

Joy of Missing Out (JOMO) and Its Role in Reducing Social Media Addiction: The Serial Mediating Role of Loneliness and Psychological Distress

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Abstract

The widespread use of social media has led to growing concerns about its impact on mental health. As digital dependency rises, the Joy of Missing Out (JOMO) has emerged as a potential means to help individuals find satisfaction in offline activities and reduce social media addiction. This study examines the serial mediating role of loneliness and psychological distress in the relationship between JOMO and social media addiction while also validating the JOMO scale's psychometric properties. Data were collected from 932 participants across 29 provinces in Türkiye. Study I confirmed the JOMO scale's reliability and validity through confirmatory factor analysis, measurement invariance testing, and Item Response Theory. In Study II, structural equation modeling revealed that JOMO was negatively associated with social media addiction through lower loneliness and psychological distress. These findings suggest that JOMO may help reduce social media addiction and promote a better balance between online and offline activities.

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Keywords

Joy of Missing Out, social media addiction, loneliness, psychological distress, digital well-being

Introduction

Social media plays a significant role in the daily lives of modern societies. As of July 2024, over 5.17 billion people—more than 63% of the global population—are actively using social media, spending an average of 2 h and 20 minutes per day on these platforms, which amounts to 14% of their waking hours (Kepios, 2024). While social media offers benefits such as instant communication and the creation of broad social networks (Valkenburg, 2022; Verduyn et al., 2021), the psychological impacts of excessive use have become a critical area of research in recent years (Marciano et al., 2024; Murari et al., 2024).

Social media addiction refers to the excessive and uncontrollable use of social media platforms, which has been shown to affect mental health negatively (Varela et al., 2023; Yigiter et al., 2024). It can lead to increased levels of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and social isolation (Du et al., 2024; Vannucci et al., 2017; Yang & Feng, 2024; Zubair et al., 2023). One of the key mechanisms associated with social media addiction is the tendency for individuals to compare themselves to others (Vogel et al., 2014; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021). Specifically, the idealized portrayals of life on social media may cause individuals to perceive their own lives as inadequate, leading to increased loneliness and stress (Park & Park, 2024).

Social media addiction has frequently been linked to the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) in previous research (Fioravanti et al., 2021). FoMO is a form of anxiety where individuals fear missing out on rewarding experiences that others may be enjoying (Przybylski et al., 2013). FoMO creates a cycle where users frequently check social media, which exacerbates negative outcomes such as anxiety and depressive symptoms (Elhai et al., 2016; Groenestein et al., 2024; Wegmann et al., 2017). This compulsive checking behavior not only increases these negative mental health outcomes but also reduces real-life interactions, heightening feelings of isolation (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2023). Given the previous findings associated with FoMO, developing strategies to mitigate these impacts is essential.

In response to the adverse effects of FoMO, Joy of Missing Out (JOMO) has recently emerged as a contrasting concept (Rautela & Sharma, 2022). JOMO encourages individuals to deliberately disconnect from social media and embrace the freedom of missing out on digital events (Eitan & Gazit, 2024). Conceptually, JOMO appears to align with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which emphasizes autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Unlike FoMO, which is driven by external motivations and the need for social approval, JOMO is associated with intrinsic motivations and self-directed behaviors that support autonomy. For example, JOMO includes emotional relief from digital demands, intentional digital disconnection, genuine offline interaction, and increased self-reflection (Barry et al., 2023; Rautela &

Sharma, 2022). These dimensions demonstrate that JOMO is not merely about disconnecting from the digital world. It also involves reconnecting with personal values, mindfulness, and self-meaning. It promotes reduced stress and increased life satisfaction through mindful use of social media and focus on meaningful real-life experiences (Chan et al., 2022). Recent studies have found that JOMO is negatively associated with FoMO (Eitan & Gazit, 2024; Gültekin et al., 2024) negative upward comparison, and social media addiction, while being positively associated with psychological well-being (Barry et al., 2023). However, limited research has explored the effects of JOMO on social media addiction, and the mechanisms underlying this relationship remain unclear.

Theoretical perspectives, such as *Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)*, provide a useful framework to understand why people engage in problematic social media use (Kircaburun et al., 2020; Whiting & Williams, 2013). According to this theory, individuals use social media to fulfill emotional and social needs, such as instant communication, distraction, and stress relief (Ifinedo, 2015; Ruggiero, 2000). From this point, problematic social media use may be driven by the desire to reduce feelings of stress and loneliness. Indeed, a study by Ponnusamy et al. (2020) found that *recognition* and *social needs* significantly increase social media addiction. Similarly, several studies have reported that loneliness plays a significant role in driving social media use (Deters & Mehl, 2012; Song et al., 2014). Thus, individuals experiencing stress may spend more time on social media, further contributing to addiction (Elhai et al., 2020). As a result, social media may be used to cope with both loneliness and stress, which can lead to the development of social media addiction. However, the role of JOMO in reducing social media addiction through loneliness and distress has yet to be studied.

Although JOMO is often defined as a positive response to digital overload, its potential role in reducing loneliness has not yet been sufficiently researched. Previous studies show that individuals with high JOMO scores do not feel socially disconnected when offline; instead, they actively choose solitude and use this time for personal reflection or meaningful offline interactions (Chan et al., 2022; Eitan & Gazit, 2024). From this point, we can say that this makes the distinction between loneliness and self-created solitude especially relevant. While FOMO pushes individuals toward constant digital interaction, JOMO reflects a sense of satisfaction in being alone or disconnected. Those with high JOMO levels are less likely to depend on online validation and, in turn, may experience fewer feelings of exclusion or isolation when away from social media (Barry et al., 2023). These models suggest a possible inverse relationship between JOMO and loneliness, which forms the theoretical basis for the model we propose.

To address this research gap, the present study proposes that loneliness and psychological distress may sequentially mediate the relationship between JOMO and social media addiction. Individuals with higher levels of JOMO are more likely to prioritize real-life interactions and self-care over excessive online engagement, which may decrease reliance on social media as an emotional escape (Chan et al., 2022; Eitan & Gazit, 2024). Given that loneliness and distress are well-documented risk factors for social media addiction (Wegmann et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2022), it is plausible that JOMO mitigates addiction by alleviating these emotional vulnerabilities.

The sequential relationship between loneliness and psychological distress is well supported in the literature. For example, loneliness has been consistently associated with increasing anxiety, stress, and depression symptoms (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009; Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). The social pain theory (Abrutyn, 2023) explains this connection by suggesting that perceived social disconnection activates neural circuits associated with physical pain, thereby intensifying emotional pain. Within the framework of the current study, JOMO has been conceptualized as a protective psychological resource. More specifically, individuals with higher JOMO are less likely to experience fear of social exclusion (Kreski et al., 2021), which helps reduce feelings of loneliness. Higher levels of loneliness are expected to be associated with greater psychological distress, whereas lower levels of loneliness are typically linked to lower psychological distress. As a result, this pathway may reduce the likelihood of using social media as a coping strategy in compulsive social media use (Elhai et al., 2020; Marino et al., 2018).

In addition, recent research (Dik & Kantar, 2025; Metwally et al., 2025) suggests that individuals who use social media extensively may differ psychologically from those who do not. Therefore, only active Instagram users were included in this study. There are two main reasons for this choice. First, Türkiye ranks high in Instagram usage (Meltwater, 2024). Second, Instagram features such as reels, stories, and visible feedback mechanisms (e.g., likes, comments) are closely linked to concepts such as FOMO and JOMO. These features can both trigger social comparison and influence digital disengagement. Therefore, focusing on Instagram users provides a contextually appropriate sample to examine these psychological processes.

Present Study

This study has two main aims. First, we will examine the psychometric properties of the JOMO scale in the Turkish context. Additionally, we will investigate gender invariance, which has not been previously addressed in other studies (Barry et al., 2023; Gültekin et al., 2024). Second, we will test a serial mediation model to explore how JOMO is related to social media addiction through loneliness and psychological distress. Through this approach, we aim to gain a clearer understanding of the scale's reliability and its relationship to both social media addiction and mental health.

Specifically, we hypothesize that JOMO may mitigate social media addiction by alleviating emotional vulnerabilities such as loneliness and psychological distress. Prior research has demonstrated that social media addiction is associated with increased loneliness and distress, as individuals may use social media as a coping mechanism for negative emotional states (Meynadier et al., 2025a; 2025b). In contrast, JOMO may encourage disengagement from excessive online interactions, reducing the emotional dependence on social media.

Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: JOMO is negatively associated with social media addiction.

H2: Loneliness is positively associated with social media addiction.

H3: Psychological distress is positively associated with social media addiction.

H4: The relationship between JOMO and social media addiction is sequentially mediated by loneliness and psychological distress.

Method

Using a quantitative framework, both Study I and Study II were conducted with a correlational research design. The sample size for Study I ($N = 396$) was based on the guideline of having at least 10 participants per item in factor analysis (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). For Study II, we used Monte Carlo power analysis (Schoemann et al., 2017) to determine the required sample size. We assumed a medium indirect effect size ($\beta = .26$), an alpha of .05, and a desired power of .90 (Zhang, 2014). Effect size estimates were informed by prior research on social media and mental health (Barry et al., 2023).

Study I

Participants and Procedure. The participants in Study I were recruited using a convenience sampling method. Data were collected online via a Google Forms survey. The survey link was distributed through the researchers' personal social media accounts and official institutional mailing lists. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Before starting the survey, all participants provided informed consent. No incentives were offered. Inclusion criteria required participants to be over 18 years old and reside in Türkiye.

The study's first phase examines the psychometric qualities of the JOMO scale (Barry et al., 2023). We began by translating the JOMO items into Turkish, following the forward and backward translation methods recommended by Hambleton and Patsula (1999). Five PhD-level language, testing, and psychology experts reviewed the translations for cultural and linguistic accuracy, after which we finalized the Turkish version of the scale.

We then tested the linguistic equivalence of the Turkish and English versions of the JOMO scale by administering both to 39 undergraduate students from the English Language and Literature department, all native Turkish speakers proficient in English. A strong positive correlation was found between the two versions ($r = .79, p < .05$).

After establishing linguistic equivalence, in Study I, we conducted validity and reliability analyses of the Turkish JOMO with a sample of 396 participants. Then, in Study II, we examined the theoretical framework of the JOMO construct through structural equation modeling with a sample of 497 participants. The detailed demographic characteristics of participants involved in Study I and II are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Demographic Statistics of Participants

Sample	Gender		Age		Range	Socioeconomic status			Education level		
	Female	Male	M	SD		Low	Medium	High	High school	University	Postgraduate
Study I	239 (60)	157 (40)	25.16	7.05	18–58	42 (11)	334 (84)	20 (5)	99 (25)	278 (70)	19 (5)
Study II	308 (62)	189 (38)	26.38	9.58	18–63	75 (15)	384 (77)	38 (8)	102 (21)	384 (77)	11 (2)

Note. Values in parentheses represent percentages.

Table 1 shows the descriptives of 396 participants involved in Study I. 40% were male ($n = 157$), and 60% were female ($n = 239$). The average age was 25.16 years ($SD = 7.05$, $range = 18-58$). 87% ($n = 343$) reported using social media in their daily routines. Instagram (61%) was found to be the most frequently used platform, followed by X (29%), Facebook (7%), and other social media platforms (3%).

Ethics. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the first author's affiliated university (Protocol Number: 02/03). Participants provided informed consent before beginning the survey and were assured of anonymity and voluntary participation.

Measures

Social Anxiety Scale Short Form (SAS-SF). SAS-SF was revised by Nunes et al. (2018). The Turkish adaptation was conducted by Can and Bozgün (2021). The SAS-SF consists of 12 items on a five-point Likert scale (e.g., "I feel uncomfortable in social situations"). Higher scores indicate higher levels of social anxiety. Previous studies reported a Cronbach's alpha internal consistency value of .78 (Can & Bozgün, 2021), while the current study reported it as .93.

Social Emotional Learning Scale (SELS). SELS was developed by Karacan-Özdemir and Büyükcölpın (2021). The scale consists of 20 items on a five-point Likert scale (e.g., "I value others' opinions"). It includes self-awareness, academic self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Previous research found Cronbach's alpha internal consistency value of .86 (Karacan-Özdemir & Büyükcölpın, 2021), while the current study reported it as .94.

Flourishing Scale. Originally developed by Diener et al. (2010) and adapted to Turkish by Telef (2013), this scale assesses psychological well-being through positive relationships, a sense of efficacy, and a meaningful life. It consists of 8 items on a seven-point Likert scale with a single-factor structure. Previous research reported a Cronbach's alpha of .87 (Telef, 2013), while the current study reported it as .86.

Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOS). FoMOS was developed by Przybylski et al. (2013) and adapted to Turkish by Gökler et al. (2016), and the instrument measures the fear of missing out on social events. It includes 10 items on a four-point Likert scale (e.g., "I feel anxious when I don't know what my friends are up to"). Higher scores indicate higher levels of fear of missing out. Previous research reported a Cronbach's alpha of .81 (Gökler et al., 2016), while the current study reported it as .82.

Joy of Missing Out Scale (JoMOS). The JoMOS, developed by Barry et al. (2023), includes 13 items across three sub-dimensions: Joy of Independence (e.g., "I enjoy doing things without checking my phone"), Joy of Disconnection (e.g., "Being offline helps me feel more relaxed"), and Joy of Self-Reflection (e.g., "I use offline time to

reflect on myself"). These dimensions respectively reflect autonomy from digital engagement, relief through intentional disconnection, and introspective use of offline time. A total score is calculated, with higher scores indicating greater enjoyment of missing out on digital content or social interaction. In the current study, the internal consistency coefficient was .76 for the full scale.

Data Analysis. We examined the construct validity of the JOMO scale through first and second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Additionally, we evaluated the measurement invariance of the scale by comparing the configural, metric, and scalar invariance findings across genders. Furthermore, we analyzed the item-level compatibility of the scale using Item Response Theory (IRT). Finally, we calculated the reliability of the scale using Cronbach's Alpha (α), McDonald's Omega (ω) and Gutman's Lambda-6 coefficients. The analyses were conducted using the Rstudio program with the *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012), *psych* (Revelle, 2023), *semTools* (Jorgensen et al., 2019), and *ltm* (Rizopoulos, 2006) packages.

Results. In the first step, we tested the three-factor, 13-item structure of the JOMO scale using first-order CFA. The model demonstrated acceptable to excellent fit indices ($\chi^2 = 169.44$, $df = 62$, $CFI = .958$, $TLI = .948$, $RMSEA = .066$, $SRMR = .068$). Next, we conducted a second-order CFA to examine whether a higher-order general JOMO factor could represent the JOMO construct. The model fit indices for the second-order CFA indicated the validation of the structure ($\chi^2 = 117.64$, $df = 62$, $CFI = .958$, $TLI = .947$, $RMSEA = .048$, $SRMR = .060$). In addition, all standardized factor loadings were significant ($p < 0.001$) and ranged from 0.4 to 0.8. Model comparisons were conducted to validate the second-order factor structure. The second-order CFA model showed higher AIC (274.243) and BIC (305.873) values compared to the first-order model ($AIC = 190.707$; $BIC = 212.667$). The first- and second-order factor loadings, item-total correlations, and related statistics are presented in Table 2. Additionally, the factors of JOMO and their relationships with other criterion variables are detailed in Table 3.

Measurement Invariance. After examining the JOMO structure through first and second-order CFA, we investigated whether JOMO measures different constructs comparably. In other words, we tested the measurement invariance of the JOMO structure across genders using multi-group CFA. Additionally, to substantiate the steps of measurement invariance, the differences between more restricted models and the baseline models are compared, focusing on the differences in fit indices (ΔCFI , $\Delta SRMR$). Cheung and Rensvold (2002) suggest assessing the ΔCFI value when comparing models. According to their recommendation, the ΔCFI value should ideally range between -0.01 and $+0.01$. Similarly, Chen (2007) noted that a change of 0.030 in the $\Delta SRMR$ value is acceptable, alongside the 0.01 change in the ΔCFI value. The findings revealed that the scale demonstrated a statistically significant fit for female and male participants. More clearly, the Turkish adaptation of JOMO achieved metric invariance ($\Delta CFI = 0.01$, $\Delta SRMR = 0.01$), scalar invariance ($\Delta CFI = 0.01$, $\Delta SRMR = 0.01$), and strict invariance

Table 2. First and Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis Loadings, Descriptive Statistics, and Item-Total Score Correlations (N = 396)

Factor	Item or factor	First order factor loadings	Second order factor loadings	\bar{x}	SD	Item-total correlations
F1 (Joy of independence)	J11	.77	.71	3.89	1.05	.666*
	J3	.42	.40	3.32	1.21	.483*
	J7	.32	.29	3.62	1.18	.407*
	J6	.76	.67	4.10	1.04	.650*
	J10	.61	.54	3.97	1.03	.650*
	J5	.46	.39	4.21	.86	.435*
F2 (Joy of disconnection)	J9	.42	.39	3.29	1.20	.467*
	J4	.46	.46	3.14	1.22	.516*
	J12	.50	.46	2.59	1.34	.508*
	J8	.49	.47	3.08	1.17	.496*
F3 (Joy of self-reflection)	J2	.60	.58	3.60	1.09	.577*
	J1	.52	.44	4.23	.93	.432*
	J13	.51	.47	3.99	1.06	.505*
JOMO (Total scale)	F1	—	.99	23.10	3.85	.883*
	F2	—	.84	12.10	3.09	.793*
	F3	—	.87	11.81	2.16	.722*

Note. * $p < .01$.

($\Delta CFI = 0.00$, $\Delta SRMR = 0.00$) as shown in Table 4. This result indicates that men and women consistently perceive the Turkish version of JOMO.

Item Response Theory. Item Response Theory focuses on item characteristics rather than total scores, providing important information about item response data (Bond & Fox, 2015). Therefore, Rasch model analyses are particularly effective for Likert-type scales, offering detailed insights into item discrimination and fit (Boone et al., 2014). In this study, we used the Rasch model, a unidimensional model within the Item Response Theory framework, to evaluate the item functioning of the JOMO scale.

For the JOMO scale, an overall person reliability of 0.769 suggests that the scale reliably differentiates respondents. The model fit indices, $MADaQ3 = 0.0798$ and $p < .001$ confirm an excellent fit to the Rasch model, indicating that the JOMO scale effectively measures the construct. Additionally, infit and outfit values close to 1 evaluate how well each item fits the Rasch model. Since all infit and outfit values are close to 1, it can be concluded that all scale items fit well with the model individually (Linacre, 2012). As can be deduced, the Rasch model analysis supports the validity and reliability of the JOMO scale, ensuring that each item contributes appropriately to the overall measurement.

Reliability. For the JOMO scale, reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, McDonald's Omega, and Gutmann's Lambda coefficients to assess internal consistency

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations With JOMO Scale

Variables	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Correlation with JOMO	
					<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Study I						
JOMO	47.02	7.42	−.192	−.191	—	—
Social anxiety	29.68	11.47	.353	−.591	−.307	.001
Psychological well-being	40.89	8.36	−.334	−.280	.369	.001
FOMO	21.16	7.18	.318	−.110	−.350	.001
Social-emotional learning skills						
Self-awareness	24.07	4.65	−.661	.080	.336	.001
Relationship skills	11.97	3.23	.095	−.213	−.285	.001
Social awareness	11.93	2.15	−.531	.312	.129	.010
Academic self-regulation	11.63	2.63	−.528	−.237	.323	.001
Responsible decision making	15.82	3.01	−.609	.078	.163	.001
Study II						
Social media addiction	52.21	13.65	.280	.051	−.191	.001
Loneliness	14.39	4.743	.909	.041	−.182	.001
Depression	8.50	5.80	.259	−.948	−.108	.016
Stress	7.82	6.06	.420	−.875	−.189	.001
Anxiety	9.92	5.51	.096	−.805	−.122	.006
JOMO	46.65	7.47	−.222	−.271	—	—

across studies. For Study I, Cronbach's Alpha was .76, McDonald's Omega was .77, and Gutmann's Lambda was .78, indicating good internal consistency. Similarly, Study II yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of .75, McDonald's Omega of .76, and Gutmann's Lambda of .76. These findings suggest that the JOMO scale is a reliable tool across different samples.

Study II

Upon examining the psychometric properties of the JOMO scale in Study I, we explored the serial mediating roles of loneliness and psychological distress in the

Table 4. Fit Indices for Gender Invariance Analysis

Invariance	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>NNFI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	ΔCFI	$\Delta SRMR$
Configural	241.98	124	.949	.959	.949	.069	.080	—	—
Metric	264.578	134	.948	.955	.948	.070	.084	.01	.01
Scalar	288.419	170	.963	.959	.963	.059	.082	.01	.01
Strict	288.419	170	.963	.959	.963	.059	.082	.00	.00

relationship between JOMO and social media addiction in Study II. One explanation for excessive social media use is that individuals use these platforms to escape loneliness (Deters & Mehl, 2012; O'Day & Heimberg, 2021). In other words, social media is a coping mechanism for overcoming loneliness. Conversely, studies (Bekalu et al., 2019) have also highlighted the positive aspects of social media use, such as connecting with others, well-being, and facilitating social interactions. In light of these findings, we propose that loneliness and psychological distress serially mediate the relationship between JOMO and social media addiction.

Methods

Participants and Procedure. Study II comprised 497 adult participants, all required to be active users of Instagram as a social media platform. Participants were selected based on accessibility (convenience sampling), and data collection was conducted online via Google Forms. 62% of the participants were female ($n = 308$), and 38% were male ($n = 189$). Most participants reported belonging to the middle socioeconomic level (77%). Additionally, 21% of the participants stated they had completed high school, 77% were attending or had graduated from university, and the remaining were postgraduates. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 63 years, with a mean age of 26.38 ($SD = 9.58$). Table 1 above presents the demographic information of participants involved in Study II.

Measures

Depression-Anxiety-Stress Scale (DASS-21). The DASS-21 is a self-report instrument developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) to measure the intensity and frequency of symptoms experienced over the past week. It includes three factors: depression, anxiety, and stress, each containing seven sub-items. Yilmaz et al. (2017) adapted the scale for the Turkish context, with reliability coefficients ranging between 0.76 and 0.82. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the depression, anxiety, and stress subscales were found to be 0.87, 0.90, and 0.89, respectively.

Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS). SMAS was developed by Şahin and Yağcı (2017) for the Turkish cultural context. The scale consists of 20 items on a five-point Likert scale, divided into two sub-dimensions (e.g., "I spend more time on social media than I planned"). Some items are reverse-coded. Higher scores indicate higher levels of problematic social media use. Previous studies reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 (Şahin & Yağcı, 2017), while the current study reported it as 0.83.

UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS-8). The ULS-8, originally developed by Russell et al. (1980), was adapted into Turkish by Doğan et al. (2011). This single-factor scale consists of eight items (e.g., "I have no friends"), with some items reverse-coded. Higher scores indicate higher levels of loneliness. Previous research reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.72 (Doğan et al., 2011), whereas the current study reported it as 0.84.

Data Analysis. Before the analyses, we assessed the dataset for missing data, outliers, and normal distribution using skewness/kurtosis values, Z standard scores, and Mahalanobis Distance scores to ensure suitability. We included validity checks recommended by Meade and Craig (2012) to mitigate any careless responses. The scales were structured according to their original factor models. For multidimensional scales, total scores of each sub-dimension were used. For the unidimensional loneliness scale, we applied the random parceling method to reduce measurement error and simplify the SEM model. The eight items were randomly grouped into three parcels, which were then used as observed indicators in the structural model (Bandalos, 2008; Little et al., 2002). Serial mediation tests and bootstrap analyses were conducted to examine indirect relationships between variables. *The indirect effects were tested using 5,000 bootstrap samples with bias-corrected confidence intervals.* All procedures were executed using JAMOVI, which was chosen for its comprehensive SEM support.

Results. As shown in Table 3, the relationships between JOMO and other variables were examined in Study II. The results showed that JOMO was negatively associated with social media addiction ($r = -.191, p < .001$), loneliness ($r = -.182, p < .001$), depression ($r = -.108, p < .05$), stress ($r = -.189, p < .001$), and anxiety ($r = -.122, p < .05$). The results of the structural equation modelling suggested that the model demonstrated a good fit ($\chi^2/df = 3.394, CFI = 0.958, TLI = 0.939, RMSEA = 0.069, SRMR = 0.042, NFI = 0.942$). The coefficients are illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 5 presents indirect coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. In the serial mediation model, JOMO was indirectly related to social media addiction (SMA) through loneliness and distress. The pathway from JOMO to SMA via loneliness and distress was significant ($\beta = -.099, p < .001$), suggesting that higher JOMO was associated with lower loneliness and distress, which in turn was related to decreased SMA. However, the indirect effects of JOMO through loneliness alone ($\beta = -.013, p = .596$) and distress alone ($\beta = -.046, p = .176$) were not significant. Additionally, loneliness was significantly related to SMA through distress ($\beta = 1.145, p < .001$).

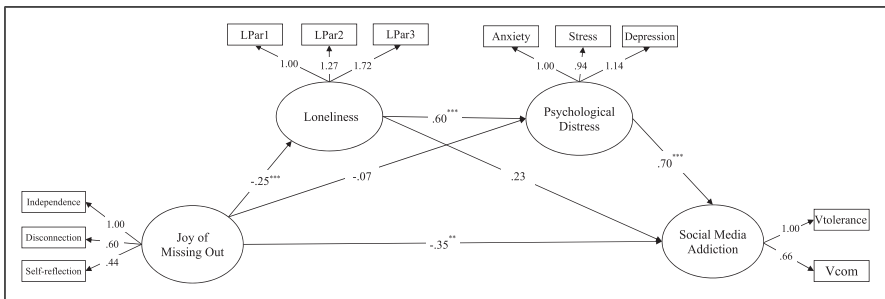


Figure 1. JOMO and Social Media Addiction via Loneliness and Distress as Serial Mediators. Note. $N = 496$; $***p < .001$, $**p < .01$, $*p < .05$

Table 5. Indirect Effects of the Proposed Serial Mediating Model

Model pathways	Estimate	95% confidence intervals		z	p
		Lower	Upper		
Indirect links					
Loneliness → Distress → SMA	1.730	1.111	2.467	5.132	.001
JOMO → Distress → SMA	−.069	−.175	.026	−1.328	.184
JOMO → Loneliness → SMA	−.020	−.106	.062	−.486	.627
JOMO → Loneliness → Distress → SMA	−.150	−.265	−.080	−3.356	.001

Note. JOMO = Joy of Missing Out, SMA = Social Media Addiction.

As shown in Table 5, the indirect effect of JOMO on SMA via loneliness and distress was significant (Estimate = −.099, 95% CI [−.1003, −.0306], $z = -3.390$, $p < .001$). It supports the acceptance of the proposed research model and hypothesis.

Discussion

In examining the psychometric properties of the JOMO scale within a Turkish context, this study also tested the serial mediation role of loneliness and psychological distress between JOMO and social media addiction. The findings indicated that the JOMO scale is a reliable and valid instrument in Turkish culture.

The initial phase of the study confirmed linguistic equivalence between the Turkish and English versions of the JOMO scale, achieving a robust correlation. In light of this finding, individuals proficient in both languages perceive the two scale versions similarly. Subsequent validity and reliability analyses supported the JOMO scale’s structural integrity through first- and second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Each item and factor within the scale significantly contributed to a general JOMO factor, validating the construct’s coherence. Further, the study assessed measurement invariance across genders, revealing that both men and women perceive the JOMO construct similarly, thus supporting the scale’s applicability across gender divides. Item Response Theory analysis examined the individual item fit within the established structure, confirming that each item was consistently aligned with the overall JOMO factor. The reliability of the JOMO scale was acceptable, as evidenced by several reliability (e.g. Cronbach’s Alpha, Gutmans’s Lambda, McDonal Omega) coefficients calculated using data from both study phases. The scale’s internal consistency across different samples showed that it is a reliable tool.

We also examined the scale’s construct validity, with a focus on discriminant relationships. Although JOMO is often defined as the opposite of FOMO, our findings and those of Barry and colleagues (2023) suggested a more complex relationship. In our study, JOMO showed a moderate negative correlation with FOMO while exhibiting a

positive correlation with social anxiety. From these findings, we can say that not all individuals disconnect for positive or restorative reasons; for some, disconnecting may stem from social discomfort or avoidance. Additionally, we found a negative correlation with relationship skills, which may reflect a decrease in social connectedness. When these findings are considered together, they suggest that JOMO may include both adaptive and avoidance components depending on the individual's underlying motivation. In other words, our results suggest that while JOMO can improve personal well-being by offering a break from digital engagement, it can also reduce social connectivity, which may negatively impact social relationships (Chan et al., 2022; Jacobsen, 2021). Future research should explore the psychological factors shaping this relationship, including potential mediators and moderators between JOMO and FOMO.

In the second phase of our study, we examined the serial mediation role of loneliness and psychological distress in the relationship between JOMO and social media addiction. Our model demonstrated good fit indices, showcasing that the model was valid. Another finding of our study indicated that JOMO is negatively associated with loneliness, which implies that individuals who actively choose to miss out may experience less loneliness, aligning with previous studies (e.g., Przybylski et al., 2013). Previous research (Yang, 2016) has indicated that loneliness is a critical factor driving individuals to engage in excessive social media use. As Katz et al. (1973) and Kircaburun et al. (2020) argued in *the UGT*, individuals turn to social media to fulfill their social and emotional needs, particularly to overcome feelings of loneliness. However, our findings revealed that JOMO could decrease loneliness, which can be interpreted as actively choosing to disengage from social media platforms to help individuals find alternative, perhaps more meaningful, offline ways of social and emotional fulfilment. This argument goes hand-in-hand with what Barry et al. (2023) claimed, who pointed out that JOMO could reduce stress and improve overall well-being by promoting real-world interactions over online engagement.

Additionally, we found a positive relationship between loneliness and psychological distress, which is a well-documented argument in the literature, verifying the relationship between loneliness and psychological distress. Loneliness is known to exacerbate feelings of anxiety, depression, and overall psychological distress (Deters & Mehl, 2012; Song et al., 2014). In our study, by reducing loneliness, JOMO indirectly mitigated psychological distress such as depression, anxiety, and stress. In this regard, our result aligns with previous findings that highlighted the detrimental effects of loneliness on mental health and the importance of social connections in mitigating psychological distress (Elhai et al., 2016).

In addition, we found a positive link between psychological distress and social media addiction. The association between psychological distress and social media addiction is also well-supported in the literature. As can be deduced from the points discussed above, the UGT provides a framework for understanding why individuals turn to social media in times of distress. UGT posits that people actively seek out media to fulfill specific needs, such as cognitive, emotional, and social needs (Katz et al., 1973; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Whiting & Williams, 2013). In times of psychological distress, individuals may prefer to use social media platforms to alleviate negative

emotions, gain social support, or distract themselves from their problems. In other words, individuals experiencing high levels of distress may turn to social media as a coping mechanism, seeking distraction or solace in virtual interactions (Elhai et al., 2016).

Finally, we investigated the indirect effect of JOMO on social media addiction through loneliness and psychological distress. The confidence intervals for the indirect effect did not include zero, indicating a significant mediation effect (*JOMO*→*Loneliness*→*Distress*→*Social Media Addiction*). Our result suggests that JOMO can reduce social media addiction by decreasing loneliness and psychological distress. However, in this study, we investigated whether perceived loneliness and psychological distress play multiple and serial mediating roles between JOMO and social media addiction. While each variable did not play a significant mediating role in the link on its own, the serial path was significant. This finding was fully consistent with our initial argument that increased social media use may be associated with individual psychological distress and environmental social isolation, as described by the I-PACE model (Brand et al., 2016). From this perspective, we can say that individuals with higher JOMO levels may feel less social pressure to stay connected, which may help reduce feelings of loneliness. Reduced loneliness may reduce psychological distress such as anxiety or stress, which may lead to a decrease in compulsive social media use. By choosing to miss out on digital engagements, individuals can foster a sense of autonomy and satisfaction, which reduces the need for constant online interaction. In turn, such disengagement from online platforms might alleviate loneliness and psychological distress, both of which are significant predictors of social media addiction. Therefore, promoting JOMO can be an effective strategy for improving digital well-being and reducing the prevalence of social media addiction.

Statistically significant correlations were found between JOMO and social media addiction, loneliness, and psychological distress. However, the effect sizes were small. Nevertheless, small effects can still be meaningful. In psychological research, small changes can accumulate over time and across individuals to produce significant outcomes (Funder & Ozer, 2019). Therefore, they may produce meaningful effects in real life. For example, a small reduction in loneliness or psychological distress may increase emotional resilience. It may also reduce problematic social media use. Additionally, small effects are particularly important in clinical contexts. Early interventions often rely on small changes. Therefore, findings can guide the development of preventive strategies. In this context, JOMO-based interventions may offer practical benefits. Digital awareness or digital detox programs can improve well-being. They can also reduce compulsive digital behavior (Setia et al., 2025).

Implications, Future Directions, and Conclusion

The study holds several important implications for research and practice in digital well-being and mental health. The significant serial mediation effect of loneliness and psychological distress in the link between JOMO and social media addiction suggests that promoting JOMO can be an effective strategy for enhancing digital well-being. By

encouraging individuals to disconnect from digital engagements intentionally, it is possible to foster a sense of autonomy and personal satisfaction. JOMO can reduce the compulsive need to stay constantly connected online, thereby alleviating loneliness and psychological distress, which are key predictors of social media addiction. Our study results comply with previous research emphasizing the benefits of digital detox and intentional disconnection for mental health (Coyne & Woodruff, 2023; Ramadhan et al., 2024; Setia et al., 2025).

In addition, mental health professionals and educators can use these insights to develop psychological interventions aimed at reducing social media addiction. Such programs designed to promote JOMO can help individuals find fulfillment and contentment in offline activities, reducing their reliance on social media for social interaction and emotional support. In addition, JOMO can help individuals cultivate healthier digital habits and improve their overall well-being. Practitioners can incorporate JOMO-promoting strategies into existing mental health programs and educational curricula. For instance, workshops and seminars on digital well-being can include modules on the benefits of JOMO and practical tips for intentional digital disengagement. Schools and workplaces can create environments encouraging offline activities and face-to-face interactions, helping individuals balance their online and offline lives.

Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of JOMO on digital well-being and mental health. Longitudinal studies can provide deeper insights into how the benefits of JOMO evolve over time and showcase whether they are sustained or not. Additionally, experimental designs could help establish causal relationships and identify the most effective strategies for promoting JOMO among different samples. However, given the limited reliability of some subscales, we recommend that researchers primarily use the total JOMO score. Researchers are also recommended to examine the potential other moderating factors, such as personality traits and social support systems, that may influence the effectiveness of JOMO interventions.

In conclusion, promoting JOMO can be a valuable strategy for enhancing digital well-being and reducing social media addiction. By addressing the underlying emotional drives of excessive social media use, such as loneliness and psychological distress, JOMO interventions can help individuals achieve a healthier and more balanced relationship with their online lives and better digital well-being.

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Ethical Considerations

Upon obtaining approval from the ethics committee, we initiated the data collection session at the state university where the first researcher was employed. The data collection process was conducted in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration of Human Rights.

Consent to Participate

Informed consent was obtained from all the individual participants that were included in the study.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Data Availability Statement

Data will be available on request.

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