

Overcoming FOMO through Imam Al-Ghazali's Sufism: A Spiritual Approach in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) phenomenon is a psychological issue that is associated with the widespread use of social media in the digital and social media era. This study aims to identify the definition of FOMO, its negative impact on individuals, as well as the approach to overcome it through the perspective of Imam al-Ghazali's Sufism. The study methodology uses a qualitative approach that involves literature and text analysis. The literature involved academic journals related to FOMO, while the text analysis focused on the work of Imam al-Ghazali, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, to integrate the principles of Sufism in dealing with this phenomenon. The results showed that FOMO, which is defined as feelings of anxiety due to fear of losing meaningful experiences, has various negative effects, such as a high desire to gain social recognition, increased neuroticism, and other negative effects discussed in this study. Imam al-Ghazali's Sufism approach, which emphasises attachment only to Allah and the reduction of love for the world, is a practical solution that can be practiced. The principle of *zuhd* helps individuals let go of attachment to the world, *tawakkul* reduces anxiety by surrendering to the decrees of Allah, and other approaches according to the perspective of Imam al-Ghazali are discussed in this study as a measure to avoid being affected by the problem of FOMO symptoms.

Keywords: FOMO, Social Media, Imam al-Ghazali, Sufism, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) was first introduced in 2004 by Dr. Dan Herman (Knight & Pretty, 2000) and then further developed by Gupta and Sharma (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). FOMO is defined as a feeling of anxiety or fear of missing out on other people's life experiences or current information, especially through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok (Rosida et al., 2022).

This term is gaining more and more attention as social media has become an important part of modern society. Studies have found that widespread social media use has increased the rate of FOMO harassment, especially among young adults aged 18 to 34 years. In the United States and the United Kingdom, 75 percent of individuals in this age group are reported to have experienced FOMO (Li et al., 2020).

In addition, women are found to be more susceptible to FOMO symptoms than men (J. D. Elhai et al., 2020). This development shows the importance of understanding the impact of FOMO on individual well-being in an increasingly challenging digital era and knowing how to avoid being impressed by the problem of FOMO symptoms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

The definition of FOMO as stated in the article "Fear of missing out: prevalence, dynamics, and consequences of experiencing FOMO" is a person's feelings of anxiety or fear of the possibility of missing out on an experience or opportunity that is considered meaningful to him. This phenomenon often occurs in the context of social media, where individuals are constantly exposed to updates on other people's lives, which causes them to feel left behind in their own lives compared to other people's lives. According to studies, FOMO is a widespread psychological phenomenon and is associated with negative emotions such as anxiety, emotional stress, and dissatisfaction with one's own life. This is the case among social media users, especially among today's young people (Milyavskaya et al., 2018).

Other studies have found that social media is a major cause of FOMO because it facilitates the constant search for other people's life experiences. Indirectly, causing oneself to often make comparisons between one's social life and the lives of others. The impact can result in disruptions in daily life and the quality of work productivity. In addition, this can lead to the risk of social media addiction to the point that a lot of time is spent on it (Rozgonjuk et al., 2020).

In addition, personality factors also play an important role in the problem of FOMO symptoms. Past studies have shown that FOMO is more common in individuals who are prone to neurotic traits and who are in dire need of social recognition. These characteristics make them more likely to feel left out if they are not engaged in activities that are seen as interesting on social media. This will lead to an increase in the use of social media as a way to stay engaged and accepted in their social circles (Alabri, 2022).

In addition, there is also an approach to overcome FOMO through social media literacy education and self-management techniques. The "FoMO-R Method," for example, is suggested to help individuals manage FOMO symptom problems more effectively through technical methods such as autoreply and self-control techniques to reduce dependence on social media (Alutaybi et al., 2020).

Tasawuf Imam al-Ghazali

Among the past studies related to Imam al-Ghazali's Sufism is the transformation of his thinking from a rational tendency to a sufistic one, which is one of the important aspects of the study of Islamic intellectual history. Studies show that this process did not happen suddenly, but through a long course that involved doubt and scepticism of the knowledge he learnt, especially in 488 AH (1095 AD). This phase of doubt brought about a major change in his thinking, where Imam al-Ghazali shifted from a rational and philosophical approach to a Sufistic approach as his frame of thought. This approach became the basis of Imam al-Ghazali's rational-sufistic epistemology, which combines elements of rationalism and Sufism in a harmonious system. This study uses a historical approach and transformation theory with a cross-disciplinary model to provide a holistic view of al-Ghazali's thought. As a result, this study has been able to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Imam al-Ghazali's thought and provide benefits to the development of classical and contemporary Islamic thought (Zayyadi et al., 2022).

Imam al-Ghazali is a prominent Islamic scholar who champions moderate Sunni Sufism, which is Sufism based on the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the traditions of the Companions. He succeeded in harmonising Sufism with sharia and cleansing it from deviations and making it accepted by the scholars of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah. Imam al-Ghazali stressed that the term in Sufism should be referred back to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah with ma'rifah understood as an introduction to the secrets of Allah through His rules. According to Imam al-Ghazali, the heart is the main tool of Sufi understanding, and the peak of happiness is the introduction to Allah through ma'rifah. In the science of mukāshafah, al-Ghazali criticises certain concepts of Sufi philosophy that go beyond the limits, such as those brought by Abu Yazid al-Bustami and Abu Manshur al-Hallaj, to ensure that Sufism remains within the framework of sharia (Ahmad, 2020).

The spread of Imam al-Ghazali's Sufism and his influence in Southeast Asia is very widespread, including in Malaysia and Indonesia. al-Ghazali, a well-known Muslim intellectual, is known for his contributions in

various fields of knowledge such as fiqh, *usul al-fiqh*, *kalām* science, logic, philosophy, and Sufism. However, his influence was most pronounced in the field of Sufism, where he developed innovative thinking known as Irfani's epistemology. al-Ghazali's great achievement was when he achieved the success of integrating sufism and fiqh, uniting sharia with the essence of Islam, which showed his intellectual superiority. The title " *Hujjat al-Islām* " was given to him in recognition of his contribution to Sufism. al-Ghazali's influence extended beyond the Arabian Peninsula, shaping the development of Sunni Islam in Malaysia, Indonesia, and throughout Southeast Asia (Ismail & Uyuni, 2020).

In addition, the past study related to Sufism of Imam al-Ghazali was when he made Sufism an important role in shaping ethical beliefs and moral values. Imam al-Ghazali gave a deep impression of spiritual upbringing in his works. In *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, Imam al-Ghazali criticises philosophers such as Ibn Sina and al-Farabi, although both have contributed to the philosophical foundations of Sufism, which also influenced him. Neo-Platonism, as the main source of Sufism philosophy, shows that the views of Socrates and Plato do not contradict either Sufism or the principles of Imam al-Ghazali. Therefore, the link suggests that Imam al-Ghazali is actually in line with the Neo-Platonist philosophy of Muslims, although he criticises them in several aspects (Kianifard, 2020).

Overall, based on research and search from previous studies, it has been shown that the symptoms of the FOMO problem and its relationship with Imam al-Ghazali's Sufism have not been studied directly, making this a significant opportunity to produce new studies. Indirectly, the results of this study will open up space for new exploration of the application of the principles of al-Ghazali Sufism as a solution to the problem of FOMO symptoms in the context of modern society.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach involving literature review and text analysis to understand the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and its prevention measures through the perspective of Imam al-Ghazali's Sufism. Literature studies were conducted to analyze academic journals on the definition, characteristics, and effects of FOMO, while text analysis focused on the content of the *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* to explore Sufism principles such as *zuhd*, *tawakkul*, *tawādu'*, and other appropriate principles as a guide in avoiding FOMO problems. The data from the literature review and text analysis were analyzed using a thematic approach to identify relevant key themes, which were then used to formulate FOMO prevention measures based on the principles of Imam al-Ghazali's Sufism through his book essay " *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* ".

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Definisi Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Milyavskaya et al. (Milyavskaya et al., 2018), Przybylski et al. (Przybylski et al., 2013), and Hayran et al. (Hayran et al., 2020) agree that FOMO is "a person who has a feeling of anxiety or fear of losing an experience that is considered meaningful to him or her or that pleases him or her through a desire to continue to learn new things that others are doing." FOMO typically occurs in the context of social media, leading to anxiety when individuals are unable to participate in other people's experiences. As a result, the individual will often feel dissatisfied with the experience he is going through compared to the contempt of others.

While Elhai et al. (J. Elhai et al., 2020), and Riordan et al. (Riordan et al., 2020) define FOMO as "the feeling of fear of missing out on valuable experiences enjoyed by others." Their definition suggests that FOMO is rooted in the desire to stay connected with others and is one of the main drivers of social media use and technology addiction, where individuals feel the need to constantly engage in digital interactions among other social media to ensure that they do not miss out on important social information or opportunities from others.

Additionally, Alabri (Alabri, 2022) and Elhai et al. (J. Elhai et al., 2020) emphasize FOMO as "feelings of anxiety and distress due to fear of missing out on exciting social opportunities or experiences." FOMO is associated with the psychological need to be accepted and participate in social interactions, which can lead to a strong tendency towards using social media to maintain social engagement to overcome feelings of anxiety.

Based on the definitions of past studies, it can be concluded that "Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a persistent

feeling of anxiety and anxiety from missing out on experiences or social opportunities that are considered valuable or pleasing, often influenced by the desire to stay connected to the lives of others. This phenomenon often occurs in the context of social media due to the constant exposure to updates on other people's lives. This can trigger feelings of dissatisfaction with their experiences during their lives, as well as encourage excessive use of social media as an effort to cope with social anxiety and seek to meet self-acceptance from social groups."

Negative Effects for Individuals with FOMO Problems

High desire for social recognition

An individual with a strong desire to be accepted and recognized in social circles is one of the effects of the FOMO problem. Therefore, those who are affected by this symptom cause anxiety or worry if they cannot explain their interesting life on social media (Alabri, 2022). This can cause an individual to do anything, even if it embarrasses him, to get as many like buttons or praise comments as possible from netizens.

Spending a lot of time on social media

The fear of missing out on other people's knowledge makes a person willing to spend a lot of time on social media, which can affect the quality of daily life. Life will not be of quality if time cannot be disciplined properly, and time is not filled with things that can improve one's career for self-advancement (Rozgonjuk et al., 2020).

Neurotic Enhancement

Neuroticism is a person's tendency to experience negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression (Widiger & Oltmanns, 2017). Uncontrolled use of social media leads to problems with FOMO symptoms. Consequently, FOMO that affects a person's feelings can increase neurotic symptoms caused by feelings of dissatisfaction with his or her life compared to the lives of others (Ramadhani & Suryaningrum, 2023).

Loss of self-confidence

The drive of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) symptoms in a person not only triggers excessive feelings of inferiority but also leads to feelings of hopelessness and loss of confidence in one's own life. FOMO often appears when a person compares his or her life to what he or she sees on social media, where others may be exhibiting a more luxurious lifestyle, good success, or exciting experiences. These comparisons create feelings that oneself is disadvantaged, inadequate, or fails to meet the standards set by society (Barry & Wong, 2020).

Depression

Symptoms of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) have been identified as one of the factors that can cause an individual's depression problems. Individuals who experience FOMO often feel dissatisfied with their own lives because they frequently compare themselves to what they see on social media. For example, such as success, lifestyle, or the experience of attracting others better than themselves. This condition triggers feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and low self-esteem, which, if persistent, can lead to depression (Barry & Wong, 2020).

Steps To Avoid Being Affected by The FOMO Problem According To Imam al-Ghazali's Perspective

Zuhud approach

Zuhd in Islam refers to the attitude of the heart and behavior that releases attachment to worldly things in order to achieve the pleasure of Allah and the happiness of the hereafter. This does not mean leaving the world or living in poverty, but rather prioritizing the hereafter by staying away from excessive love for the pleasures of the world alone. Imam al-Ghazali emphasized that seeking human recognition is like seeking the relaxation of human views compared to the views of Allah. It can indirectly lead to ripples and 'ujub that damage sincerity in charity and worship. In *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, he encourages one to prioritize Allah's pleasure over human appreciation (Al-Ghazali, 2004). Every individual Muslim should focus only on Allah in any practice and not on human responses such as likes or compliments on social media.

Prioritizing beneficial practices

Imam al-Ghazali taught the importance of making good use of time because the past time, even a second ago, will not return. He mentioned in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* that wasted time is the enemy of the soul. Humans should always fill it with things that can bring them closer to Allah, such as reading the Quran, deliberating, or seeking knowledge (Al-Ghazali, 2004). Controlling the use of social media through *mujāhadah*, which is fighting against lust, can help individuals discipline themselves in managing their time better. Scheduling time for temporal and spiritual activities is a practical step that should be practiced.

Tawakkul and riḍā

Imam al-Ghazali teaches that anxiety and anxiety stem from a lack of *tawakkul*, which is surrendering to Allah for whatever stipulations will be given and also relieved by accepting all His provisions. Through the confidence that everything that happens is God's decree, individuals can reduce the tendency to compare their lives with others and focus more on improving themselves. Just as the Prophet PBUH taught his people when looking at matters related to the world, then look at the people below, namely those who are more difficult than them, in order to be able to give thanks to Allah SWT. In addition, to overcome the problem of neurotic symptoms is to increase *dhikr* for peace of mind and soul. Imam al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of practicing *dhikr* to gain peace of mind, which can help control negative emotions such as anger and anxiety (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

Slavery to God

In *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Imam al-Ghazali explained that a person's self-worth is not determined by human views but even by his relationship with Allah SWT. By thinking of oneself as a noble servant of God, one can let go of the feelings of inferiority that arise from comparisons with other people's lives from various angles of comparison of the world, such as wealth, fame, and others. Self-confidence is built by realizing that each individual has a purpose determined by Allah, which is to become a servant of Allah (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

Changing the perspective of life

Putting the love of the world above all else to the point of racing in the pursuit of luxury to look like he is the richest in society. If what he dreams of does not come true, furthermore, comparing his unfortunate life to the lives of others causes him to suffer from depression. Apart from *tawakkul* and subsidence, the solution to depression is to change the perspective of life. Imam al-Ghazali emphasized that the world is a temporary place and that happiness that lasts forever is only in the hereafter (Al-Ghazali, 2004). By instilling this perspective, individuals can view worldly challenges, including FOMO, as temporary tests that should be easily resolved.

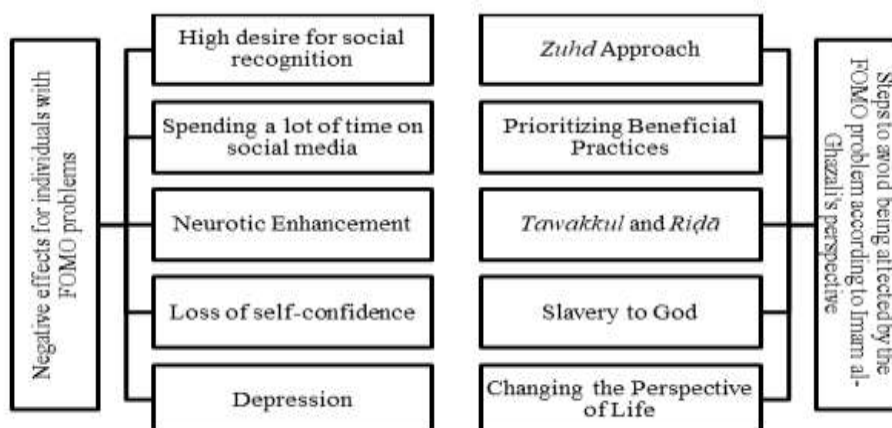


Figure 1: Negative effects of FOMO and Imam al-Ghazali's perspective in handling it

CONCLUSIONS

This study has discussed the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a psychological and social issue

that is becoming more widespread in the digital era. FOMO is defined as feelings of anxiety and fear of missing out on social or information experiences, which are often associated with excessive use of social media. It negatively affects individuals, including increasing the desire for social recognition, a lot of time wasted due to excessive use of social media, increased neuroticism, loss of self-confidence, and finally depression. This problem clearly shows the importance of FOMO prevention and management measures for mental and spiritual well-being.

Based on the perspective of Imam al-Ghazali's Sufism, approaches such as zuhd, increasing worship, muḥāsabah, tawakkul, servitude to Allah SWT, and prioritizing the hereafter can be an effective solution in dealing with the problem of FOMO symptoms. Zuhd teaches individuals to let go of attachment to the world, while tawakkul helps to instill faith in Allah's provisions, reducing feelings of anxiety due to social comparisons. Through muḥāsabah and filling time with beneficial practices such as dhikr and prayer, individuals can improve their relationship with Allah and build self-confidence based on the purpose of the hereafter only.

In conclusion, addressing FOMO requires a holistic approach by combining psychological awareness and spiritual values. Imam al-Ghazali's principles of Sufism are not only relevant in dealing with the mental challenges brought by the digital age but also offer life guidance that helps individuals achieve peace of mind, spiritual balance, and happiness in this world and the hereafter.

Guideline for Future Research

This study highlights Imam al-Ghazali's approach in addressing the symptoms of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) through the principles of Sufism. Therefore, future research is recommended to conduct a comparative analysis between the approach introduced by Imam al-Ghazali and the teachings of other prominent Sufi scholars such as Ibn Ata'illah al-Iskandari, Jalal al-Din Rumi, and Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani. Such comparative studies may reveal the similarities and differences in their spiritual perspectives and methods in dealing with psychological and emotional challenges related to attachment to worldly life and social anxiety, including the phenomenon of FOMO in the digital era.

In addition, future studies may also explore the practical application of Sufi-based spiritual modules in helping social media users manage FOMO symptoms more effectively. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches could be employed to measure the effectiveness of spiritual practices such as dhikr, muḥāsabah, tawakkul, and zuhd in reducing anxiety, depression, and excessive dependence on social media among different age groups. Furthermore, research involving university students, working adults, or adolescents could provide a broader understanding of how Islamic spiritual values contribute to mental well-being and digital balance in contemporary society.

Future research may further expand the understanding of the relationship between FOMO and Imam al-Ghazali's spiritual framework by exploring broader methodological and conceptual dimensions. Researchers may consider providing more comprehensive descriptions of the criteria used in selecting FOMO-related studies, identifying specific texts or chapters from *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* for analysis, and applying systematic thematic analysis procedures to enrich research transparency and depth. In addition, future studies could develop a more structured conceptual framework that maps specific FOMO symptoms with corresponding al-Ghazalian spiritual approaches, thereby offering a clearer understanding of the relationship between psychological challenges and spiritual remedies. Greater engagement with Imam al-Ghazali's original texts may also provide deeper insights into his perspectives and strengthen the interpretation of Sufi principles in contemporary contexts. Furthermore, future research may contribute to the advancement of this field by ensuring consistency in the use of key terminology, particularly concepts related to Sufism, while maintaining high standards of academic writing and scholarly presentation to enhance the overall contribution of studies in this area.

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