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From Convenience to Consequences: Unraveling FOMO in the Lives of Gen Z College Students from Türkiye and the USA

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Abstract

This IRB-approved study examined the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) phenomenon among Generation Z (Gen Z) college students in Türkiye and the USA ($N=637$ aged 18-25; 20.09% male, 78.65% female, 1.26% other). A bilingual English-Turkish Qualtrics survey was distributed through online platforms at urban universities in both countries measuring questions self-reported online and offline behaviors, clinical diagnoses and a 17-item FoMO Scale. Results suggest that FoMO is a universal phenomenon on campus across cultures, associated with mental disorders and increased usage of various social media platforms, $R^2=.083$, $F(3, 633)=19.00$ $p<.001$. Also, problematic social media usage (i.e., passive online engagement, observing others' posts) was associated with FoMO, $\eta p^2=.056$, $F(1,636)=37.41$, $p<.001$. This comparative study offers valuable cross-cultural insights on mental health and social media, yet its moderate sample size and reliance on self-reports, limits the establishment of causation. Future research should explore the developmental impact of popular media platform usage and develop diagnostic strategies to mitigate FoMO among Gen Z students, ultimately enhancing their well-being and productivity as they transition into society. Moreover, this study underscores the role of stakeholders in assisting Gen Z students in regulating their online and offline behaviors to improve their overall well-being.

Keywords: *FoMO, mental health among Gen Z college students, mental disorder, problematic online behavior*