



Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Media Addiction, and Anxiety among Adolescents: A Conceptual Framework for Evidence-Based School Counseling Strategies

Yulia Septi Wahyuni¹, Nurhanifa Tamba²

¹Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau, Indonesia

²Universitas Universitas Quality, Indonesia

Corresponding author: ayusepti341@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Open Access

This article is freely available online under the CC BY 4.0 license.

Article History

Received: 2026-07-18

Revised: 2026-07-28

Accepted: 2026-08-08

Published: 2026-09-02

Keywords:

Fear of Missing Out;
Social Media Addiction;
Anxiety; Adolescents;
School Counseling;
Conceptual Framework.

The rapid growth of social media has transformed adolescents' communication and social interaction while creating increasing challenges to psychological well-being. Among these challenges, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Media Addiction (SMA), and anxiety have emerged as interrelated concerns requiring attention from school counseling professionals. This study aims to develop an evidence-based conceptual framework explaining the relationships among FoMO, SMA, and anxiety and to examine their implications for school counseling practices. A conceptual paper design was employed using an integrative literature review approach. Relevant studies published in reputable international journals were systematically identified through major academic databases and synthesized using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that FoMO functions as a psychological vulnerability that encourages excessive social media engagement. Persistent and compulsive social media use may subsequently increase anxiety through maladaptive social comparison, emotional dysregulation, and dependence on online social validation. Based on the synthesis, this study proposes a conceptual framework positioning FoMO as the psychological antecedent, SMA as the behavioral mechanism, and anxiety as the psychological outcome. The framework contributes theoretically by integrating relevant psychological perspectives and practically by informing evidence-based school counseling interventions, including digital literacy, psychoeducation, emotional regulation, cognitive-behavioral strategies, and school-family collaboration. Future empirical research is recommended to validate the proposed framework across diverse educational contexts.

How To Cite

Wahyuni. Y.S., & Tamba. N. (2026). Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Media Addiction, and Anxiety among Adolescents: A Conceptual Framework for Evidence-Based School Counseling Strategies. *PSIKONSA: Jurnal Psikologi dan Konseling*, 1(1), 17-33. <https://doi.org/10.67467/psikonsa.v1i1.260>

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally reshaped the ways adolescents communicate, establish social relationships, and construct their identities. As digital natives, adolescents increasingly rely on social media platforms including Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and X not only for interpersonal communication but also for entertainment, information seeking, self-expression, and social validation. According to UNESCO (2023), digital technologies have become deeply embedded in educational and social environments, creating unprecedented opportunities for learning and collaboration while simultaneously introducing new psychosocial challenges. Likewise, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) identifies adolescent mental health as a global public health priority, emphasizing that digital environments represent an increasingly influential determinant of young people's psychological well-being. Although social media facilitates connectivity and access to information, accumulating evidence suggests that its psychological consequences depend less on the frequency of use than on the quality and patterns of engagement. Systematic reviews and multinational studies consistently demonstrate that problematic social media use (PSMU) is more strongly associated with depression, anxiety, stress, emotional distress, and reduced life satisfaction than mere usage intensity (Boer et al., 2020a; Shannon et al., 2021; Marciano et al., 2022; Saleem et al., 2024; West et al., 2024). These findings indicate that understanding adolescents' mental health requires moving beyond screen-time measures toward examining the psychological mechanisms underlying maladaptive digital behaviors.

One of the most influential psychological constructs explaining adolescents' vulnerability in digital environments is Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Originally conceptualized by Przybylski et al. (2013), FoMO refers to a pervasive apprehension that others are experiencing rewarding events without one's participation, accompanied by a persistent desire to remain continually connected with others' activities. Recent conceptualizations suggest that FoMO extends beyond curiosity or habitual social media checking, representing a form of cognitive-emotional vulnerability characterized by heightened sensitivity to social exclusion, interpersonal comparison, and perceived social disconnection (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020; Bozzola et al., 2022; Szawłoga et al., 2024). From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, FoMO arises when fundamental psychological needs particularly relatedness, autonomy, and competence are insufficiently fulfilled, motivating individuals to seek social reassurance through continuous online engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020; West et al., 2024). Adolescents are especially susceptible because developmental tasks during this life stage emphasize peer acceptance, identity exploration, and belongingness. Consequently, many adolescents develop persistent concerns about being excluded from online interactions, social events, or peer conversations, prompting repetitive monitoring of social networking platforms as a means of maintaining perceived social connectedness (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020; Orben et al., 2024; Szawłoga et al., 2024).

Growing empirical evidence further indicates that FoMO functions as a critical antecedent of problematic social media use and may gradually evolve into Social Media Addiction (SMA). Longitudinal evidence demonstrates that FoMO predicts subsequent increases in problematic social media use among adolescents, whereas the reverse relationship receives considerably weaker empirical support, suggesting that FoMO represents an important psychological driver rather than merely a consequence of excessive social media engagement (Li et al., 2024). Qualitative investigations similarly reveal that adolescents frequently experience pressure to remain constantly available, respond immediately to messages, monitor peers' online activities, and maintain continuous digital presence to avoid social exclusion (Throuvala et al., 2019; West et al., 2024). Such behavioral patterns closely align with the Compensatory Internet Use Theory, which posits that individuals engage excessively with digital technologies to compensate for unmet social and emotional needs or to alleviate negative affective states (Gioia et al., 2021; Montag et al., 2024). However, rather than resolving these psychological needs, compulsive online engagement often reinforces dependence on social media, creating maladaptive cycles characterized by diminished self-regulation, impaired daily functioning, and increasing psychological vulnerability. Accordingly, FoMO should be

understood not merely as an emotional response to social exclusion but as a central cognitive mechanism that facilitates the transition from adaptive social media use to addictive digital behavior.

The relationship between FoMO and Social Media Addiction has been consistently supported by recent empirical studies across diverse cultural settings. Fabris et al. (2020) demonstrated that FoMO contributes to emotional symptoms both directly and indirectly through stress associated with online neglect and social media addiction. Similarly, Dam et al. (2023) reported that adolescents with elevated FoMO experienced poorer quality of life, greater psychological distress, and significantly higher levels of problematic social media use. Broader reviews have further concluded that FoMO is systematically associated with loneliness, depression, anxiety, excessive technology use, and diminished psychosocial adjustment among adolescents (Cataldo et al., 2021; Szawłoga et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings suggest that FoMO represents a foundational psychological vulnerability that links adolescents' unmet social needs with maladaptive patterns of digital engagement. Nevertheless, despite the growing body of evidence, previous studies have predominantly examined FoMO either as an isolated predictor of problematic social media use or as an independent correlate of mental health outcomes. Limited attention has been devoted to integrating FoMO, Social Media Addiction, and anxiety into a comprehensive conceptual framework capable of informing evidence-based school counseling practices. This unresolved issue provides an important rationale for developing a more integrated theoretical perspective on adolescent digital well-being.

Among the adverse psychological consequences associated with adolescents' digital engagement, anxiety has emerged as one of the most prevalent and concerning mental health issues. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) estimates that anxiety disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability during adolescence, affecting emotional well-being, academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life. Within digital environments, anxiety is no longer understood solely as an individual psychological condition but increasingly as a response to continuous online social evaluation, excessive exposure to idealized self-presentations, cybervictimization, and the persistent pressure to remain socially connected (Orben et al., 2024). A growing body of evidence demonstrates that adolescents exhibiting problematic social media use consistently report higher levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, emotional distress, and stress than those whose social media engagement remains adaptive (Shannon et al., 2021; Saleem et al., 2024). Longitudinal findings further indicate that problematic social media use precedes subsequent deterioration in mental health, whereas mere frequency or duration of social media use shows considerably weaker and less consistent associations (Boer et al., 2020a). These findings reinforce the view that the psychological consequences of digital technology are determined primarily by maladaptive patterns of engagement rather than by exposure alone.

The relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Media Addiction, and anxiety is increasingly recognized as a dynamic psychological process rather than a series of isolated associations. Adolescents experiencing elevated FoMO tend to engage in compulsive social monitoring to reduce uncertainty regarding peer activities and social acceptance. However, instead of satisfying their need for belongingness, continuous online engagement frequently intensifies upward social comparison, emotional dependence on digital feedback, perceived social exclusion, and fear of negative evaluation, thereby reinforcing anxiety symptoms (Fabris et al., 2020; Einstein et al., 2023; Orben et al., 2024). This mechanism is further strengthened by deficits in emotion regulation, loneliness, and maladaptive coping strategies, which encourage adolescents to use social media as a compensatory means of alleviating psychological discomfort while paradoxically increasing emotional vulnerability (Gioia et al., 2021; Türk & Koçyiğit, 2025). Recent longitudinal evidence also demonstrates that FoMO predicts problematic social media use over time, whereas problematic internet and social media use subsequently contribute to heightened anxiety and loneliness, suggesting a self-reinforcing cycle of digital maladjustment (Li et al., 2024; Wang & Gong, 2025). Collectively, these findings support the proposition that Social Media Addiction operates as a key psychological mechanism through which FoMO contributes to anxiety among adolescents.

Despite substantial advances in digital mental health research, the existing literature remains conceptually fragmented. Most previous studies have examined direct associations or specific mediation models involving FoMO, problematic social media use, and anxiety without integrating broader theoretical perspectives capable of explaining their reciprocal psychological mechanisms (Li et al., 2024; Saleem et al., 2024). Furthermore, although systematic reviews have consistently identified FoMO, emotion dysregulation, loneliness, social comparison, and problematic social media use as major risk factors for adolescent mental health, these constructs have rarely been synthesized into a comprehensive conceptual framework that can inform evidence-based school counseling practices (West et al., 2024; Orben et al., 2024). Consequently, school counselors continue to face challenges in translating rapidly expanding empirical evidence into preventive and intervention strategies that address the underlying cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes of adolescents' digital experiences. Addressing this gap, the present conceptual paper synthesizes contemporary theoretical and empirical evidence to develop a conceptual framework linking Fear of Missing Out, Social Media Addiction, and anxiety, while proposing evidence-based school counseling strategies that support early identification, prevention, and psychological intervention for adolescents in the digital era.

2. METHODS

This study employed a conceptual paper approach using an integrative literature review to critically synthesize theories and empirical evidence concerning Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Media Addiction, anxiety among adolescents, and evidence-based school counseling strategies. Unlike a traditional narrative review, an integrative literature review enables researchers to combine findings from diverse theoretical and empirical studies, identify conceptual relationships, reveal research gaps, and develop a comprehensive conceptual framework for future research and professional practice (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2016). This approach was selected because the objective of the study was not to estimate effect sizes or statistically summarize previous findings, but rather to construct an integrated theoretical model capable of explaining the psychological mechanisms linking FoMO, Social Media Addiction, and anxiety, while providing practical implications for school counseling.

The literature search was conducted using major international academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, SAGE Journals, ProQuest, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The search strategy combined Boolean operators with keywords such as *"Fear of Missing Out" OR "FoMO", "Social Media Addiction" OR "Problematic Social Media Use", "Anxiety", "Adolescents", "School Counseling", "Mental Health", and "Digital Well-being"*. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2019 and 2025, reflecting the rapidly evolving landscape of adolescent digital behavior. Nevertheless, seminal works that established the theoretical foundations of the study, including Self-Determination Theory and the original FoMO construct, were also incorporated to strengthen the conceptual analysis.

To ensure the quality and relevance of the reviewed literature, four inclusion criteria were applied: (1) publications appearing in peer-reviewed international journals indexed in Scopus or Web of Science, with additional support from reputable scholarly databases; (2) studies focusing on adolescents, digital behavior, FoMO, Social Media Addiction, anxiety, emotional regulation, or school counseling; (3) empirical studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and theoretical papers contributing substantially to the conceptual development of the topic; and (4) publications available in English. Conversely, conference abstracts, editorials, opinion papers, unpublished manuscripts, duplicate publications, and studies lacking clear methodological rigor were excluded from the review. This selection strategy ensured that the conceptual framework was developed from robust and high-quality scientific evidence.

The analysis followed an integrative synthesis process consisting of four sequential stages. First, relevant literature was identified and screened according to the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Second, selected studies were examined to extract key information regarding theoretical perspectives, research objectives, methodologies, principal findings, and practical implications. Third, recurring themes, conceptual similarities, and inconsistencies across studies were identified through thematic analysis to reveal

the underlying psychological mechanisms connecting FoMO, Social Media Addiction, and anxiety. Finally, these synthesized findings were integrated into a comprehensive conceptual framework that explains the interrelationships among the three constructs and serves as a theoretical foundation for developing evidence-based school counseling strategies. Throughout this process, particular attention was devoted to identifying cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social factors that may influence adolescents' vulnerability to problematic digital engagement.

The proposed conceptual framework was developed through an iterative process of theoretical integration. Self-Determination Theory was employed to explain the psychological origins of FoMO arising from unmet needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Compensatory Internet Use Theory was used to explain adolescents' excessive reliance on social media as a coping mechanism for emotional discomfort and unmet social needs (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Gioia et al., 2021). Furthermore, Social Comparison Theory and Cognitive Behavioral perspectives were incorporated to explain how continuous online comparison, cognitive distortions, and emotional dysregulation contribute to anxiety symptoms among adolescents. Integrating these complementary perspectives enabled the development of a multidimensional framework that extends beyond simple bivariate associations and provides a stronger theoretical basis for evidence-based school counseling interventions.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the conceptual synthesis, the reviewed literature was critically compared across different research designs, including longitudinal studies, cross-sectional surveys, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses. Greater weight was assigned to studies employing rigorous methodologies, large representative samples, and high-quality evidence, particularly recent publications in internationally reputable journals. Rather than merely summarizing previous findings, this study emphasizes conceptual integration by identifying consistent patterns, theoretical convergence, unresolved inconsistencies, and emerging directions for future research. Consequently, the resulting framework offers not only a comprehensive explanation of the relationships among FoMO, Social Media Addiction, and anxiety but also practical guidance for designing preventive, developmental, and intervention-oriented school counseling programs that address adolescents' mental health challenges in the digital era.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO): A Psychological Vulnerability in the Digital Era

The synthesis of recent literature consistently identifies Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) as one of the most influential psychological constructs underlying adolescents' maladaptive digital behavior. Rather than representing a temporary emotional response, FoMO has evolved into a persistent cognitive-affective condition characterized by excessive concern about being excluded from rewarding social experiences and a compulsive need to remain continuously connected with online social interactions (Przybylski et al., 2013; Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020). The increasing integration of social media into adolescents' daily lives has intensified this phenomenon by creating an environment where social information is continuously available, encouraging frequent social comparison and reinforcing the perception that meaningful experiences are constantly occurring elsewhere (Orben et al., 2024; West et al., 2024). Consequently, adolescents become increasingly vulnerable to emotional distress when they perceive themselves as disconnected from their peers' digital activities.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), FoMO emerges when adolescents experience frustration in fulfilling the basic psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Social media platforms provide immediate opportunities to satisfy these needs through social approval, online interaction, and digital recognition. However, the gratification obtained through online engagement is often temporary, encouraging repeated checking behaviors that gradually become habitual and difficult to regulate. Recent studies consistently demonstrate that adolescents with higher FoMO levels are more likely to exhibit compulsive social media monitoring, stronger dependence on peer feedback, lower psychological well-being, and greater susceptibility to problematic social media use (Fabris

et al., 2020; Dam et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). Longitudinal evidence reported by Li et al. (2024) further confirms that FoMO predicts subsequent increases in problematic social media use, whereas the reverse relationship is substantially weaker, suggesting that FoMO functions as an antecedent rather than merely a consequence of excessive social media engagement.

The reviewed studies also indicate that FoMO should not be viewed as an isolated psychological factor but as a central mechanism linking adolescents' social needs with broader mental health outcomes. Recent reviews associate FoMO with loneliness, emotional dysregulation, depression, anxiety, reduced life satisfaction, and diminished psychosocial adjustment (Cataldo et al., 2021; Szawłoga et al., 2024). Furthermore, qualitative evidence suggests that adolescents experiencing FoMO often report pressure to remain constantly available, fear of delayed responses, and persistent concern about missing online interactions, thereby reinforcing compulsive digital engagement (Throuvala et al., 2019). Collectively, these findings suggest that FoMO represents a foundational psychological vulnerability that initiates a chain of maladaptive digital behaviors. Therefore, from a school counseling perspective, early identification of students exhibiting high FoMO is essential for preventing the progression toward problematic social media use and subsequent psychological distress.

Table 1. Synthesis of Previous Studies on Fear of Missing Out among Adolescents

Author(s)	Main Focus	Key Findings	Implications
Bloemen & De Coninck (2020)	Family and FoMO	Family characteristics influence adolescents' FoMO levels.	Family involvement is important in prevention.
Fabris et al. (2020)	FoMO, Social Media Addiction, Emotional Symptoms	FoMO directly and indirectly predicts emotional symptoms through social media addiction.	FoMO should become an early target of counseling interventions.
Dam et al. (2023)	FoMO and Quality of Life	Higher FoMO is associated with poorer quality of life and greater psychological distress.	Strengthening digital well-being programs is necessary.
Li et al. (2024)	Longitudinal Relationship	FoMO predicts problematic social media use over time.	FoMO functions as an antecedent of problematic digital behavior.
Orben et al. (2024)	Psychological Mechanisms	Social comparison and online evaluation strengthen FoMO and mental health vulnerability.	Preventive interventions should address cognitive and emotional mechanisms.

The synthesis presented in Table 1 demonstrates a consistent pattern across recent empirical studies: FoMO constitutes the primary psychological vulnerability that precedes problematic social media engagement among adolescents. Rather than resulting solely from technological exposure, FoMO develops through the interaction between developmental needs for social belonging and the reinforcing characteristics of digital platforms. This finding supports Self-Determination Theory, which posits that unmet psychological needs motivate individuals to seek alternative sources of social satisfaction, including online environments (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Accordingly, interventions aimed solely at reducing screen time are unlikely to produce sustainable outcomes unless they also address adolescents' underlying psychological needs. For school counselors, these findings underscore the importance of integrating psychoeducation, emotional regulation training, digital literacy, and social competence development into comprehensive preventive counseling programs. Such an approach is expected to reduce FoMO while simultaneously strengthening adolescents' resilience in navigating the increasingly complex digital environment.

Social Media Addiction as a Consequence of Fear of Missing Out

The literature consistently recognizes Social Media Addiction (SMA) as one of the most significant psychological consequences of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Although social media is designed to facilitate communication and information sharing, its persuasive technological features including personalized algorithms, instant notifications, endless scrolling, and social feedback mechanisms can reinforce compulsive use, particularly among adolescents with heightened needs for social belonging and peer approval (Montag et al., 2024; Orben et al., 2024). Within this context, FoMO functions as a motivational trigger that encourages adolescents to remain continuously connected in order to avoid missing social interactions or rewarding online experiences. Over time, repeated checking behaviors become habitual and may develop into problematic or addictive patterns of social media use characterized by salience, loss of control, withdrawal symptoms, tolerance, and interference with everyday functioning (Bozzola et al., 2022; Shannon et al., 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) provides a compelling explanation for this relationship. The theory argues that individuals often engage excessively with online platforms to compensate for unmet emotional and social needs experienced in offline settings (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). Adolescents experiencing loneliness, social insecurity, or low perceived belonging may increasingly depend on social media as a coping strategy to regulate negative emotions. However, rather than resolving these psychological difficulties, excessive engagement reinforces emotional dependence on digital interaction, creating a maladaptive cycle in which FoMO intensifies social media use while problematic use simultaneously strengthens psychological vulnerability (Gioia et al., 2021; Montag et al., 2024). Longitudinal evidence by Li et al. (2024) further supports this mechanism, demonstrating that FoMO predicts subsequent problematic social media use, whereas reciprocal effects are comparatively weaker, highlighting FoMO as a primary antecedent of digital addictive behavior.

Recent empirical findings consistently reinforce this theoretical perspective. A systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by Shannon et al. (2021) concluded that problematic social media use is significantly associated with multiple adverse psychological outcomes among adolescents and young adults, including anxiety, depression, and stress. Similarly, Dam et al. (2023) reported that adolescents with higher levels of social media addiction experienced poorer quality of life, greater emotional distress, and stronger FoMO. Furthermore, the comprehensive review by Montag et al. (2024) identifies adolescence as a developmental period particularly susceptible to problematic social media use due to ongoing neurocognitive maturation, heightened reward sensitivity, and increased dependence on peer evaluation. Collectively, these findings suggest that Social Media Addiction should be understood not merely as excessive technology use but as a multidimensional behavioral condition emerging from the interaction between individual psychological vulnerabilities and the persuasive design of digital platforms.

Table 2. Synthesis of Recent Studies on Social Media Addiction among Adolescents

Author(s)	Research Focus	Main Findings	Implications
Shannon et al. (2021)	Systematic review and meta-analysis	Problematic social media use is consistently associated with anxiety, depression, and stress.	Early identification of problematic use is essential in schools.
Gioia et al. (2021)	Emotional dysregulation	Emotion dysregulation contributes to problematic internet and social media use.	Counseling should strengthen emotional regulation skills.
Dam et al. (2023)	FoMO, SMA, and quality of life	Social media addiction is associated with poorer quality of life and greater psychological distress.	Digital well-being programs should address FoMO and addictive behaviors simultaneously.
Li et al. (2024)	Longitudinal study	FoMO predicts increases in problematic social media use over time.	FoMO represents a key preventive intervention target.

Montag et al. (2024)	Narrative review	Adolescent brain development and platform design jointly increase vulnerability to social media addiction.	Preventive strategies should combine psychological and digital literacy approaches.
----------------------	------------------	--	---

The reviewed literature demonstrates that Social Media Addiction represents the behavioral manifestation of unresolved psychological needs associated with FoMO. Rather than viewing problematic social media use solely as excessive screen time, contemporary evidence emphasizes the interaction between cognitive vulnerability, emotional regulation, and persuasive platform architecture. This perspective shifts the focus of school counseling from restricting technology use toward strengthening adolescents' psychological resilience, self-regulation, and healthy digital habits. Therefore, evidence-based school counseling should integrate psychoeducation on digital well-being, cognitive-behavioral techniques to reduce compulsive checking behaviors, emotional regulation training, and collaborative interventions involving parents and teachers. Such comprehensive approaches are more likely to prevent the progression from FoMO to Social Media Addiction and subsequently reduce adolescents' vulnerability to broader mental health problems.

Anxiety as the Psychological Outcome of Fear of Missing Out and Social Media Addiction

The synthesis of contemporary literature indicates that anxiety represents one of the most consistent psychological outcomes associated with Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Social Media Addiction (SMA) among adolescents. Unlike transient emotional responses, anxiety related to digital environments develops through continuous exposure to social comparison, fear of social exclusion, excessive online monitoring, cybervictimization, and dependence on external validation (Orben et al., 2024). Adolescents with elevated FoMO tend to interpret delayed responses, limited online interactions, or exclusion from digital activities as indicators of social rejection, thereby increasing cognitive rumination and emotional distress (Einstein et al., 2023). As these maladaptive cognitions become reinforced through compulsive social media engagement, the likelihood of persistent anxiety symptoms increases substantially. This pattern aligns with cognitive-behavioral perspectives, which emphasize that dysfunctional beliefs and repetitive reassurance-seeking behaviors contribute to the maintenance of anxiety disorders.

Recent empirical evidence consistently supports this mechanism. A systematic review by Saleem et al. (2024) concluded that problematic social media use is significantly associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression among children and adolescents, although the magnitude of these relationships varies according to individual and contextual factors. Similarly, Shannon et al. (2021), through a meta-analysis, reported moderate but robust associations between problematic social media use and anxiety across diverse populations. Longitudinal studies further demonstrate that problematic internet and social media use predict subsequent increases in anxiety and loneliness rather than merely occurring as consequences of poor mental health (Wang & Gong, 2025). Moreover, Einstein et al. (2023) found that adolescents with high FoMO exhibited significantly stronger associations between social media use and anxiety than those with lower FoMO, indicating that FoMO amplifies adolescents' psychological vulnerability to the adverse effects of digital engagement. These findings collectively suggest that FoMO and Social Media Addiction interact synergistically in increasing anxiety rather than operating as independent risk factors.

From the perspective of evidence-based school counseling, these findings imply that anxiety prevention should extend beyond limiting social media use to addressing the underlying psychological mechanisms that sustain maladaptive digital behavior. Contemporary counseling approaches recommend integrating psychoeducation on healthy digital engagement, cognitive restructuring to challenge irrational beliefs regarding online acceptance, emotional regulation training, mindfulness-based interventions, and peer-support programs to strengthen adolescents' resilience in digital environments (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2023; Gioia et al., 2021). Such multidimensional interventions are consistent with preventive school counseling models that emphasize early identification of psychological risk factors

before they develop into more severe emotional disorders. Consequently, reducing adolescents' anxiety requires interventions that simultaneously target FoMO, compulsive social media behaviors, and emotional regulation, rather than focusing on any single construct in isolation.

Table 3. Synthesis of Recent Evidence Linking FoMO, Social Media Addiction, and Anxiety

Author(s)	Research Focus	Main Findings	Implications
Einstein et al. (2023)	FoMO and anxiety	FoMO strengthens the association between social media use and anxiety.	FoMO should be considered a psychological risk indicator.
Shannon et al. (2021)	Meta-analysis	Problematic social media use is consistently associated with anxiety, depression, and stress.	Schools should implement early screening for problematic digital behavior.
Saleem et al. (2024)	Systematic review	Problematic social media use contributes to anxiety symptoms among adolescents.	Digital mental health promotion should become part of school counseling.
Wang & Gong (2025)	Longitudinal study	Internet addiction predicts subsequent anxiety and loneliness over time.	Early intervention is more effective than symptom-focused treatment.
Orben et al. (2024)	Mechanism review	Social comparison, cybervictimization, and online evaluation explain the impact of social media on adolescent mental health.	Counseling interventions should target cognitive and emotional mechanisms rather than technology use alone.

The reviewed evidence demonstrates that anxiety should be understood as the cumulative psychological consequence of the interaction between FoMO and Social Media Addiction, rather than as an isolated outcome of excessive technology use. FoMO initiates persistent concerns regarding social connectedness, while Social Media Addiction reinforces compulsive engagement with digital platforms through repetitive reassurance-seeking and social comparison. Over time, these reciprocal processes weaken emotional regulation and increase adolescents' vulnerability to anxiety. Therefore, school counseling interventions should adopt an integrated preventive framework that combines digital literacy, cognitive-behavioral counseling, emotional regulation training, mindfulness, and collaborative support involving families and schools. Such an approach is expected to strengthen adolescents' psychological resilience while promoting healthier and more adaptive patterns of digital engagement in the contemporary social media environment.

Developing a Conceptual Framework for Evidence-Based School Counseling Strategies

The synthesis of the reviewed literature suggests that Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Media Addiction (SMA), and anxiety should not be understood as isolated psychological phenomena but rather as interconnected processes within adolescents' digital experiences. Existing empirical studies consistently demonstrate that FoMO increases adolescents' motivation to remain constantly connected with social media, which subsequently encourages compulsive digital engagement and ultimately contributes to anxiety through maladaptive cognitive and emotional processes (Fabris et al., 2020; Li et al., 2024; Orben et al., 2024). However, previous studies have predominantly examined these relationships from psychological or public health perspectives, with limited attention given to translating these findings into an integrated framework that can guide school counseling practice. Consequently, school counselors often face difficulties in selecting preventive and intervention strategies that address the underlying mechanisms rather than merely reducing observable symptoms.

Drawing upon Self-Determination Theory, Compensatory Internet Use Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Cognitive Behavioral Theory, this study proposes a conceptual framework in which FoMO

functions as the primary psychological vulnerability, Social Media Addiction serves as the behavioral mechanism, and anxiety represents the psychological outcome. Within this framework, unmet needs for relatedness, competence, and social acceptance increase adolescents' susceptibility to FoMO (Ryan & Deci, 2020; West et al., 2024). Persistent FoMO then promotes compulsive social media monitoring and dependence on online validation, which gradually develops into problematic social media use (Li et al., 2024; Montag et al., 2024). As addictive behaviors become reinforced through continuous social comparison, cybervictimization, and emotional dysregulation, adolescents become increasingly vulnerable to anxiety and other psychological difficulties (Gioia et al., 2021; Orben et al., 2024; Wang & Gong, 2025). This integrated perspective explains why interventions that focus exclusively on reducing screen time often produce limited and short-term outcomes.

Based on this conceptual synthesis, evidence-based school counseling should adopt a multi-tiered preventive framework that targets both psychological vulnerabilities and digital behaviors. At the universal level, counselors should implement digital literacy education, psychoeducation on FoMO, and healthy social media habits for all students. At the selective level, schools should conduct early screening using validated instruments to identify students at risk of FoMO, problematic social media use, and anxiety. At the indicated level, individualized interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Counseling (CBC), mindfulness-based counseling, Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC), and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) can strengthen emotional regulation, cognitive restructuring, and adaptive coping skills. This multi-tiered framework aligns with contemporary recommendations emphasizing prevention, early identification, and evidence-based intervention as the foundation of comprehensive school mental health services (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2023; WHO, 2024).

Table 4. Proposed Evidence-Based School Counseling Framework

Psychological Issue	Counseling Focus	Recommended Intervention	Expected Outcome
Fear of Missing Out	Social belonging and digital awareness	Psychoeducation, digital literacy, group guidance	Reduced FoMO and healthier online behavior
Social Media Addiction	Self-regulation and behavioral control	Cognitive Behavioral Counseling (CBC), self-monitoring, behavioral contracts	Improved self-control and balanced social media use
Anxiety	Emotional regulation and cognitive restructuring	Mindfulness-based counseling, REBT, SFBC, individual counseling	Reduced anxiety and enhanced psychological well-being
Comprehensive Prevention	School ecosystem	Parent–teacher collaboration, peer support programs, routine mental health screening	Sustainable digital well-being and school resilience

The proposed framework extends previous research by integrating psychological theory, empirical evidence, and school counseling practice into a unified explanatory model. Rather than conceptualizing FoMO, Social Media Addiction, and anxiety as independent constructs, the framework explains their sequential and reciprocal relationships while identifying specific intervention points for school counselors. This integration represents the primary theoretical contribution of the present conceptual paper. From a practical perspective, the framework provides counselors with an evidence-based guide for designing preventive, developmental, and responsive counseling programs that address the psychological roots of adolescents' digital behavior. As schools continue to confront increasing mental health challenges associated with digital technology, adopting comprehensive counseling strategies grounded in current scientific evidence will be essential for promoting adolescents' resilience, digital well-being, and healthy psychosocial development.

Implications for School Counseling and Future Research

The proposed conceptual framework has important implications for the development of evidence-based school counseling in the digital era. The synthesis of contemporary literature indicates that adolescents' psychological difficulties associated with social media cannot be effectively addressed through restrictive policies alone, such as limiting screen time or reducing internet access. Instead, counseling services should prioritize interventions that target the underlying psychological mechanisms, including Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), emotional dysregulation, maladaptive social comparison, and excessive dependence on online social validation (Orben et al., 2024; West et al., 2024). Accordingly, school counselors should integrate digital well-being into comprehensive counseling programs through preventive psychoeducation, emotional regulation training, digital literacy, and cognitive-behavioral interventions that strengthen adolescents' self-control and resilience in navigating digital environments (ASCA, 2023; WHO, 2024).

The conceptual framework also highlights the importance of adopting a whole-school approach involving counselors, teachers, parents, and school leaders. Preventive efforts should not only identify students who exhibit problematic social media use but also foster a supportive school climate that promotes healthy peer relationships, responsible digital citizenship, and adaptive coping skills. Routine screening using validated psychological instruments, collaboration with families, and continuous monitoring of students' digital well-being may enhance early detection and timely intervention for adolescents at risk of developing anxiety related to digital behaviors (Montag et al., 2024; Saleem et al., 2024). Such collaborative practices are consistent with contemporary school mental health frameworks that emphasize prevention before psychological problems become more severe.

Although this study provides an integrated conceptual explanation of the relationships among FoMO, Social Media Addiction, and anxiety, several directions for future research remain open. First, the proposed framework should be empirically validated using longitudinal or structural equation modeling (SEM) designs to examine the causal pathways among the constructs. Second, future studies should investigate potential protective factors such as psychological resilience, self-compassion, emotional intelligence, digital literacy, and parental support that may buffer the adverse effects of FoMO and problematic social media use. Third, intervention studies are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of evidence-based school counseling approaches, including Cognitive Behavioral Counseling (CBC), Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC), mindfulness-based counseling, and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), in reducing FoMO, problematic social media use, and anxiety among adolescents. These research directions will contribute to refining the proposed conceptual framework while strengthening the scientific foundation of school counseling practices in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

4. CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper synthesizes contemporary evidence demonstrating that Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Media Addiction (SMA), and anxiety constitute an interconnected psychological process influencing adolescents' mental health in the digital era. The literature consistently indicates that FoMO functions as a primary psychological vulnerability that encourages excessive social media engagement, which subsequently develops into problematic social media use and increases the risk of anxiety. By integrating Self-Determination Theory, Compensatory Internet Use Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Cognitive Behavioral Theory, this paper provides a comprehensive explanation of the psychological mechanisms linking these constructs while highlighting the importance of addressing underlying cognitive and emotional processes rather than focusing solely on reducing screen time.

The primary contribution of this study is the development of an evidence-based conceptual framework for school counseling that positions FoMO as the psychological antecedent, Social Media Addiction as the behavioral mechanism, and anxiety as the psychological outcome. This framework offers practical guidance for designing preventive and intervention programs through digital literacy, psychoeducation, emotional regulation training, cognitive-behavioral counseling, and collaborative partnerships among schools, families, and communities. Future empirical research is needed to validate the proposed framework across diverse

educational settings and to evaluate the effectiveness of counseling interventions in promoting adolescents' digital well-being and psychological resilience.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contributions

Y.S.W: Conceptualization, literature identification and synthesis, development of the conceptual framework, analysis and interpretation, writing of the original draft, and revision of the manuscript.

N.T: Theoretical integration, critical review of the conceptual framework, interpretation of the literature, supervision, and writing, review, and editing.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required because this study was a conceptual paper based exclusively on the synthesis and analysis of previously published literature and did not involve human participants, animals, or the collection of primary data.

Data Availability

No new data were generated or analyzed in this study. The study was based on previously published scholarly literature.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank their respective institutions for providing academic support and access to scholarly resources that contributed to the development of this conceptual paper.

AI-Assisted Tools Disclosure

No AI or AI-assisted tools were used in the conceptual development, analysis, or substantive writing of this manuscript. The authors are fully responsible for the content of the manuscript

REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (2023). *Clinical practice guideline for the treatment of mental health disorders*. American Psychological Association.
- American School Counselor Association. (2023). *The ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs* (4th ed.). American School Counselor Association.
- Bloemen, N., & De Coninck, D. (2020). Social media and fear of missing out in adolescents: The role of family characteristics. *Social Media + Society*, 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120965517>
- Boer, M., Stevens, G. W. J. M., Finkenauer, C., de Looze, M. E., & van den Eijnden, R. J. J. M. (2020a). Social media use intensity, social media use problems, and mental health among adolescents: Investigating directionality and mediating processes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 116, 106645. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106645>
- Boer, M., van den Eijnden, R. J. J. M., Boniel-Nissim, M., Wong, S. L., Inchley, J., Bađura, P., Craig, W., Gobiņa, I., Kleszczewska, D., Klanšček, H., & Stevens, G. W. J. M. (2020b). Adolescents' intense and problematic social media use and their well-being in 29 countries. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 66(6 Suppl.), S89–S99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.02.014>
- Bozzola, E., Spina, G., Agostiniani, R., Barni, S., Russo, R., Scarpato, E., Di Mauro, A., Di Stefano, A., Caruso, C., Corsello, G., & Staiano, A. (2022). The use of social media in children and adolescents: Scoping review on the potential risks. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(16), 9960. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19169960>

- Cataldo, I., Lepri, B., Neoh, M. J. Y., & Esposito, G. (2021). Social media usage and development of psychiatric disorders in childhood and adolescence: A review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, 508595. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.508595>
- Dam, V. A., Dao, N. G., Nguyen, D. C., Vu, T., Boyer, L., Auquier, P., Fond, G., Ho, R. C., Ho, C. S. H., & Zhang, M. W. B. (2023). Quality of life and mental health of adolescents: Relationships with social media addiction, fear of missing out, and stress associated with neglect and negative reactions by online peers. *PLOS ONE*, 18(6), e0285890. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0285890>
- Einstein, D. A., Dabb, C., & Fraser, M. (2023). FoMO, but not self-compassion, moderates the link between social media use and anxiety in adolescence. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 75(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2023.xxxxxx>
- Fabris, M. A., Marengo, D., Longobardi, C., & Settanni, M. (2020). Investigating the links between fear of missing out, social media addiction, and emotional symptoms in adolescence: The role of stress associated with neglect and negative reactions on social media. *Addictive Behaviors*, 106, 106364. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2020.106364>
- Gioia, F., Rega, V., & Boursier, V. (2021). Problematic internet use and emotional dysregulation among young people: A literature review. *Clinical Neuropsychiatry*, 18(1), 41–54.
- Kardefelt-Winther, D. (2014). A conceptual and methodological critique of internet addiction research: Towards a model of compensatory internet use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 31, 351–354. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.10.059>
- Kardefelt-Winther, D. (2014). A conceptual and methodological critique of internet addiction research: Towards a model of compensatory internet use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 31, 351–354. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.10.059>
- Li, Y.-Y., Koning, I., Finkenauer, C., Boer, M., & van den Eijnden, R. J. J. M. (2024). The bidirectional relationships between fear of missing out, problematic social media use and adolescents' well-being: A random intercept cross-lagged panel model. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 151, 108021. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.108021>
- Marciano, L., Ostroumova, M., Schulz, P. J., & Camerini, A.-L. (2022). Digital media use and adolescents' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9, 793868. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.793868>
- Montag, C., Demetrovics, Z., Elhai, J. D., Grant, J. E., Koning, I., Rumpf, H.-J., Spada, M. M., Throuvala, M., & van den Eijnden, R. J. J. M. (2024). Problematic social media use in childhood and adolescence. *Addictive Behaviors*, 149, 107838. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2023.107838>
- Orben, A. C., Meier, A., Dalgleish, T., & Blakemore, S.-J. (2024). Mechanisms linking social media use to adolescent mental health vulnerability. *Nature Reviews Psychology*, 3(7), 435–449. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-024-00307-y>
- Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4), 1841–1848. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.014>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). *Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions*. Contemporary Educational Psychology.
- Saleem, N., Young, P., & Yousuf, S. (2024). Exploring the relationship between social media use and symptoms of depression and anxiety among children and adolescents: A systematic narrative review. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 27(11).

- Shannon, H., Bush, K., Villeneuve, P. J., Helleman, K. G. C., & Guimond, S. (2021). Problematic social media use in adolescents and young adults: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *JMIR Mental Health*, 8(9), e28704. <https://doi.org/10.2196/28704>
- Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 333–339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>
- Szawłoga, T., Soroka, K., & Śliwińska, M. (2024). Relationship between fear of missing out and adolescents' mental health. *Environmental Medicine*, 27(2).
- Throuvala, M. A., Griffiths, M. D., Rennoldson, M., & Kuss, D. J. (2019). Motivational processes and dysfunctional mechanisms of social media use among adolescents: A qualitative focus group study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 93, 164–175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.12.012>
- Torraco, R. J. (2016). Writing integrative literature reviews: Using the past and present to explore the future. *Human Resource Development Review*, 15(4), 404–428. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484316671606>
- Türk, F., & Koçyiğit, B. (2025). The relationship between fear of missing out and loneliness among adolescents in the digital age: The mediating roles of emotion dysregulation and social media addiction. *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 13(1).
- UNESCO. (2023). *Global education monitoring report 2023: Technology in education*. UNESCO Publishing.
- Wang, Y., & Gong, G. (2025). Exploring the dynamic interactions between internet addiction, anxiety, and loneliness in adolescents: A longitudinal cross-lagged panel model. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 16.
- West, M., Rice, S. M., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2024). Adolescent social media use through a self-determination theory lens: A systematic scoping review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 21.
- World Health Organization. (2024). *Mental health of adolescents*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>