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Brief report

Fear of missing out and sleep: Cognitive behavioural factors in adolescents' nighttime social media use

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Social media use has been linked to poor adolescent sleep outcomes, but the mechanisms behind this association are not yet well understood. This study examines links between adolescents' social media habits, fear of missing out and sleep outcomes, using path analysis to evaluate a model of proposed underlying mechanisms.

Methods: Adolescents aged 12–18 years (N = 101) completed questionnaire measures.

Results: Nighttime social media use was associated with later bedtimes, increased pre-sleep cognitive arousal, longer sleep onset latency and shorter sleep duration. Path analysis supported a model whereby fear of missing out predicted shorter sleep duration via two distinct mechanisms: (1) at a behavioural level, by driving late night social media use, which delays bedtimes; (2) at a cognitive level, by increasing pre-sleep cognitive arousal, thus further delaying sleep onset.

Conclusions: Efforts to develop and evaluate intervention strategies should therefore consider not only social media behaviours but also underlying cognitive factors, such as fear of missing out.

Social media now plays a central role in adolescents' lives, with recent research highlighting both positive and negative outcomes of this shift towards online social interaction (Deters & Mehl, 2013; Lenhart, 2015; Vorderer, Kromer, & Schneider, 2016; Woods & Scott, 2016). One aspect of concern for parents, teachers and health professionals is the potential negative impact on sleep – since sufficient, good quality sleep is crucial for adolescent health, wellbeing and academic performance (Owens, 2014).

Adolescents who use social media more (particularly around bedtime) tend to have poorer sleep (Woods & Scott, 2016). However, research directly examining potential drivers and mechanisms behind this link is still lacking. The current study begins to address this gap by exploring an important possible driver for this nighttime social media use: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). FOMO is a general state of anxiety at missing out on rewarding experiences, often driving social media engagement (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013). Young people in particular report feelings of disconnectedness and missing out without access to online communication, preferring to keep their phones within reach at night (Vorderer et al., 2016). This desire to be constantly connected and concern about missing out when offline may make it difficult for highly invested adolescent users to disengage from social media at bedtime (Woods & Scott, 2016).

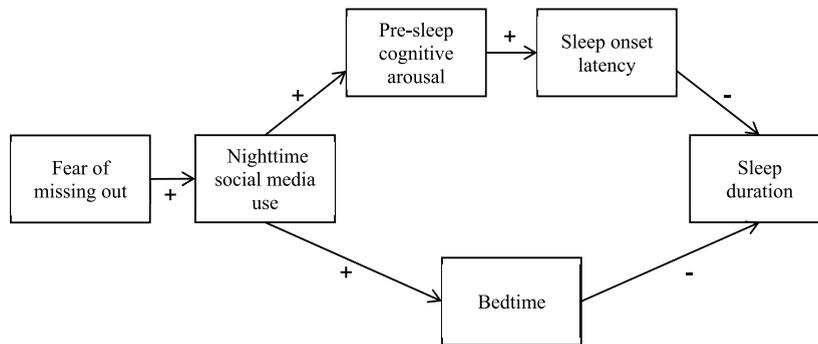
The current study evaluates a model whereby FOMO predicts nighttime social media use, which is in turn linked to shorter sleep duration via two paths, based on mechanisms identified in Cain and Gradisar's (2010) theoretical framework of electronic media use and sleep in children and adolescents. Firstly, at a behavioural level, we propose that nighttime social media use will predict later bedtimes, in line with similar findings in young adults (Orzech, Grandner, Roane, & Carskadon, 2016). Secondly, at a cognitive level, we propose that nighttime social media use will predict increased pre-sleep cognitive arousal and longer sleep onset latency (time

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Our proposed path model, whereby fear of missing out predicts nighttime social media use, which in turn is linked to shorter sleep duration at both a behavioural level (via later bedtimes) and a cognitive level (via increased pre-sleep cognitive arousal and longer sleep onset latency).

Fig. 1. Proposed model.

taken to fall asleep). This is in line with previous findings that adolescents who used social media more around bedtime tended to take longer to fall asleep, and this was mediated by how alert they felt in bed (Harbard, Allen, Trinder, & Bei, 2016). By delaying sleep onset, both these possible mechanisms are particularly relevant for the sleep duration of adolescents, whose school timetables prevent later rise times to compensate (Owens, 2014; Tavernier & Willoughby, 2014). Fig. 1 presents the proposed model, whereby FOMO predicts nighttime social media use, which is in turn linked to shorter sleep duration via behavioural and cognitive paths.

1. Methods

1.1. Participants and procedure

This research took place at a UK secondary school, as part of an ongoing research partnership. The study was advertised through school assemblies and in classes, with pupils invited to complete an online survey hosted via [qualtrics.com](https://www.qualtrics.com). 101 participants (66% female) completed the self-report online questionnaires measures. Participants were aged 12–18 years, with a mean age of 14 years and an age breakdown as follows: 46% were 12–13 years; 32% were 14–15 years; 22% were 16–18 years. All participants (plus parents of under 16s) provided consent. Institutional ethical approval was granted, plus permission from the relevant Local Education Authority and school.

1.2. Measures

1.2.1. Fear of missing out

The Fear of Missing Out scale (FoMOs; Przybylski et al., 2013) consists of 10 items (e.g. “I get anxious when I don’t know what my friends are up to”) rated on a 5-point scale from “not at all true of me” to “extremely true of me”. Item scores are averaged to give an overall score of 1–5. The scale has good reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha of .89 in both Przybylski et al.’s (2013) adult sample and in the current sample.

1.2.2. Nighttime social media use

Nighttime-specific social media use was measured using a self-report questionnaire (Woods & Scott, 2016). Seven items – including “How often during the last month have you used social media in bed?” – provide a total score of 0–31. The measure had Cronbach’s alpha of .82 in the current sample.

1.2.3. Pre-sleep cognitive arousal

The cognitive subscale of the Pre-Sleep Arousal Scale (PSAS; Nicassio, Mendlowitz, Fussell, & Petras, 1985) requires participants to rate how intensely they experience eight symptoms (e.g. “Being mentally alert, active”) as they attempt to fall asleep, from “not at all” to “extremely”. Item scores are summed to give a score of 8–40. It has good reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .87; Yeh, Wung, & Lin, 2015). Cronbach’s alpha was .86 for the current sample.

1.2.4. Sleep habits

Participants reported the time they usually went to bed, how long it usually took them to fall asleep (in minutes) and how many hours of actual sleep they got a night, during the past month.

1.3. Data analysis

Predicted associations were tested with Spearman’s Rho correlation coefficients. Path analysis tested the proposed model (Fig. 1)

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