

A critical review on the Mediating Role of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Sleep Quality in the Relationship Between Social Media Use and Anxiety Among Indian Youth

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Abstract: The rapid expansion of India's digital infrastructure following the 2016 data revolution has profoundly reshaped the psychosocial landscape for the nation's youth (aged 15–24). While smartphones have become indispensable for academic and social integration, excessive Social Media Use (SMU) is increasingly linked to a burgeoning mental health crisis among Indian university students. This critical review synthesizes peer-reviewed literature from 2018 to 2025 to evaluate the complex relationship between SMU and anxiety, moving beyond simple correlational models to investigate the dual-mediating roles of the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and sleep quality. Methodologically, a systematic approach was employed using databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed to identify studies utilizing validated instruments like the GAD-7, PSQI, and FoMO Scale. The review identifies a Triple-Threat Loop prevalent in the Indian context: the psychological trigger of FoMO drives compulsive vamping (late-night usage), which disrupts circadian rhythms and suppresses melatonin (Tandon et al., 2020). This biological depletion significantly lowers the threshold for clinical anxiety, a cycle exacerbated by India's collectivist social structures and intense academic competition (Dhir et al., 2018). Thematic analysis reveals a critical distinction between active and passive usage, with passive scrolling posing a significantly higher risk for Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD). Furthermore, the review highlights moderating variables such as the Digital Aspiration Gap in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. Despite the richness of current data, significant gaps remain, including an over-reliance on cross-sectional surveys and a lack of focus on marginalized demographics (Varma et al., 2021). This review concludes that social media-induced anxiety is a structural public health challenge, proposing the integration of Digital Wellness into the National Education Policy (NEP) and the adoption of Sleep-First hygiene protocols within university frameworks to safeguard the mental well-being of India's future workforce.

Keywords — *Social Media Addiction; FoMO; Sleep Hygiene; Anxiety Disorders; Indian Higher Education; Digital Wellness.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The digital landscape in India underwent a seismic shift following the 2016 data revolution, characterized by some of the lowest mobile data tariffs globally. This democratization of high-speed internet has provided nearly 440 million Indian youth with unprecedented access to social media platforms (Kaur et al., 2021). For the demographic aged 18–25, smartphones have transitioned from luxury devices to essential instruments for academic collaboration and socio-cultural integration. However, this hyper-connectivity has introduced a multifaceted array of psychological challenges.

While foundational research initially focused on a linear correlation between screen time and mental health, contemporary evidence from 2023 to 2025 indicates that this relationship is significantly more nuanced. Recent empirical studies among Indian university students suggest that the volume of usage is less predictive of psychological distress than the nature of the engagement (Saini et al., 2020). Instead, the path from digital interaction to clinical anxiety is increasingly seen as a mediated process.

Specifically, two critical mediators have emerged: Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Sleep Quality. FoMO, defined as the pervasive apprehension that others might be having

rewarding experiences from which one is absent, acts as a primary psychological trigger that drives compulsive checking behaviors (Dhir et al., 2018). In the Indian context, this is often compounded by intense academic competition and collectivist social pressures. These behaviors frequently culminate in vamping—late-night social media use—which directly impairs sleep hygiene by suppressing melatonin production through blue light exposure and cognitive arousal (Tandon et al., 2020). This review examines how these dual mediators—FoMO and deteriorating sleep—act as the functional bridges that translate routine social media engagement into clinical levels of anxiety within India’s unique cultural and educational framework.

II. FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FoMO) AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL TRIGGER

The empirical evidence indicates that social media platforms have evolved into the primary theater for social comparison among Indian university students, frequently precipitating a high prevalence of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Within the Indian psychographic, FoMO is defined as a pervasive apprehension that peers may be engaging in rewarding experiences from which the individual is absent, creating a self-regulatory deficit that manifests as a compulsive drive for constant digital tethering (Tandon et al., 2021). In the Indian academic ecosystem, the impact of FoMO is intensified by deep-rooted collectivist values where peer validation and social capital are critical markers of success. Research involving Indian undergraduates has identified FoMO as a robust predictor of Problematic Social Media Use (PSMU), frequently serving as a mediator between personality traits—such as neuroticism—and social media addiction (Kaur et al., 2023). Unlike Western individualistic models, the Indian experience of FoMO is often tied to the concept of Social Death, where being offline is equated with a loss of communal relevance and perceived social exclusion.

Studies utilizing the Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOS) among Indian youth reveal that this psychological strain establishes a Vicious Cognitive Loop. The anxiety of perceived social exclusion motivates hyper-vigilant checking behaviors; however, this increased exposure to the curated highlight reels of others serves only to exacerbate feelings of relative deprivation and inadequacy (Dhir et al., 2018; Vaidya et al., 2023). Consequently, for the Indian youth demographic, the urge to refresh digital feeds is less an act of seeking entertainment and more a maladaptive defense mechanism against the dread of social devaluation. This state of cognitive hyper-arousal, when sustained into the nocturnal window, becomes the primary catalyst for the subsequent deterioration of sleep hygiene and the onset of nocturnal anxiety.

III. IMPACT ON SLEEP QUALITY: THE PHYSIOLOGICAL MEDIATOR

Beyond psychological triggers, the physiological impact of digital engagement is centered on systemic sleep disruption. Authentic data from the Great Indian Sleep Scorecard (GISS) indicates a critical trend: nearly 88% of Indian adults use their smartphones just before bedtime, with a significant majority attributing their nocturnal alertness to the consumption of digital content (Wakefit, 2024/2025). This behavior, characterized as Doomscrolling or Bedtime Procrastination, significantly predicts poor sleep quality by maintaining the brain in a state of high cognitive arousal. The emission of short-wavelength blue light from screens suppresses the secretion of melatonin, the hormone responsible for regulating the circadian rhythm (Tandon et al., 2020). For Indian university students, this often manifests as vamping—a compulsive habit of staying awake late into the night to scroll—which drastically reduces sleep efficiency and REM latency (Bhardwaj et al., 2023).

Research involving Indian medical and engineering cohorts demonstrates that this lack of restorative sleep is not merely a side effect but a direct precursor to increased irritability, chronic stress, and clinical anxiety symptoms (Saini et al., 2020). The relationship is best understood as a sequential mediation chain: high Social Media Use (SMU) triggers FoMO, which necessitates late-night digital tethering; this, in turn, degrades sleep quality, ultimately manifesting as heightened Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) symptoms during waking hours (Dhir et al., 2018).

IV. SYNERGISTIC EFFECTS AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

The interplay between FoMO and sleep quality creates a Triple-Threat Loop that severely compromises the mental well-being of Indian youth. Recent empirical evidence suggests that while Social Media Use (SMU) possesses a direct path to anxiety, its indirect path through sleep disturbances and psychological mediators is significantly more potent (Tandon et al., 2020). This suggests that the biological fallout of digital use often outweighs the immediate psychological strain.

Within the specific framework of Indian higher education, these digital stressors are compounded by intense academic competition and a Collectivist Comparison culture. Indian students frequently utilize social media as a maladaptive coping mechanism to escape academic stress; however, this results in a displacement effect where restorative activities are replaced by negative social comparisons and nocturnal scrolling (Saini et al., 2020). This cycle reinforces a state of Hyper-Arousal, where the brain remains in a threat-detection mode (FoMO), preventing the transition into deep sleep. Data from 2023–

2025 highlights that Problematic Social Media Use (PSMU) is positively correlated with loneliness and depression, with anxiety serving as the central hub mediator in this relationship (Kaur et al., 2023). Furthermore, longitudinal observations indicate that students in Indian metropolitan hubs (Tier-1 cities) exhibit higher GAD-7 scores compared to those in rural areas, likely due to the Digital Aspiration Gap (Varma et al., 2021). To break this cycle, interventions such as Digital Mindfulness and Sleep Hygiene Education (SHE) have shown significant promise. By reducing psychological dependence and restoring circadian rhythms, these interventions mitigate the transition from routine digital use to clinical anxiety (Bhardwaj et al., 2023).

V. METHODOLOGY

The structural integrity of this critical review is predicated on a transparent and rigorous selection process designed to minimize bias and maximize the replicability of the findings. To ensure alignment with Scopus-level bibliometric standards, a systematic approach was adopted to synthesize the evolving landscape of digital health literature, specifically isolating variables relevant to the Indian psychosocial context.

Search Strategy and Database Selection

A comprehensive, interdisciplinary search was executed across four primary academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), PubMed/MEDLINE, and Google Scholar. This selection ensures a balanced integration of clinical medical standards, behavioral psychology, and regional socio-technical data from the Global South. To optimize precision and recall, a Boolean search string strategy was implemented. The primary search query was structured as follows:

(Social Media OR SNS OR Smartphone Addiction) AND (Fear of Missing Out OR FoMO) AND (Sleep Quality OR Insomnia OR PSQI) AND (Anxiety OR GAD-7) AND (Indian Youth OR University Students OR India)

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To capture the specific shifts in India's digital ecosystem following the 2016 data revolution, the temporal scope was restricted to peer-reviewed articles published between January 2018 and February 2025.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Empirical studies (cross-sectional, longitudinal, or experimental) focusing on Indian participants aged 18–25.
- Research utilizing validated psychometric instruments, specifically the GAD-7 (Anxiety), PSQI (Sleep Quality), and Przybylski's FoMO Scale.
- Studies published in English in Scopus-indexed or UGC-CARE listed journals.

Exclusion Criteria

- Non-peer-reviewed white papers, op-eds, or anecdotal reports.
- Studies where the primary focus was on clinical comorbidities (e.g., pre-existing neurological disorders) rather than social media-induced distress.

Additionally, a snowballing manual search of reference lists from seminal papers—particularly the work of Dhir et al. (2018) and Tandon et al. (2020)—was conducted to ensure comprehensive coverage of foundational Indian datasets. This dual-layered search strategy ensures that the review synthesizes both high-impact global trends and nuanced local realities.

Quality Assessment and Critical Appraisal

The analytical rigor of this critical review transcends mere narrative synthesis; it necessitates a structured evaluation of the evidence's methodological quality. Each selected study was subjected to a formal appraisal to determine its internal validity and risk of bias, ensuring that the final conclusions rest upon high-quality data.

Methodological Benchmarks

Studies were primarily appraised based on their sampling robustness and the validity of their psychometric instrumentation. Specifically:

- **Sampling Strategy:** Preference was given to studies utilizing stratified random sampling over convenience sampling. Studies with a sample size (N) < 200 were scrutinized for sampling bias and limited generalizability within the diverse Indian socio-economic landscape.
- **Psychometric Rigor:** The review prioritized research employing internationally recognized, cross-culturally validated instruments. This ensures that the data synthesized is based on clinical metrics rather than subjective self-reports.

Clinical Instrumentation and Inclusion Criteria

The following Gold Standard scales served as the benchmark for inclusion

1. **Sleep Quality:** Evidence was appraised based on the inclusion of the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) or the Epworth Sleepiness Scale (ESS), which are established tools for measuring sleep latency and dysfunction in Indian student populations (Saini et al., 2020).
2. **Anxiety Manifestation:** Anxiety levels were evaluated through the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) or the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). These scales provide a standardized threshold for identifying clinical versus sub-clinical distress.

3. FoMO Mediation: The Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOS)—as developed by Przybylski et al. and validated for the Indian demographic—was utilized to measure the intensity of social-digital apprehension (Dhir et al., 2018).

By filtering for these standardized tools, this review ensures that the mediation effects discussed are grounded in clinical metrics recognized by the global psychiatric and psychological communities (Vaidya et al., 2023; Tandon et al., 2021). This critical appraisal facilitates a more reliable discussion on the causal pathways between digital habits and the Indian psyche.

VI. THEMATIC ANALYSIS & CRITICAL SYNTHESIS

Social Media and Anxiety: The Active vs. Passive Dichotomy

The direct correlation between Social Media Use (SMU) and psychological distress has intensified within Indian higher education ecosystems. Current prevalence rates suggest that anxiety is no longer a peripheral issue but a core characteristic of the digital student experience. Recent multi-centric studies involving university students in major Indian hubs indicate that approximately 38% to 44% of undergraduates report mild to severe anxiety symptoms directly correlated with their screen time (Saini et al., 2020; Varma et al., 2021).

A critical distinction emerging in high-impact literature is the functional difference between Active and Passive usage. Active engagement—creating content and direct messaging—is often linked to Social Capital acquisition; however, it frequently precipitates Performance Anxiety regarding metrics. Conversely, Passive usage (scrolling/voyeurism) is a more potent driver of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). Indian students engaging in passive consumption for more than three hours daily exhibit significantly higher risks of anxiety, as the brain remains in a state of unresolved upward social comparison (Dhir et al., 2018). This Digital Aspiration Gap creates a chronic state of psychological arousal that the modern Indian youth finds difficult to mitigate.

Mediator A: The Psychological Engine (FoMO in a Collectivist Context)

While Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is a global construct, the Indian Nuance lies in the country's deep-rooted collectivist culture. Unlike individualistic Western societies, Indian social structures prioritize communal presence and group cohesion. Consequently, FoMO is not merely about missing an event; it is the dread of Social Death or exclusion from the digital tribe.

Research suggests that for Indian youth, being offline is perceived as a loss of communal relevance (Tandon et al., 2021). This cultural pressure acts as a robust mediator, converting routine digital browsing into acute social

anxiety. This is further fueled by the Influencer Economy, where students compare their lived reality—characterized by academic stress and modest hostel lives—with curated, affluent highlight reels. This relative deprivation triggers immediate psychological strain, particularly among female students, who report higher levels of inadequacy mediated by FoMO (Kaur et al., 2023).

Mediator B: The Biological Engine (Sleep Quality and the Hostel Factor)

The transition from psychological distress to physiological impairment occurs primarily through the disruption of the circadian rhythm. While Melatonin Suppression via blue light (450–490 nm) is a known factor, recent Indian research emphasizes that Cognitive Arousal—the mental alertness caused by infuriating or rewarding content—is a more significant barrier to sleep onset (Tandon et al., 2020). A unique environmental stressor in India is the Hostel Factor. In university hostels, late-night usage is normalized through communal behavior, often leading to Revenge Bedtime Procrastination where students reclaim a sense of agency after high-pressure academic days. Data consistently indicates that hostellers score higher on the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) than day scholars, with a staggering percentage classified as Poor Sleepers (Bhardwaj et al., 2023). This establishes a Feed-Forward mechanism: social media use ruins sleep, and the resulting daytime fatigue reduces executive function, making the student even more susceptible to compulsive scrolling the following night.

VII. DISCUSSION: THE MEDIATIONAL MODEL

The synthesis of contemporary data reveals that the relationship between social media and mental health among Indian youth is not merely correlational but deeply structural. The findings support a sequential mediation model, wherein the path from Social Media Use (SMU) to clinical anxiety is facilitated by psychological triggers and physiological degradation.

Synergy of Mediators: The Triple-Threat Loop

The core of this review identifies a process defined as the Triple-Threat Loop. This sequential mediation begins with a psychological catalyst (FoMO), transitions into a behavioral disruption (Bedtime Procrastination), and culminates in a biological deficit (Sleep Deprivation) that amplifies anxiety. This creates a synergistic downward spiral characterized by three distinct phases:

- **Phase 1:** The Psychological Load (Cognitive Hyper-vigilance): FoMO acts as a state of constant alert. For the Indian student, the apprehension of being socially sidelined drives compulsive checking behaviors. This keeps the prefrontal cortex in a state of hyper-vigilance, preventing

the cognitive de-arousal necessary for sleep onset (Dhir et al., 2018).

- **Phase 2:** The Physiological Toll (Circadian Dysregulation): Late-night engagement (vamping) disrupts the sleep architecture. Authentic research shows that Indian students suffering from high FoMO experience a significant reduction in REM sleep and an increase in sleep latency (Tandon et al., 2020). This is critical because REM sleep is the primary period for emotional processing and neural restoration.

- **Phase 3:** The Anxiety Threshold (Amygdala Hyper-reactivity): The lack of restorative sleep leads to a functional decoupling between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala. When sleep is compromised, the amygdala becomes hyper-reactive to negative stimuli (Saini et al., 2020). Consequently, a student with a sleep debt has a significantly lowered threshold for anxiety; minor academic or social stressors that would normally be manageable instead trigger acute, clinical-level anxiety responses.

The Indian Nuance

Unlike Western studies that often view SMU as an individual choice, in India, this loop is reinforced by structural factors. Intense academic pressure (e.g., JEE/NEET/UPSC preparation) leads to Revenge Bedtime Procrastination, where social media becomes the only perceived window for leisure, further entrenching the Triple-Threat Loop (Bhardwaj et al., 2023).

Moderating Variables: Contextual Accelerants in India

While the mediational model provides the foundational framework, several moderating variables unique to the Indian landscape dictate the intensity of these outcomes. These Contextual Accelerants determine how severely Social Media Use (SMU) translates into pathological anxiety.

Academic Pressure and Maladaptive Coping

In India's hyper-competitive educational ecosystem (characterized by the JEE, NEET, and UPSC cultures), social media often functions as a maladaptive coping mechanism. Students utilize scrolling as a displacement activity to escape intense academic stress; however, the subsequent sleep deprivation and FoMO-induced comparisons create a secondary layer of cognitive load. This results in a feedback loop where impaired cognitive performance leads to further academic stress, driving the student back to digital escapism (Saini et al., 2020).

The Digital Aspiration Gap (Tier-2 and Tier-3 Dynamics)

A significant moderator emerging in recent literature is the geographic location of the user. Contrary to early assumptions that digital distress was a metropolitan issue,

recent data suggests that the impact of FoMO is often more acute in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. As high-speed data penetrates rural and semi-urban areas, it creates a Digital Aspiration Gap—a profound disconnect between the localized reality of the student and the globalized, affluent lifestyles depicted on platforms like Instagram and LinkedIn (Varma et al., 2021). This gap significantly heightens social anxiety and feelings of relative deprivation.

Socio-Economic Status (SES) and Relative Deprivation

While India has achieved Data Equity (low-cost access), Experience Equity remains elusive. Students from lower SES backgrounds frequently report higher levels of Digital Relative Deprivation. In this context, the inability to replicate the consumption patterns, travel, or aesthetics seen on social media leads to chronic feelings of inadequacy (Dhir et al., 2018). For these individuals, social media does not just facilitate social connection; it serves as a constant reminder of socio-economic barriers, thereby moderating the relationship between SMU and Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD).

VIII. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This review aligns its findings with two primary theoretical frameworks to provide a structured, multidimensional understanding of the Indian digital experience. By contextualizing these theories within the Global South, the study identifies unique deviations from Western digital behavioral models.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT): The Paradox of Gratification

Traditionally, UGT suggests that individuals actively seek specific media to satisfy psychological needs, such as Social Integrative (connecting with peers) and Tension Release (relaxation) needs. However, this review identifies a Gratification Interference unique to the Indian youth demographic. While students turn to social platforms for escapism from intense academic pressures, the medium fails to deliver restorative relief. Instead, the Triple-Threat Loop of FoMO and sleep disruption creates a Paradox of Gratification: the platform sought for tension release becomes the primary source of psychological strain (Tandon et al., 2021). In the Indian context, the Social Integrative need is often hijacked by the dread of social exclusion, transforming a voluntary search for connection into a compulsive checking habit (Dhir et al., 2018).

Determination Theory (SDT): Pseudo-Relatedness vs. Autonomy

SDT posits that human well-being is dependent on the fulfillment of three innate needs: Competence, Autonomy, and Relatedness. This review suggests that the Indian digital landscape facilitates a state of Pseudo-Relatedness.

Relatedness: While students achieve high volumes of

digital interaction (likes/comments), the mediating role of FoMO prevents the formation of meaningful, restorative social bonds. The digital tribe provides visibility but lacks the emotional depth required for psychological safety (Kaur et al., 2023).

- **Autonomy:** The lack of autonomy is particularly evident in the Vamping phenomenon. Indian youth frequently report a loss of agency over their time, feeling controlled by the Algorithmic Push of platforms like Instagram and YouTube. This perceived loss of control over sleep and digital habits is a direct predictor of Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) symptoms (Saini et al., 2020).

IX. CRITICAL GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite the proliferation of digital health research in India, several fundamental gaps hinder the formulation of targeted clinical interventions. Addressing these is essential for transitioning from descriptive observation to empirical mitigation.

Methodological Gaps: From Static Surveys to Digital Phenotyping

The most glaring limitation in current Scopus-indexed Indian literature is the overwhelming over-reliance on cross-sectional, self-report surveys. These studies capture only a static snapshot of a student's life, which fails to account for the fluctuating nature of mood and digital habits (Saini et al., 2020). To evolve, Indian research must transition toward Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) and Digital Phenotyping. EMA involves pinging participants via their smartphones in real-time to record immediate affective states. This would allow researchers to pinpoint precisely when FoMO peaks—typically during late-night vamping sessions—and how it immediately precedes sleep latency (Tandon et al., 2020).

Longitudinal Trajectories and Causality

There is a dire need for longitudinal cohort studies that track Indian students from matriculation to graduation. Current data often leaves the direction of causality unresolved. We must determine if problematic Social Media Use (PSMU) is a primary driver of anxiety or a secondary coping mechanism for pre-existing social insecurity and academic stress (Dhir et al., 2018). Establishing these trajectories is critical for identifying at-risk windows during the four-year university cycle.

Demographic and Environmental Invisibility

Current literature predominantly focuses on metropolitan, cisgender, and able-bodied populations. Significant research gaps exist regarding:

- **Marginalized Demographics:** The unique stressors of LGBTQ+ youth and students from marginalized castes in the digital space are under-explored (Kaur et al., 2023).

- **The Rural-Urban Shift:** While the Digital Aspiration Gap is acknowledged, the specific psychological transition of students moving from rural areas to urban university hostels requires more granular study (Varma et al., 2021).

X. OBJECTIVE PHYSIOLOGICAL METRICS

Future research should move beyond the PSQI (self-reported sleep) to include objective data from actigraphy and wearable sleep trackers. Correlating digital usage logs with objective heart rate variability (HRV) and REM sleep duration would provide the physiological smoking gun needed to drive policy changes in the National Education Policy (NEP) and university health frameworks (Bhardwaj et al., 2023).

Proposed Interventions: A Multi-Tiered Approach

To effectively disrupt the Triple-Threat Loop, intervention strategies must be as multifaceted as the systemic dependencies they aim to treat. We propose a three-tiered framework targeting the individual, the institution, and the policy landscape.

Individual Level: Digital Mindfulness and Detox Protocols

Universities should implement evidence-based Digital Fasting protocols. Research indicates that short-term abstinence from high-stimulus, image-centric platforms can facilitate a dopaminergic reset, reducing the baseline of social comparison anxiety (Tandon et al., 2021). Normalizing Unplugged Zones within campus libraries and common rooms can provide the physical architecture needed for cognitive de-arousal.

Institutional Level: Sleep-First Hygiene Protocols

Mental health counseling in Indian higher education must pivot toward biological indicators. Instead of treating anxiety as a purely psychological phenomenon, counselors should adopt Sleep-First Protocols.

- **Cognitive De-arousal Education:** Teaching students that the mental stimulation of a notification is a more significant sleep barrier than blue light itself.

- **Environmental Optimization:** In hostel settings, enforcing Quiet Hours and blue-light-free environments can mitigate the communal pressure of late-night vamping (Bhardwaj et al., 2023).

Policy Level: Integration with the National Education Policy

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides a unique mandate for holistic development. We propose integrating Digital Wellness and Algorithmic Literacy as mandatory, credit-based modules.

- **Algorithmic Literacy:** Helping students understand that social media feeds are curated by engagement-maximization

algorithms, not reality. This understanding significantly reduces the psychological potency of Upward Social Comparison (Dhir et al., 2018).

- Digital Citizenship: Moving the conversation from addiction to agency, empowering students to curate their digital environments to minimize FoMO-inducing content (Kaur et al., 2021).

XI. CONCLUSION

This critical review establishes that the relationship between Social Media Use (SMU) and anxiety among Indian youth is not merely correlational but is governed by a robust sequential mediation framework. By synthesizing empirical evidence from the post-2016 digital era, we have moved beyond the reductionist screen time model to identify a sophisticated causal path: high digital engagement triggers a psychological state of social apprehension (FoMO), which necessitates nocturnal vamping, subsequently degrading sleep architecture. This biological depletion acts as a catalyst, lowering the neurological threshold for clinical anxiety and creating a self-sustaining cycle of distress.

While the Data Revolution has provided Indian youth with unprecedented access to global information, it has simultaneously compromised their psychological and physiological equilibrium. The findings of this review suggest that Indian higher education institutions can no longer categorize social media as a peripheral distraction; it must be addressed as a primary public health variable.

Additionally, the study highlights a critical need for policy-level interventions. Regulating the persuasive design of algorithms that specifically target the sleep windows of vulnerable student populations is no longer optional. If the biological and psychological foundations of this digital crisis remain unaddressed, the academic community risks fostering a generation that is globally connected but internally fragmented. This review serves as a call to action for the immediate integration of Digital Hygiene and Sleep Literacy into the national public health agenda to safeguard the future workforce of India.

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