporating digital literacy education. Students themselves may benefit from recognizing FoMO-related triggers, regulating online activity, and practicing mindfulness-based strategies to maintain emotional balance.

Based on the findings of the systematic literature review, higher education institutions need to develop interventions that target improving self-efficacy and strengthening adaptive coping strategies in final-year students. Interventions should specifically address anxiety induced by the digital environment and FoMO.

Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation Strengthening Programs

Interventions should aim to increase students' confidence in their ability to manage their academic tasks and challenges (self-efficacy). Structured Academic Skills Training: Offer workshops that focus on essential skills for the final year, such as thesis planning, time management for intensive workloads, and setting realistic academic goals. Self-Regulation Enhancement: Develop training modules that teach students to prioritize academic obligations and resist distractions arising from online social interactions. This helps build stronger control over their digital behavior. Provision of Academic and Professional Support: Provide clear and structured career counseling and academic advising sessions to reduce uncertainty about the future.

Promoting Adaptive Coping Strategies

Institutions should actively promote coping strategies proven to reduce the negative impact of FoMO on self-efficacy and well-being. Problem-Focused Coping Strategies: Teach and encourage students to use problem-focused coping strategies, such as active planning and problem-solving (e.g., creating a realistic study schedule). This can reduce the psychological impact of FoMO on academic stress. Seeking Constructive Social Support: Promote seeking social support as a form of adaptive coping, not as a means of negative self-comparison.

Integrating Digital Literacy as a Coping Mechanism

Interventions should broaden their focus to include the role of digital literacy in managing anxiety generated by the digital environment. Comprehensive Digital Literacy Education: Develop programs that explicitly teach students to: Regulate Online Activity: Practice deliberate regulation of social media use and set clear boundaries to reduce compulsive online monitoring. Critically Interpret Digital Content: Train students to recognize and critically interpret social media content (especially peer achievements), reducing the tendency for negative social comparisons that reinforce FoMO. Social Comparison Reduction Sessions: Academic counselors should specifically address social comparison behavior among undergraduate students. This will help reduce feelings of inadequacy that are reinforced by real-time exposure to peer achievements. This integrated approach helps students see FoMO not simply as a social media phenomenon, but as a broader issue of impaired self-regulation and cognitive judgment in the face of social and digital pressures.

6. Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should consider longitudinal approaches to examine FoMO experiences across academic stages, experimental designs to test intervention strategies, and deeper exploration of FoMO within collectivist cultural contexts. Further research into digital mental health tools may also enhance understanding of how technology-based interventions can support students experiencing FoMO.

7. LIMITATIONS

This review is constrained by the limited number of studies focusing specifically on final-year students, the variability in FoMO and coping measurement instruments, and the minimal use of qualitative methods. Despite these limitations, the consistency of findings across contexts supports the robustness of the observed relationships.

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