

SPECIAL FOCUS FOR 2015: FOMO AND SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCE

The 2015 survey included an in-depth exploration of Australians' experiences of social media usage and the social, psychological and behavioural impact of the use of social media on their health and wellbeing. Social media in the context of the survey is defined as the use of the internet and mobile technologies to turn communication into social interactive dialogue. It excludes activities like texting and email.

Social media allows individuals access to increasingly abundant opportunities for interaction through real-time information about the activities, events, and conversations happening across diverse social networks. However, it contributes to the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) which is defined as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences that you are not part of, and is characterised by the desire to stay continually connected online with what others are doing (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013).

Two validated and standardised instruments developed by Przybylski and colleagues (2013) were included in this year's survey to provide an insight into Australian's social media engagement and FoMO:

- The Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ), and
- The FoMO Scale (FoMOs)

Key findings

Australians are avid social media users. Of the Australians who responded to the FoMO questionnaire, adults were spending 2.1 hours per day and adolescents 2.7 hours per day connected to social media.

Among adolescents, 56 per cent report being heavy social media users (connecting 5+ times per day), with 25 per cent being constantly connected.

In contrast, almost one in four (23%) adults report being heavy social media users, with 6 per cent of those being constantly connected.

Social media dominates the life of many adolescents.

- Over half of adolescents (53%) connect to social media 15 minutes before bed every night.
- Almost two in five connect (37%) in the presence of others and within 15 minutes of waking up.
- Almost one in four adolescents (24%) reported using social media when they were eating breakfast and lunch seven days a week.
- The impact of social media use on Australian's wellbeing is evident in a range of ways: more than one in two adolescents (57%) and one in five adults (23%) find it difficult to sleep or relax after spending time on social networking sites and 60 per cent of adolescents and a quarter of adults (25%) feel brain 'burnout' from constant connectivity of social media.

Social media use is associated with a range of fears and anxieties among adolescents:

- 79% are afraid they will miss out on something if they don't stay connected to their online social networks.
- 63% feel left out or excluded after seeing photos of their friends together at something they weren't invited to.
- 60% worry about people posting ugly photos of them.
- 55% feel bad about themselves when nobody comments on or likes their photos.

FoMO

Both Australian adults and adolescents experience Fear of Missing Out (FoMO): one in two adolescents and one in four adults experience FoMO. Interestingly, younger adults, those aged 18-25 (48%) and those aged 26-35 (44%) experienced similar levels of FoMO to adolescents.

Generally, there are no significant gender differences in the experience of FoMO. Older Australians are significantly less likely to report that they experience FoMO.

Benefits of social media

There is an upside to social media use with many reported benefits both for adolescents and adults. In particular, heavy social media users report more of both the positive and negative effects.

On the positive side: 84% of adolescents say it strengthens their relationships, 82% feel connected to like-minded people through their online social networks, 78% use social networks to connect with youth around the globe who share common interests, 72% feel empowered to seek help through the use of social media, 70% love posting photos of themselves and their friends to social media and 51% use social media as motivational tool to achieve health goals. Adults reported that social media use helped enrich their professional networks, empowered them to seek help and helped them achieve health-related goals.

