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Fear of Missing Out and Social Support Among Nigerian Undergraduates: Trends Across Geopolitical Zones

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Abstract: The prevalence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and social support differences among undergraduates in South Eastern, South Western and Northcentral geopolitical zones of Nigeria: A cross-sectional study. An ex post facto research design was employed, and data were obtained from 4,930 students by using validated tools, including the Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOS) and a Social Support Scale. Identifying regional discrepancies and their influence on student well-being was a focus of the study. The analysis showed significant differences by zones. The Northcentral zone showed highest FOMO prevalence (97.1%) and lowest with high social support (32.5%) but highest neutral support (42.6%). On the other hand, highest high social support was observed in Southeast (60.7%) which could buffer the detrimental effects of FOMO. The combining observations from both social and infrastructural perspectives who make these findings relevant in cultural studies of students feedback on psychological level. The study also highlights the need for targeted interventions to ameliorate these disparities. Digital literacy programs should be rolled out in universities, and counselling services expanded, while policymakers should prioritise establishing strong systems of social support, especially in the Northcentral zone. Future studies should focus on the longitudinal implications of FOMO and the contributions of digital and socio-economic factors for student health.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Social Support, Nigerian Undergraduates, Geopolitical Zones.

1. Introduction

In today's hyperconnected world, the phenomenon known as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has emerged as a significant psychological challenge, particularly among young adults. FOMO refers to the apprehension that others might be experiencing rewarding events or opportunities from which one is absent. Amplified by the pervasive use of social media and constant digital exposure, FOMO has been linked to increased stress, reduced self-esteem, and feelings of exclusion [1], [2], [3]. For students, and particularly for undergraduates, FOMO typically takes the form of wanting to be always aware of what their peers are doing, academic chances, or social events. This compulsive behavior is linked to negative effects such as increased anxiety and poorer academic achievement [4].

On the contrary, social support has an important protective effect by providing emotional, informational, and instrumental support, which strengthens resilience to psychological challenges. Social support, either perceived or actual, is key factor affecting mental health outcomes from family, friends or the community [5]. The lack of sufficient

social support contributes to the loneliness and social exclusion students experience while facing multiple pressures of higher education, and strong support systems can buffer the negative effects of FOMO [6], [7].

Nigeria, with its multifarious cultural, linguistic and socio-economic characteristics, offers a distinct environment in which to examine these nuances. These three geo-political zones, South-East, South-West, and North-central, which are the epicenter of this study, have their own specific socio-cultural and infrastructural settings [8], [9]. The predominantly Igbo-speaking Southeast promotes a culture of collectivism and extended family living arrangements which might improve access to social support. On the other hand, the Southwest has a majority Yoruba-speaking population that has grown significantly urbanized and exhibits a mix of traditional communalistic tendencies with increasingly individualistic aspirations. The Northcentral zone on the other hand, also typified by its cultural diversity and infrastructural differences, grapples with fundamental challenges around social cohesion and digital participation. It is not out of speculation that such in-group shame dynamics will greatly vary across regions depending on FOMO prevalence as well as the access-affordance of social support systems [10], [11], [12].

FOMO has been increasingly recognised in youth worldwide as potentially problematic and implicated in anxiety, depressive, and unhealthy social media use [2]. Collectivist cultural values, which abound in much of Africa, can promote social capital that such research is starting to show can ameliorate the impacts of FOMO [6]. Despite the prevalence of FOMO and social within Nigeria, research examining the role of social support in buffering FOMO within Nigeria is lacking, especially by region. Gaining insight into how existing socio-cultural and infrastructural factors contribute to these experiences is imperative for solving mental health inequity throughout the nation [13], [14], [15].

In this paper, we aim to address this gap in research by investigating the extent to which undergraduates in Southeastern, Southwestern, and Northcentral Nigeria experience FOMO and social support. The intention is to understand how socio-cultural and infrastructural contexts might shape regional differences in these experiences and consequences for student health. More specifically, this study examines the gender differences in FOMO and perceived social support among undergraduates, which would inform targeted interventions as well as national mental health policy.

By focusing on these issues, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on young adults' mental health in Nigeria and highlights the importance of culturally sensitive interventions. Understanding the complex interplay of FOMO and social support in diverse contexts can inform strategies to promote psychological resilience and equitable mental health support systems in Nigerian universities.

2. Methodology

Study Design

The present study employed an ex post facto research design in order to ascertain whether there is a significant difference in Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and social support (as a function of FOMO) among undergraduates from Southeastern, Southwestern and Northcentral geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The nature of this design facilitates the analysis of data through observation rather than through experimentation, and it is suitable for studying naturally occurring phenomena in large populations [2].

Population and Sampling

Four thousand nine hundred and thirty (4,930) undergraduate students from universities in three geopolitical zones of Southeast, Southwest and Northcentral Nigeria were included in the study population. It applied the stratified random sampling

technique to guarantee proportional representation by federal, state, and private universities. In the selected universities, students were stratified by age, gender, and academic level, ensuring that the sample was both representative and balanced across the four strata.

Instruments

1. Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOS):

The Fear of Missing Out Scale is a validated research tool widely adopted in psychology [2] [3]. It is composed of 10-items assessed on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 (Not at all true) to 5 (Extremely true). Items gauge the psychological sensation of FOMO, e.g.: "I worry others are having more fun than I am." For this study the scale showed acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.73.

Social Support Scale:

A 7-point Likert scale instrument was used to assess perceived support from family, friends, and significant others. Scores ranged from 1 (Very dissatisfied) to 7 (Very satisfied), capturing emotional and instrumental support. This scale showed reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78 in the context of this study.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire that included:

1. **Demographic Information:** Capturing details such as age, gender, academic level, and marital status.
2. **FoMOS Items:** Measuring the extent of FOMO experiences.
3. **Social Support Items:** Assessing perceptions of social support.

The questionnaire was pretested in the students with 50 sample size and was modified accordingly to issues related to clarity and relevance. The study was approved by the Covenant University Ethical Review Board; informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the survey. Responses were anonymized, and the data was securely stored to maintain confidentiality.

3. Results

Demographic Overview

Table 1: Summarizes the demographics of the sample (N=4930). Of the respondents, 63.3% were female and 36.7% were male. The age distribution of the participants also reflected the young adult nature of the undergraduate population, as the majority of participants were aged 18–24 years (76.2%). Since university students in Nigeria often range from single to married persons, it is not surprising to note that most of the respondents were single (84.1%). For level of study, the majority of respondents were graduate students (36.3%), with 100 level students making up almost a quarter of the total (25.2%).

Table 1. Summary of Demographic Characteristics.

Demographic Characteristic	Majority Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	63.3
Age Group	18–24 years	76.2
Marital Status	Single	84.1
Level of Study	200 Level	36.3

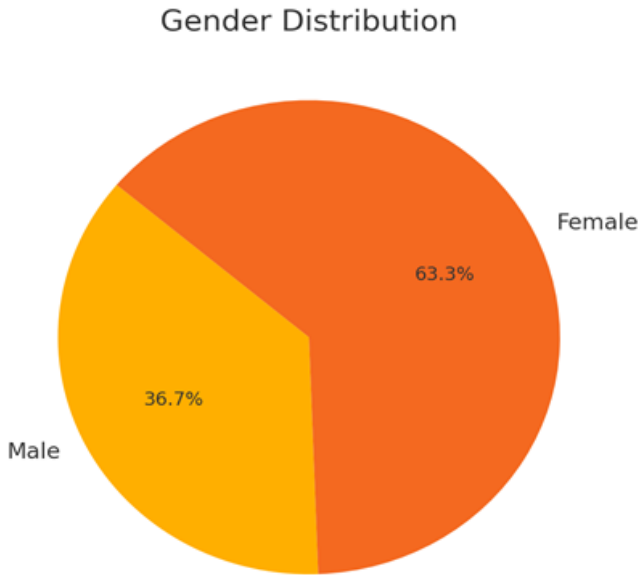


Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Respondents (Source: Author, 2025).

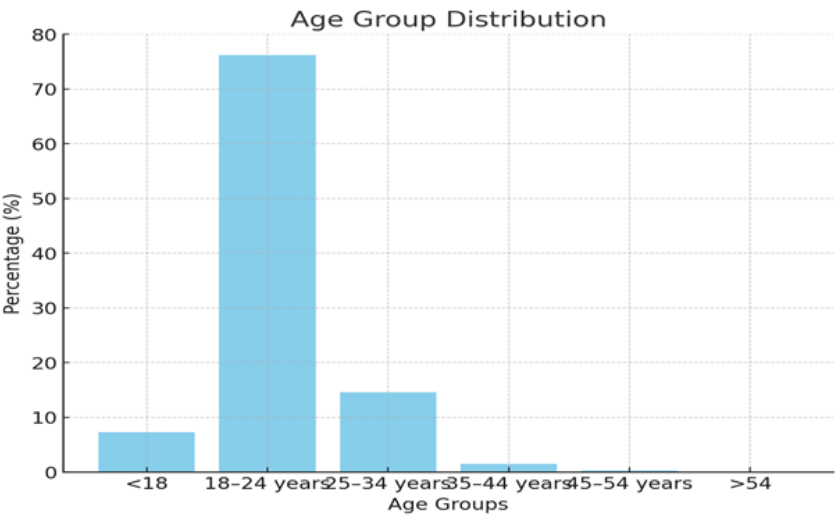


Figure 2. Age Distribution of Respondents (Source: Author, 2025).

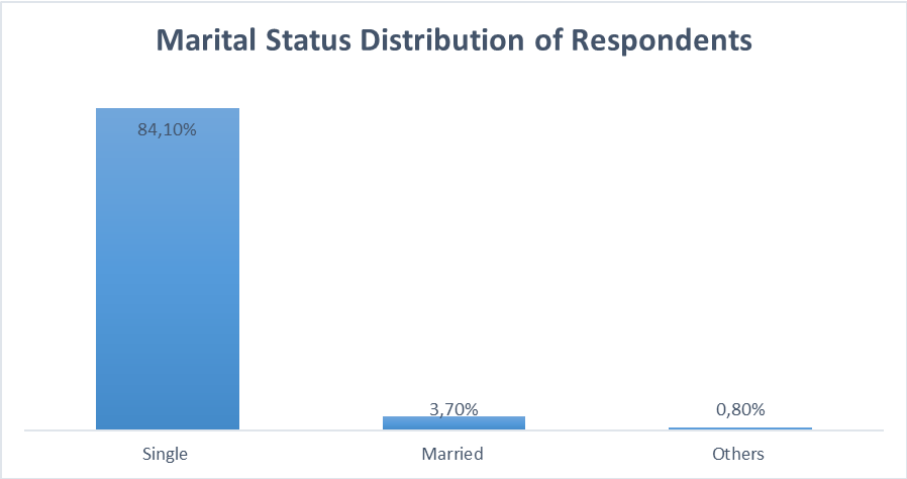


Figure 3. Marital Status Distribution of Respondents (Source: Author, 2025).

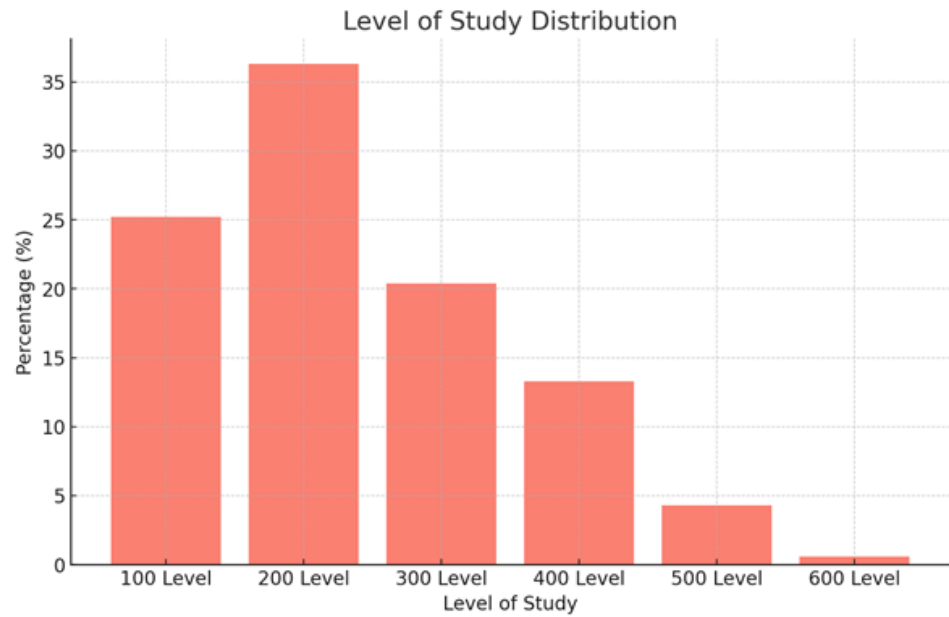


Figure 4. Level of Study Distribution of Respondents (Source: Author, 2025).

FOMO Prevalence

Table 2 depicts the extent of exposure to Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) across the three Geopolitical Zones. Findings showed that the Northcentral zone had the highest prevalence of FOMO (97.1%) compared with the Southeast and Southwest which had prevalence rate of 89.3% each. In the Northcentral zone, however, only 2.9% of students reported no FOMO, compared with 10.7% in both the Southeast and Southwest.

This suggests a regional disparity in the level of FOMO students experienced, with those from the Northcentral zone being more prone to experience FOMO. These are likely due to cultural differences or discrepancies in digital access and social opportunity.

Table 2. FOMO Prevalence Across Geopolitical Zones.

Geopolitical Zone	FOMO Prevalence (%)	No FOMO (%)
Southeast	89.3	10.7
Southwest	89.3	10.7
Northcentral	97.1	2.9

Social Support Trends

Table 3 provides a summary of social support by region. Seventy-three percent (60.7%) of a Southeast student reported the highest level of high (40.2%) of social support, while the Southwest reported 48.2%. The lowest proportion of high social support was found in the Northcentral zone (32.5%). And, the Northcentral zone had the greatest percentage of score as neutral identified for social support (42.6%) inferring inferior perceived status of support as their own compared to other regions.

Thus, these results highlight notable differences in social support systems between the three zones. The high social support indexes in the Southeast may reflect the region's collectivist values, whereas the lower support indexes in the Northcentral zone may be related to social or infrastructure issues.

Table 3. Social Support Trends Across Geopolitical Zones.

Geopolitical Zone	High Support (%)	Neutral Support (%)
Southeast	60.7	0.0
Southwest	48.2	0.0
Northcentral	32.5	42.6

Key Comparisons

Results showed large differences between regions in both the prevalence of FOMO and social support. While the Northcentral zone has the highest FOMO prevalence (97.1%) it has also the lowest high social support rate (32.5%) but the highest neutral support rate (42.6%). Together they suggest that students in this zone may be more susceptible to higher levels of anxiety and lower levels of resilience.

In comparison, the Southeast demonstrated the most, with high social support (60.7%), that might mitigate the impact of FOMO. The Southwest represents a mixture of both suburban and urban environments and thus showed moderate levels of FOMO and social support.

The differences underlying the finding also imply that cultural, infrastructural, and socio-economic drivers are probably valuable components in understanding who faces FOMO and gains access to social support. Tackling these variances is key to creating region-targeted actions to attaining mental wellness of Nigerian undergraduates.

4. Discussion

Results indicated higher levels of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and less social support among Nigerian undergraduates, but this varied significantly by region. The more prevalent fear of missing out (FOMO) among individuals from the Northcentral zone (97.1%) could be based on digital access, socio-cultural factors and similar issues. Although there has been a quick increase in digital inclusion in this region, cultural diversity and infrastructure will deepen the sense of isolation. Research shows that more digital exposure without proper coping skills simply increases FOMO [3]. The Northcentral zone also lacks strong community networks, which may also account for this increased vulnerability.

In contrast, the presence of robust social support in the Southeast (60.7% high support) seems to serve as a buffer against FOMO and the accompanying pressures. This is similar to the observations of Rashid et al on the collectivist cultures which are common in the Southeast, which promote resilience through strong family and community ties [6]. The presence of these support systems acts as a buffer against negative emotion, thus reducing the adverse psychological effects of feeling FOMO by promoting belonging and reducing perceived social disconnection.

Implications for Student Well-being

Countries with both high prevalence of FOMO (in the top 25%) and low social support (in the bottom 25%) in the northcentral zone represent one of the most serious mental health threats. As a result, FOMO has been shown to correlate with greater anxiety and depression, as well as lower life satisfaction [2], [4]. These impacts are compounded by insufficient social support, which can add to stress and enhance levels of student burnout. Confronting these inequities is a crucial step to protecting student mental health.

On a positive note, the Southeast shows the importance of sustaining social networks to keeping mental health strong. Strong social support bolsters psychological and instrumental resilience, thereby mitigating the maladaptive effects of FOMO [6]. These results show that protections in other parts of the country — particularly the

Northcentral zone — need to be fortified to truly ensure the results are fair and equitable throughout the nation.

Comparison with Literature

The results align with global research on FOMO's psychological impacts. Studies by Blackwell et al. and Elhai et al. highlight the role of FOMO in anxiety and problematic social media behavior, especially among young adults [2], [3]. In doing so, this study builds on these qualitative findings by illustrating how socio-cultural and infrastructural differences alter FOMO experiences in developing countries.

Rashid et al. (2017) in the African context, noted that collectivist cultural paradigms typically mitigate the influence of FOMO through the promotion of close social relationships [5]. And that fits with the Southeast, where the social support tends to be high. Nevertheless, the unique contribution of this current study is that it draws attention to geographical diversities existing in Nigeria, and explaining how cultural ecological and geographical (hierarchical) factors react to shape FOMO and social support across varied zones.

Recommendations

University specific intervention → Targeted interventions should be carried out at university level, such as promoting workshops on digital literacy, social outreach and presenting workshops to promote healthy social media habits and solutions to overcome FOMO. Students need some mechanism to cope with FOMO and digital mindfulness programs can serve the purpose.

Increase the level of social support: Considering the low levels of social support in Northcentral zone, peer support programs, counselling and community programme need to be develop by policy makers and university administrations. By doing so, this influence can ensure that every individual feels like they belong, and prevent feelings of exclusion.

Zone-at-a-glance: Explore culturally sensitive interventions for each zone. The collectivist values in the Southeast can be utilized to strengthen social support systems in both of these geographies, while also confronting the challenges in the Northcentral zone.

Future research is needed to explore how digital connection and class-first characteristics contribute to the FOMO experienced. The longitudinal studies may also prove to yield more information about the cumulative effects of FOMO and social support on student well-being.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal significant regional disparities in the prevalence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and social support among Nigerian undergraduates. The Northcentral zone exhibited the highest FOMO prevalence (97.1%) and the lowest levels of high social support (32.5%), coupled with the highest neutral social support rate (42.6%). In contrast, the Southeast recorded the highest levels of high social support (60.7%), which likely serves as a protective buffer against FOMO-induced stress. These results underscore the importance of socio-cultural and infrastructural factors in shaping students' psychological experiences and their access to support systems.

The findings have critical implications for policymakers, universities, and mental health practitioners. Universities should prioritize the implementation of digital literacy programs and peer-support initiatives to help students navigate the psychological challenges of FOMO. There is an urgent need for policymakers to invest in digital and social infrastructure that can help reduce regional disparities in access to resilience-enhancing resources, especially in the Northcentral zone. Reducing the gap between regions in mental health requires strong social support networks through community engagement and mental health services.

More studies should be conducted on the relationship between digital accessibility, socio-economic background and FOMO of undergraduates in Nigeria. Longitudinal studies could examine the evolving impact of FOMO and social support on student well-being over time. Additionally, cross-regional and cross-cultural studies would provide deeper insights into the broader implications of these phenomena and inform more effective intervention strategies tailored to diverse student populations.

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