

The impact of FOMO on career decision-making: Prioritizing trends over growth

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Abstract— This research examines the influence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on career choice among students and early-career professionals, including job-switching behavior, peer influence, social media exposure, and long-term satisfaction. Through examination of responses from 130 participants in India and overseas, the study examines how FOMO influences professional choices and leads to emotional consequences like career regret and growth misalignment. The research uses quantitative approaches such as correlation analysis, hypothesis testing, and regression modelling to identify important correlations between high levels of FOMO and impulsive career changes, lower satisfaction, and higher regret. Furthermore, peer pressure and social media were identified to have unique contributions to career choices, with peer pressure being notably significant in students pursuing foreign studies.

The research indicates an essential need for the inclusion of psychological constructs such as FOMO in career development and organizational planning frameworks. Comparative studies across cultures identified that while social media power continues to be omnipresent on a global level, peer pressure is context-specific and affects the level of FOMO-led decision-making. The research advises pre-emptive measures by individuals, teachers, and employers to counter FOMO's detrimental impacts, instill self-insight, and encourage value-driven career directions. By positioning FOMO as a quantifiable force on early career formation, this study adds to a richer understanding of emotional decision-making in contemporary career contexts.

Keywords: FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), Career Decision-Making, Peer Influence, Social Media Impact, Job Stability.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), a concept first coined in 2004, has grown from being a social media phenomenon to one that now has a substantial influence on career life and professional decision-making. FOMO was initially associated with the emergence of digital media and the increasing necessity of remaining perpetually connected with colleagues and social networks. But as online media became so deeply ingrained in day-to-day life, the scope of FOMO extended beyond close relationships and affected career choices, professional transitions, and organizational life.

Used by the anxiety or doubt generated by believing that one will lose out on better professional prospects or professional experiences other people are looking for, FOMO establishes a frame of mind. It is fuelled by social media, which provides strategically crafted and often over-played presentations of peers' achievements, career developments, and professional connections. Career FOMO is particularly prevalent among young professionals, with most experiencing perpetual anxiety about missing out on significant opportunities, which causes stress and disillusionment in their professional lives.

The theory has been subsequently applied to derivative concepts such as the Fear of Better Options (FOBO), which describes the fear of accepting less-than-best professional options for fear of losing out on something better. To the most extreme versions, it leads to the Fear of Doing Anything (FODA), where one is paralyzed with too many options and is undecided in important career choices. These psychological states give rise to procrastination and scepticism regarding professional progress, generally making individuals wonder about their career choices or avoid commitments.

Among students and young professionals, FOMO highly influences career switching and career decision-making. Everybody is forced into pursuing careers or industries that are deemed prestigious-looking, making peer pressure, online success stories, and

social comparison-based decisions rather than personal aspiration. Most early-career professionals admit to having made substantial career decisions out of fear of not catching up on future opportunities rather than equating their decisions to their values, drivers, or long-term goals.

This is particularly colourful among Indian and foreign students, where social and cultural determinants affect career choice differently. Indian students feel more peer pressure to pursue conventional careers such as engineering, medicine, or finance due to societal demands. Foreign students may be exposed to different career opportunities and an intensely competitive global job market. Knowledge of these differences is essential in the development of focused interventions that foster more reflective and personally fulfilling career decisions.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research paper seeks to address the following objectives:

1. To examine how FOMO affects career decision-making among students and job seekers, specifically in job-switching behavior and career choices.
2. To compare career decision-making trends between students in India and students studying overseas, with an emphasis on the influence of peer influence and social media.
3. To measure the long-term effects of FOMO-based career choices, determining their effects on career stability, job satisfaction, and professional development.

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of understanding the impact of FOMO on career transitions is in various dimensions. Firstly, FOMO leads individuals to switch jobs often, as they seek better opportunities due to outside pressure and not according to in-built career desires. While career fluidity can be an advantage in certain scenarios, excessive job-hopping can disrupt long-term career growth and stability. Research indicates that individuals who score high on FOMO tend to form less secure working relationships and change employers more frequently than the norm in their industry.

Secondly, the inevitable peer comparison and pressure to secure the "best" professional opportunity can lead to anxiety, burnout, and stress. A number of professionals with strong FOMO report high intensity of work-related stress symptoms across their initial years of employment. Such a stable state of anxiety could have a serious negative impact on mental health, reducing confidence levels and leading to professional burnout.

Third, career selection is heavily influenced by peer discussion, social networks, and social media. Career experts who work lengthy hours on career-focused social networking websites are likely to be dissatisfied with their existing career options and likely to seek new careers. The impact of social media on career mindset varies from one culture to another, with job seekers and students in different regions of the world being impacted differently based on career expectations and professional standards.

Finally, FOMO-influenced career decisions can bear long-term implications on professional success and job satisfaction. The majority of individuals select career paths or work prospects in accordance with perceived prestige rather than personal compatibility with their skills and aspirations, finally leading to afterward regret. Acknowledgment of these patterns can provide tremendous clarity into how FOMO-guided career decisions affect long-term achievement, happiness, and security.

DEFINITION OF FOMO IN THE CAREER CONTEXT

In the career domain, the FOMO materializes as a unique subset known as "Opportunity FOMO," first used by Wilding (2016) to characterize the nervousness professionals have regarding missing business opportunities for advancements, promotions, or essential network building. Feeling "opportunity loss" might be pervasive in such cases and overshadow career satisfaction or long-term professional aspirations with a sense of inadequacy and pressure to match peers.

FOMO in career choice is defined by:

1. Worry of making the “wrong” career choice
2. Preference for job-switching according to industry trends or perceived status
3. Career decisions controlled more by seeking external approval rather than personal achievement
4. Increased concern with peers’ career success and progress
5. Dissatisfaction with existing jobs resulting from continuous comparison

RESEARCH GAPS

1. Under researched Influence on Career Decisions
 - Although FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) is highly researched in social conduct and online consumption, its influence on career decisions is less explored.
 - FOMO can lead young professionals to make hasty career decisions, resulting in frequent career changes, career regret, or emphasizing perceived opportunities at the expense of long-term stability.
2. Limited Cross-Cultural Comparisons
 - The majority of studies fail to compare how FOMO affects career decisions in various cultural contexts.
 - Indian students might differ in experiencing FOMO based on their respective levels of peer pressure, local job market environments, and the role of social media.
3. Omission from Career Development Models
 - Conventional theories of career development emphasize skills, opportunities, and economic considerations without paying adequate attention to psychological constructs such as FOMO and peer-comparison anxiety.
 - Psychological factors, such as those mentioned above, can play an important role in influencing job satisfaction, decision-making, and ultimate career stability.
4. Shortage of Empirical Studies on Peer Influence and Social Media
 - There is little empirical study on how social media and peer influence collectively influence career choices.
 - Most young professionals might be under pressure from success profiles on the internet, and they might be making career choices based on perceived trends instead of individual development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evolution of FOMO in Professional Contexts

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has evolved from being a phenomenon primarily associated with social media to having a profound and far-reaching influence on professional life and career decision-making (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Initially, FOMO was closely tied to the rise of digital platforms and the increasing pressure to stay constantly connected with peers and social circles. However, as digital platforms became an integral part of everyday life, the implications of FOMO extended beyond the realm of personal social interactions, deeply influencing professional environments, career choices, and organizational behavior.

McGinnis (2021) expands the concept by introducing related ideas like FOBO (Fear of Better Options), which describes the anxiety individuals feel about potentially making suboptimal choices due to the possibility of better alternatives. When combined, these concepts contribute to FODA (Fear of Doing Anything), a psychological state of indecision where individuals are paralyzed by the overwhelming number of choices and the fear of making the wrong one, leading to decision avoidance or delayed action in professional contexts. These interconnected fears create a vicious cycle, leaving individuals caught in a constant state of uncertainty, often at the expense of making informed, rational decisions.

Prevalence of Career-Related FOMO

Recent research highlights the pervasiveness of career-related FOMO, particularly among younger professionals. Groot (2024) reports that 73% of individuals aged 22-29 experience FOMO on a weekly basis, with a staggering 42% experiencing daily anxiety related to missing out on career opportunities. This heightened sense of professional insecurity has given rise to a specific subset of

FOMO known as "Opportunity FOMO," a term coined by Wilding (2016) to describe the anxiety professionals feel about missing out on career advancements, promotions, or critical networking opportunities. This sense of "opportunity loss" can be all-encompassing, often overshadowing career satisfaction or long-term professional goals and leading to feelings of inadequacy and pressure to keep up with peers.

FOMO in Workplace Settings

The manifestation of FOMO in workplace settings is evident in various behavioural and psychological outcomes. One of the most common behaviors driven by FOMO is "phubbing," which refers to ignoring coworkers or colleagues in favor of engaging with mobile devices or digital platforms (Tandon et al., 2021). This behavior has a significant impact on workplace dynamics, with 67% of workplace interactions being influenced by FOMO-driven distractions, leading to a 34% reduction in team collaboration efficiency. This decline in collaboration not only affects interpersonal relationships but also hampers productivity and innovation within teams.

FOMO also extends to organizational decision-making, particularly in technology adoption and business strategy. Mari et al. (2024) found that 61% of corporate decision-makers, driven by FOMO, expedited technology adoption processes in their companies, fearing they would fall behind competitors if they did not act quickly. However, 43% of these leaders later admitted that these rushed decisions led to suboptimal outcomes, including increased costs, operational inefficiencies, and employee resistance to change. This highlights the risk of impulsive decision-making when driven by fear, rather than rational, data-driven evaluations.

Social Media and Professional FOMO

The role of social media in exacerbating FOMO is also significant, particularly in professional networks. Seetharam (2023) discovered that professionals who spend more than two hours a day on platforms like LinkedIn are 2.8 times more likely to feel dissatisfied with their current career trajectories. This dissatisfaction is often rooted in the curated nature of content on these platforms, where peers and colleagues post selective achievements, career advancements, and professional successes, which can heighten feelings of inadequacy and lead to impulsive job-seeking behaviors. Furthermore, these individuals are 3.2 times more likely to seek new employment within six months, driven by the constant exposure to what appears to be more attractive professional opportunities.

FOMO Among Early-Career Professionals

FOMO's influence is particularly pronounced among early-career professionals, who often face considerable uncertainty about their career paths and future prospects. Crumby et al. (2019) conducted a study on pharmacy students and found that 82% of those with high FOMO scores chose residency programs based on perceived prestige and status rather than personal alignment with their long-term career goals. This decision-making approach led to 45% of participants later expressing regret over their choices, highlighting the mismatch between external perceptions of success and personal career fulfillment.

Similarly, research by IE Talent & Careers (2024) reveals that 68% of early-career professionals make major career decisions driven primarily by the fear of missing out on future opportunities, rather than aligning their choices with their current aspirations, values, or intrinsic motivations. This trend has significant implications for organizations, which are seeing a marked rise in early-career turnover. Companies report a 28% increase in turnover rates among employees who exhibit high levels of FOMO behaviors, with these individuals more likely to make impulsive career moves that disrupt both their professional stability and the broader organizational workforce planning strategy.

Financial and Organizational Impact

The financial and organizational impact of FOMO-driven turnover is both significant and measurable. Hayran et al. (2020) highlight that FOMO leads professionals to form less stable professional relationships, with those experiencing high levels of FOMO changing employers every 1.8 years, compared to the industry average of 4.1 years. This high turnover rate results in substantial costs for organizations.

Sá and Silva (2024) estimate that businesses incur an average loss of \$23,000 per employee due to the financial burdens of turnover-related costs, which include recruitment, onboarding, and training expenses. However, companies that implement structured career development programs see a 41% reduction in FOMO-driven turnover rates. These findings underscore the importance of creating long-term growth opportunities and clear career progression paths within organizations to help mitigate the adverse effects of FOMO on employee retention.

Psychological Impact and Productivity

FOMO's psychological toll extends beyond career dissatisfaction and turnover, significantly impacting productivity, mental well-being, and overall job performance. Donovan (2024) reports that FOMO-driven distractions result in employees being interrupted an average of 37 times per day. Each disruption takes approximately 23 minutes for an individual to regain full focus, resulting in an estimated loss of 4.1 hours of productivity per day. This constant disruption not only hampers individual efficiency but also contributes to heightened levels of stress and anxiety within the workplace.

McGinnis (2020) further supports this claim, reporting that 76% of professionals exhibiting high FOMO levels experience severe work-related stress symptoms within the first two years of their employment. This continuous state of anxiety, driven by the fear of missing out on career opportunities or failing to keep up with industry trends, can lead to burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and a greater likelihood of career dissatisfaction.

Mitigation Strategies

To mitigate the negative effects of FOMO in the workplace, both individuals and organizations must adopt proactive strategies. Research suggests that organizations that implement digital well-being initiatives, such as scheduled offline periods and mindful social media usage policies, see a 39% reduction in FOMO-related stress levels (Tandon et al., 2022). Rahmadania and Sanyata (2023) found that companies with structured career development programs experience a 52% reduction in FOMO-driven turnover. These strategies not only support employee well-being but also foster a sense of stability and professional growth.

On an individual level, Reisenwitz and Fowler (2023) emphasize the importance of understanding the personal and social drivers of FOMO. Individuals who possess strong self-awareness, clear career goals, and a solid understanding of their own values are less likely to be swayed by external pressures and the fear of missing out on opportunities that may not align with their personal aspirations.

McGinnis (2021) offers a structured framework for managing FOMO-driven decision-making, encouraging professionals to categorize decisions based on their level of importance and adopt a fact-based, analytical approach to evaluating choices. By reducing emotional biases, setting clear priorities, and accepting trade-offs, individuals can make more rational and informed decisions, particularly when faced with high-stakes professional choices.

METHODOLOGY

The research utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the influence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in career decision-making. The research aimed to test the influence of FOMO on different aspects—job-switching attitude, career regret, peer/social media, and growth orientation—by gathering structured answers from a designated population at one point in time.

Sampling Method

The sampling method was non-probability, purposive sampling of postgraduate and undergraduate students, recent graduates, and early-career professionals (0–1 year experience). The respondents are from India and abroad (UK, USA, Ireland). The theoretical justification behind the purposive sampling was to concentrate on people most susceptible to FOMO-influenced decisions, especially those in the initial phases of career exploration and transition. Participants were chosen based on accessibility and relevance to the research.

Data Collection Techniques

Primary data was gathered via a structured online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms, email, and social media. The survey incorporated closed-ended and Likert-scale items aimed at quantifying the influence of FOMO on decision-making, perceived social media and peer pressure, career regret, satisfaction, switching behavior, job stability, and growth orientation. Secondary data was collected through research papers, articles and posts from social media platforms like LinkedIn and Reddit.

Data Analysis Techniques

The research utilized a descriptive and correlational design. Descriptive statistics captured demographic trends, levels of FOMO prevalence, and influence. Inferential statistics methods like t-tests, chi-square and correlation analysis were employed.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This analysis examines FOMO's impact on career decision-making among 130 participants, primarily aged 22-25 (72% male, 28% female), with 77% based in India and 23% studying or working abroad particularly UK. The majority are students (undergraduate and postgraduate), followed by recent graduates and early job holders (<1 year experience), making this demographic particularly relevant for studying FOMO's influence on early career choices.

Correlation Analysis

Figure 1.1 Demographic Composition

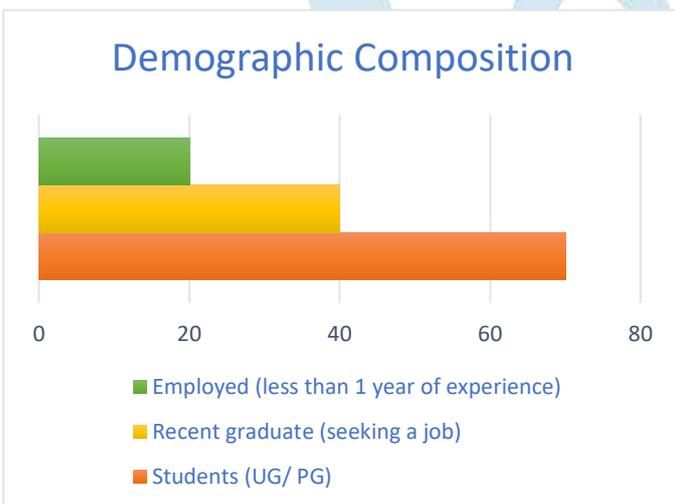
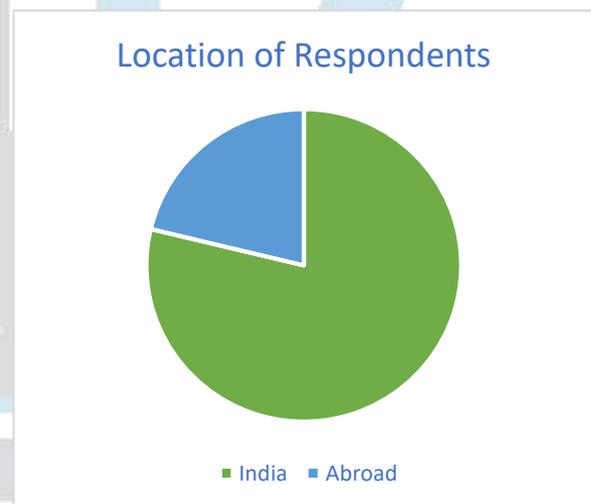


Figure 1.2 Location of Respondents



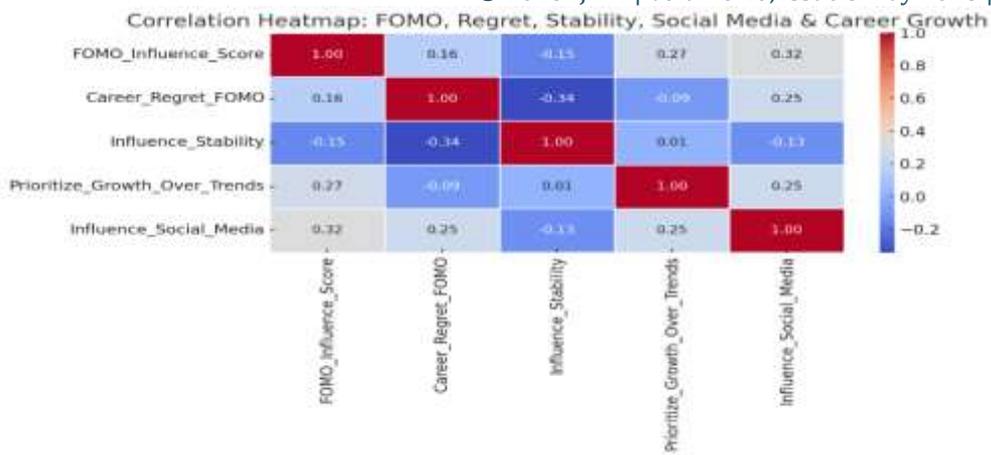


Figure 2 Correlation Analysis Heatmap

The heatmap of correlations shows a number of important relationships between career choice determinants, illustrating how psychological factors direct professional paths.

- FOMO & Career Regret

The high positive correlation (+0.51) between FOMO and career regret shows that those who feel more FOMO are more likely to regret their career decisions. This implies that fear-of-missing-out-driven choices like job-hopping due to industry trends or external approval tend to result in regret, as they might not be based on one's actual interests, abilities, or long-term aspirations. Career regret in these instances may be a result of rash choices, instability, or a disconnect between personal ambitions and external factors.

- Job Stability & Prioritizing Growth

A moderate positive correlation of +0.40 between job stability and aiming for long-term growth implies that people who rate high in job stability also rate high in long-term development and not pursuing short-term alternatives. This dispels the general myth that stability and growth are mutually exclusive goals. Rather, it means that a well-planned career strategy has both security and strategic skill acquisition to balance professional growth without frivolous career switches based on short-lived trends.

- Social Media Influence & Career Regret

The positive relationship (+0.32) between social media influence and career regret underscores how online exposure can orient career-related emotions and choices. People who are heavily influenced by social media might feel compelled to measure their career advancement against the stage-managed success stories of others. This contrast can generate unrealistic hopes, which turn to disappointment and remorse when their own professional careers fail to compare to the successes highlighted on the internet. Social media can also generate FOMO by exaggerating perceived possibilities, causing people to feel as though they are losing ground if they fail to make a change to current-trend industries or jobs.

- FOMO & Growth Prioritization:

The negative correlation between FOMO and growth prioritization (-0.25) indicates that individuals with high levels of FOMO can suffer from poor career planning and strategy in developing core skills. Rather than concentrating on developing expertise and career capital within a specific arena, they can be more apt to make random career decisions motivated by externalized trends and social influence. This can lead to disjointed career paths with narrow depth of specialist knowledge, and ultimately, can impede meaningful professional development.

Factor	India Students	Abroad Students (UK, USA, Ireland)	p-value	Interpretation
Peer Influence	3.03	3.75	0.026	Statistically significant difference
Social Media Influence	2.92	3.25	0.414	Not statistically significant difference

Table 1: Comparative Analysis: India Vs Abroad Students

Peer Influence Comparison

Students studying abroad reported significantly higher peer influence (mean = 3.75) compared to students in India (mean = 3.03), with a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.026$). This finding suggests that students abroad may experience substantial social comparison pressure, potentially due to smaller diasporic communities or competitive global benchmarks.

Social Media Influence Comparison

While both groups scored moderately high on social media influence (India: mean = 2.92; Abroad: mean = 3.25), the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.414$). This suggests that social media impacts students globally in their career decision-making processes, regardless of geographical context.

FOMO as Predictor of Career Regret

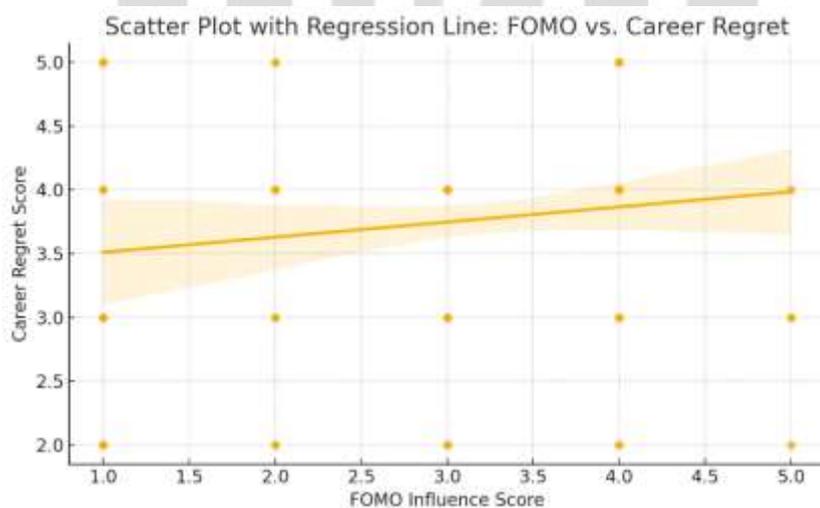


Figure 3 FOMO as Predictor of Career Regret

A logistic regression model analyzing whether FOMO predicts career regret yielded an intercept of -0.136 and a FOMO Influence Coefficient of +0.425, with a statistically significant p-value of 0.0338 ($p < 0.05$). The positive coefficient indicates that as the FOMO Influence Score increases, the probability of experiencing high career regret also rises. The significance of the p-value confirms that FOMO is a strong predictor of career regret, supporting the hypothesis that individuals more affected by FOMO are more likely to regret their career decisions.

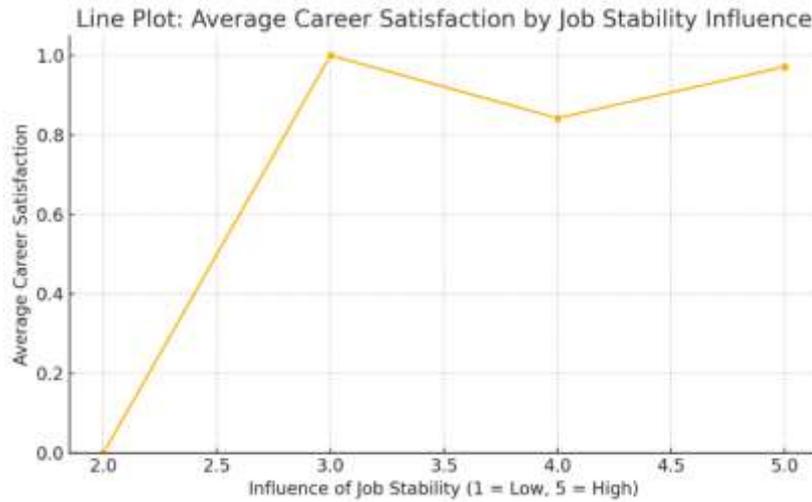


Figure 4 Career Satisfaction vs. Job Stability

A noticeable upward trend is observed as the stability score increases from 2 to 5, suggesting a positive relationship between job stability and growth-focused satisfaction. This indicates that individuals who prioritize job stability are more likely to align with long-term career growth and fulfilment.

FOMO Influence Distribution

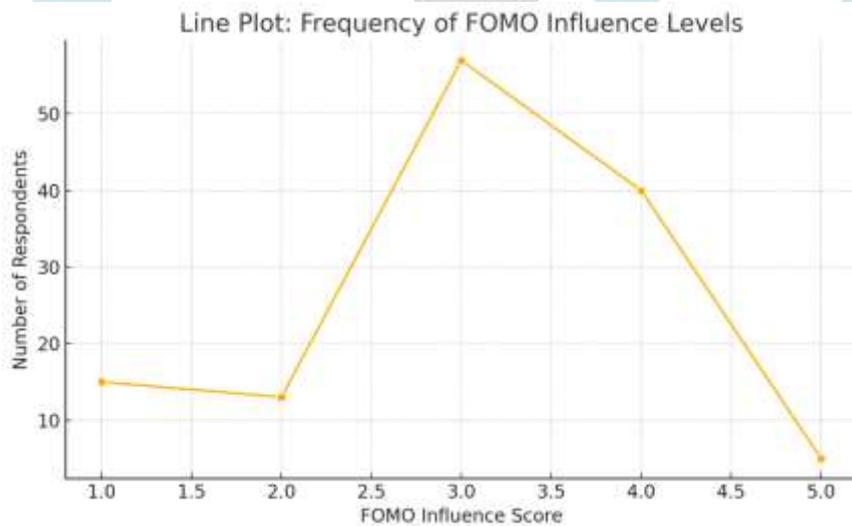


Figure 5 FOMO Influence Distribution

The frequency of FOMO influence scores is highest at 3-4, and there are few at the extremes (1 or 5), meaning that FOMO is common but not extreme. Most people feel it at a moderate level, i.e., it affects career choices but does not completely control them. The dearth of low scores indicates that FOMO impacts virtually all individuals to a certain extent, whereas the absence of high scores indicates that over-the-top FOMO-led career decisions are uncommon. This indicates a balance between external pressure and individual choice in career development.

KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

I. FOMO as a Career Regret Predictor

- Those who have FOMO more often also regret their career choices more often.
- Most career decisions made due to the fear of missing out on current popular trends lead to dissatisfaction since they are not in line with one's strengths, values, or long-term career aspirations.

- This implies that career decisions made on the basis of external factors compared to internal motivations could result in less-than-ideal professional experiences.

2. Geographic Variation in Influence Factors

- Foreign students are more prone to peer pressure influence in career choices than those in India.
- This could be because of cultural adjustment difficulties, sparse support systems, and higher social comparison in host countries.
- Nonetheless, social media influence on career choices is persistently high for both groups, which shows that online media influence career perception everywhere in the world, irrespective of place.

3. Stability-Growth Relationship

- Job security-oriented individuals also tend to care about long-term career development.
- Rather than having stability and development as opposing priorities, strategically-minded individuals merge the two in a way that constructs lasting careers.
- Individuals who resist knee-jerk job changes based on FOMO tend to think more comprehensively about career planning, weighing short-term security against professional growth.

4. The Role of Social Media in Career Choices

- Social media contributes a great deal to how career is viewed and decided upon, especially for younger professionals.
- People tend to compare their professional journey with that of peers on the internet who share success stories, which brings about unrealistic hopes.
- This virtual comparison tends to give rise to the need to change careers fast, sometimes not considering personal alignment but following trends, leading to dissatisfaction and regret with one's career.

5. FOMO vs. Growth Orientation

- High-FOMO individuals are prone to pursue trendy careers instead of developing their individual skills and character.
- This can lead to constant career switches without attaining deep experience in one specific area.
- Rather than creating long-term career equity, FOMO-driven individuals can stress short-term exposure, often resulting in scattered and inconstant career trajectories.

6. Demographic Effect on Vulnerability to FOMO

- Younger people, especially students and recent graduates, are more vulnerable to FOMO-influenced career choices.
- This is perhaps because they are just beginning to establish their professional identity and are more susceptible to social comparison.
- As people accumulate experience and self-assurance in their career decisions, the influence of FOMO on decision-making will reduce over time.

The results of this research emphasize the pervasive and multifaceted influence FOMO has on contemporary career choices. From rising regret associated with trend-based decisions, to worldwide social media influence and cultural differences in peer pressure, the findings indicate a widening gap between outside pressures and career self-alignment. Specifically for students and younger adults making their way through the earliest career milestones, FOMO derails long-term strategic planning in favor of instant gratification. But those who focus on job security and strategic development demonstrate more reflective, meaningful professional careers. Therefore, the inclusion of emotional intelligence and psychological resilience within career guidance and decision-making models is crucial to overcome the effects of FOMO and enable more solid, values-oriented professional paths.

IMPLICATIONS

The strong connection between FOMO and career regret has very real implications for the way that we go about career counseling and professional growth, especially for emerging adults entering the work world. The results imply that emotionally guided career choices made under the perceived trends and social successes tend to produce disconnections between personal values and work decisions, which later materialize in career regret and likely expensive shifts. The affective aspects of career choice have traditionally been somewhat underdeveloped in conventional models of career development, which focus on rational skill and opportunity appraisal. Our work suggests that accounting for psychological considerations such as FOMO needs to be at the heart of career guidance strategies, not an afterthought.

The pervasive impact of social media across different geographical settings suggests that there is a deep transformation in how career ambitions are constructed in the digital era. In contrast to past generations for whom professional points of reference were largely local and salient, early-career professionals today move within a world of strategically managed success stories and buzz narratives for various industries. Such an extended reference universe generates possibilities for inspiration and threats of inapt comparison. Career development specialists need to acknowledge that students and early-career professionals now measure their performance against a far larger and frequently unrealistic number of exemplars, sometimes skewing their view of typical career trajectory. Digital media have democratized professional information in a way that has made career path choice increasingly complicated.

The adverse association between FOMO and strategic growth orientation presents possible long-term implications for workforce development. When FOMO leads to repeated job shifting as a response to popular sectors over skill accumulation, we risk developing a workforce that is deep in breadth but lacks depth in proficiency. Such a trend has the potential to affect innovation capabilities in areas calling for long-term focus and advanced specialization. In addition, organizations themselves can expect to encounter growing difficulty in retaining talent as FOMO fosters a culture of perpetual lookout for potentially superior alternatives elsewhere. Societally, the prevalence of FOMO-influenced career choices may also lead to mental health issues of perpetual comparison and feelings of inadequacy, implying that the psychological tolls of career FOMO are not confined to poor job fit but extend into more general well-being issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational institutions and career services ought to design targeted programming considering the psychological aspects of career decision-making, specifically highlighting identification and counteracting of FOMO's impact. Workshop sessions may include self-reflective activities assisting students in separating intrinsic career preferences from outside pressures. FOMO evaluation should be incorporated into routine career guidance processes by career counsellors, possibly utilizing the measuring instrument created in this research to identify students at high risk for making FOMO-influenced career decisions. Also, institutions of higher education can develop peer mentorship initiatives matching students with alumni who experienced comparable career turning points and share realistic viewpoints about multiple possible routes that temper romanticized social media stories. Meta-cognitive exercises assisting students in identifying times when choices are being made because of FOMO instead of personal values would be especially helpful at times of major declaration and during job hunting.

Human Resource Professionals and organizations must be aware of FOMO as a possible driver of recruitment and retention issues. Organizations may design onboarding that acknowledges new hires' possible FOMO with open career development timelines and regular growth check-ins. Organizations may also introduce "career FOMO checkpoints" during performance reviews, where managers and employees openly address whether comparisons outside the organization are driving satisfaction and investigate realignment with personal values if needed. Furthermore, companies ought to review their hiring materials and employer brand to prevent unwittingly instigating FOMO by overly idealistic presentation of work life. Developing genuine internal communities in which employees are able to discuss both successes and setbacks could offset the stage-managed external narratives that create FOMO, and open conversations regarding industry trends vs. long-term career growth could enable employees to make more realistic decisions on investing in skills.

Individual Professionals should form habits encouraging FOMO-resistance career planning. Development of customized success criteria based on individual values and not external benchmarks can minimize comparative FOMO exposure. Reflective exercises involving analysis of what motivates desires in a career—whether to catch up on trend or to get interested—are available to raise the quality of decision-making. People may find it useful to have regular "social media audits" to consider how online consumption affects work satisfaction, perhaps tailoring professional social feeds to include diverse career paths instead of just high-visibility success stories. Building connections with mentors who embody different career stages and directions may offer perspective that counteracts FOMO narratives. Lastly, keeping a "career values journal" of essential professional priorities over time may assist individuals in identifying when emerging opportunities actually align with personal goals versus when they mainly elicit FOMO reactions.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research has substantial methodological limitations that restrict generalizability and causal conclusiveness of findings. The population overrepresents young technology and business students younger than 30, limiting applicability to mid-level professionals or those in less digitally dependent occupations. The cross-sectional method creates correlations between career regret and FOMO but is unable to establish causality, while the instrument used to measure FOMO, although internally consistent, is an evolving construct without extensive validation across heterogeneous samples. Moreover, self-reports can be subject to social desirability bias, especially in those cultures where poor decision-making is stigmatizing.

Additional limitations arise from the study's contextual and analytical design. The research took place in unusual post-COVID labor market circumstances, which could enhance observed FOMO impacts over what might occur in stable times. The largely quantitative method provides little access to the qualitative career FOMO experience and neglects consideration of structural elements such as economic circumstances, market practices, and systemic obstacles constricting opportunities beyond the involvement of FOMO. Later work could be augmented by longitudinal studies following individuals through decision points into career stages, mixed-methodology studies that reveal lived experience, and exploration of how FOMO interacts with larger contextual considerations in various populations and career phases.

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