



## PARASOCIAL INTERACTION AND FEAR OF MISSING OUT IN PARTICIPATORY MEDIA: IMPLICATIONS ON MENTAL HEALTH OF KERALA YOUTH

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### ABSTRACT

The growing prevalence of social media has intensified parasocial relationships between audiences and media figures, creating new patterns of engagement and social comparison. This study examines the relationship between parasocial interaction, fear of missing out (FoMO), and mental health among youth. Using a quantitative design, responses from 200 youth aged 15-25 from various districts of Kerala, India were collected using tools such as socio demographic data, Celebrity persona interaction scale, Fear of missing out scale and General health questionnaire (GHQ 12). The data were analyzed to explore correlations between these variables. Results indicate that no significant difference in the parasocial interaction in adolescents and young adults, there is significant difference in fear of missing out in adolescents and young adults, there is no significant difference in the mental health of adolescents and young adults, there is no significant relationship between parasocial interaction and fear of missing out in Youth, there is no significant relationship between parasocial interaction and mental health issues in Youth and there is a significant relationship between fear of missing out and mental health in Youth. The findings contribute to understanding the psychosocial impact of mediated relationships, highlighting the need for digital literacy and mental health awareness programs tailored to youth audiences. This research extends media effects literature by situating parasocial interaction and FoMO within the evolving dynamics of digital well-being.

**Keywords:** Parasocial Interaction, Fear Of Missing Out, Mental Health, Youth, Participatory Media.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between celebrities and their fans has been a topic of growing concern, especially regarding its impact on mental health and social behaviors. Parasocial relationships, which is the one-sided emotional bonds formed with public figures have become highly prevalent in the age of social media, from perception about self to consumer and social behaviour, it has influence on everything (Abidin, 2015). With Participatory medias like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter offering intimate glimpses into their lives as well as giving opinions on them, celebrities today are more accessible than ever to general public. This constant exposure fosters a sense of closeness, even though the relationship remains entirely one-sided (Bond, 2022). Over time, social media has magnified these interactions, deepening emotional ties between fans and their idols (Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013).

The aftermath of Michael Jackson's death in 2009, which saw several fans reportedly die by suicide, exposed the intense psychological impact of such bonds (Lee & Chun, 2016). Similarly, celebrities like the Kardashian sisters have influenced beauty standards through curated online personas, contributing to rising cosmetic surgery rates and body dissatisfaction (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015). The global popularity of K-pop and K-dramas illustrates how these emotional attachments extend beyond entertainment, fostering unrealistic ideals and leading to serious mental health issues among fans (Jin & Youn, 2019).

Similar instances have occurred in India too. From nationwide emotional responses to cricket victories to big fascination with celebrity weddings (Chandra, 2016). There are several instances where the public had emotional responses towards celebrity personas such as the Death of Bollywood actor

Sushant Singh Rajput, Divorce of Samantha Ruth Prabhu, Building a temple for Rajnikant, fans association celebrating the first show of their favourite actor etc. These patterns are rooted in basic psychological needs for connection, as explained by theories like the mere exposure effect, uses and gratifications theory, and parasocial interaction theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). Social comparison theory is particularly relevant, suggesting upward comparisons on platforms like Instagram and TikTok increases dissatisfaction, anxiety, and low self-worth (Wikipedia, 2025). The curated authenticity of influencer content intensifies these comparisons, heightening FOMO and deepening psychological distress. Entertainment industries further reinforce these bonds through fan service and strategic marketing (Click et al., 2013). Social media platforms intensify this dynamic, enabling celebrities to influence purchasing decisions and shape self-identity (Tukachinsky, 2011).

Parasocial interactions (PSIs) have garnered increasing attention, particularly in Youth (Giles & Maltby, 2004). During these years, individuals are faced with identity struggles, job pressures, and social challenges. These challenges are either amplified by idealized portrayals online or PSIs act as a coping mechanism for them (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). With the rise of social media, the boundaries between real and imagined relationships have become increasingly blurred, influencing mental health outcomes and psychological development in young populations (Stever, 2011).

Parasocial relationships can escalate Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) through the creation of strong emotional attachment to idols, celebrities or fictional characters, thereby leading fans to feel anxious about missing updates or merchandise releases (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013). This emotional connection can drive fans to engage more deeply with social media and idol-related content, heightening their fear of being left out (Blackwell et al., 2017). The growing prevalence of PSIs, combined with constant connectivity and FoMO, presents significant implications for cognitive, emotional, and social well-being (Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, & Koestner, 2018).

Parasocial relationships are a double-edged sword. They have the potential to help individuals form identity, belonging, and comfort, but also contribute to emotional distress, unrealistic expectations, fear of missing out, and mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and body dysmorphia (Moyer-Gusé, 2019). Reframing PSI and FOMO within the field of communication highlights dual potential of participatory medias. On one hand, self-disclosure and frequent content engagements facilitate community bonding and brand trust; on the other, they fuel compulsive engagement, loneliness, and mental health risks (Chung & Cho, 2017; Kim & Song, 2016). Understanding this balance is essential for digital media strategists, educators, and policy makers aiming and working towards to foster healthier digital environments or online spaces. As social media continues to evolve and develop, it is crucial to understand how these relationships shape perceptions, behaviors, and well-being (Jin & Park, 2021).

## **1.2 Statement of The Problem**

To understand the role of para social interaction in creating fear of missing out and mental health in Youth.

## **1.3 Significance of The Study**

In today's digital world, social media has significantly intensified parasocial interactions, fostering one-sided but emotionally deep bonds between individuals and online personalities. Despite its growing relevance, parasocial interaction remains underexplored in psychological research. Although related variables like fear of missing out (FoMO) and mental health have been studied, there is a lack of focused research on parasocial relationships among Youth. This study aims to bridge that gap by exploring how these interactions influence psychological well-being, particularly FoMO, anxiety, and self-esteem in youth.

Adolescence and young adulthood are critical developmental stages marked by emotional vulnerability, identity exploration, and social comparison. During this period, individuals often seek external validation and emotional support, making them especially susceptible to media influences. This study will help examine how parasocial relationships may trigger FoMO and mental health challenges,

which in turn could affect academic, professional, and personal development due to immature coping mechanisms.

Moreover, the study offers practical value for mental health professionals, educators, policymakers, and guardians by guiding the development of targeted interventions. These may include educational programs, digital literacy campaigns, social media usage monitoring apps, or counselling strategies to promote healthier online behaviors. The findings can help parents and teachers encourage balanced online and offline interactions.

With the rise of curated, idealized digital content, the societal implications are immense. This research highlights the urgent need to understand how social media dynamics shape youth mental health, providing tools to foster a healthier, more mindful digital culture for future generations.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

1. To find out the para social interaction among youth.
2. To find out fear of missing out among youth
3. To find out mental health among youth
4. To find out the significant relationship between para social interaction and fear of missing out among youth.
5. To find out the significant relationship between para social interaction and mental health among youth
6. To find out significant relationship between fear of missing out and mental health youth

#### **1.5 Hypotheses**

1. There is a significant difference in the role of social interaction among youth
2. There is a significant difference in the fear of missing out among youth
3. There is a significant difference in the mental health among youth
4. There is a significant relationship between para social interaction and fear of missing out among youth
5. There is a significant relationship between para social interaction and mental health among youth
6. There is a significant relationship between fear of missing out and mental health among youth

## **2. METHOD**

### **2.1 Research Design:**

The researcher adopted descriptive research design which is a scientific method which involves observing the behavior of the participant without influencing them in anyway.

### **2.2 Research Participant:**

Here the researcher chose 200 youth who were aged between 15 to 25 .The sample of the study consisted of 100 adolescents and 100 young adults from schools, colleges from various districts of Kerala, India who were chosen using convenient sampling.

### **2.3 Inclusion criteria**

The sample chosen here is 200 participants, 100 participants from adolescent population, 100 participants from young adult population in the age range between 15 to 25.

### **2.4 Exclusion Criteria**

Participants who have taken psychiatric or psychological treatment prior or taking at the present moment was excluded.

### **2.5 MEASURES:**

**1. Socio Demographic Data:** A personal data schedule was developed by the researcher to collect the data. Personal details like, name, age, gender, whether the participant has taken psychiatric or psychological treatment were included in the consent form

**2. Celebrity Persona Parasocial Interaction Scale (CPPI):** The CPPI demonstrates high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha typically ranging from 0.80 to 0.90. Factor analysis consistently yields single-factor solutions with high loadings, supporting internal consistency. Its validity is strong, with CPPI scores predicting identification with celebrities and being predicted by media exposure. It shows good criterion-related validity, effectively forecasting expected outcomes. Construct validity is supported by the accurate inference of underlying parasocial variables. Overall, CPPI reliably and validly measures parasocial interaction as a singular conceptual dimension.

**3. Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Scale:** The FoMO scale has shown strong reliability, with internal consistency ranging from  $\alpha = 0.82$  to 0.90. Model fit indices also support its

reliability (e.g., RMSEA = 0.073, SRMR = 0.056). Face and content validity are confirmed by items reflecting anxiety over social exclusion. Items were developed using real-world sources, enhancing content relevance. Convergent validity is demonstrated by a positive correlation with social media use ( $r = 0.4$ ), while discriminant validity is shown through a negative association with psychological need satisfaction ( $r = -0.29$ ), confirming the scale's precision in measuring FoMO.

**4. General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12):**

The GHQ-12 exhibits excellent reliability, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.78 to 0.95 across various populations. It also shows good test-retest reliability, indicating stable results over time. Its validity is well-established: construct validity is evidenced by correlations with anxiety and depression scales, and criterion validity is supported by strong sensitivity and specificity when compared to

**Table 1:** Basic descriptive statistics of variables of (N= 200)

Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	S.D	Skewness	Kurtosis
Parasocial Interaction	63.84	63.00	55	12.774	-.052	.468
Fear Of Missing Out	26.48	26.00	28	7.208	.459	1.227
Mental Health	12.73	12.00	9	5.892	.292	-.363

clinical diagnoses. Factor analyses suggest both one- and two-factor models (emotional and social dysfunction), depending on the sample. Overall, GHQ-12 is a robust and efficient tool for assessing general psychological well-being.

**2.6 Procedure and Administration.**

The scales for celebrity persona parasocial interaction scale, fear of missing out and General health questionnaire were used to collect data, which was collected from Youth from Various districts by directly giving the questionnaire to them. The instructions to fill the questionnaire were included and confidentiality were assured. After the responses were submitted, it was scored accordingly and the data was analyzed using suitable techniques.

**2.6 Statistical Techniques**

**Descriptive statistics:** Descriptive statistics, is the procedures for depicting main aspects of

simple data, without necessarily inferring to a large population.

**Student's t –test:** This is statistical appropriate for studying the significance of the mean or judging the significant difference of means of two populations or samples.

**Correlation:** Correlation is the degree of relationship between two variables, which may be quantified as the correlation coefficient.

**2.7 Ethical Considerations**

All participants were informed that the responses collected are kept confidential. A consent form was given to all the participant before collecting the data. Researcher avoided unnecessary or embarrassing questions. The researcher safeguarded the privacy of each of the participant.

**3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Preliminary Analysis**

Table 1 shows the basic descriptive statistics on the three variables, parasocial interaction, Fear of missing out and mental health of youth. It includes mean, median, mode, standard deviation, Skewness and kurtosis.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant difference in the role of parasocial interaction among adolescents and young adult.

**Table 2:** Mean, SD and t- value obtained by parasocial interaction among adolescents and young adults

	Mean	SD	t-value	P value
Adolescents	65.22	13.670	1.533	.127
Young adults.	62.46	11.716		

Table 2 show the mean, Standard deviation and t value obtained by the parasocial interaction among Youth. From the table it was found that the P value is greater than 0.05. So the hypothesis there is significant difference in the role of Para social interaction among

Youth is rejected. From a media studies perspective, PSI is shaped by media affordances that transcend age brackets. The result indicates that both the population has similar media consumption patterns. Social media, through features like stories, livestreams, and direct messaging, creates an illusion of reciprocity and intimacy that supports similar engagement modes across youth age groups. Even though there is a difference in the ages they may use Para social interaction to fulfill emotional needs, such as companionship or escape at similar rates to understand or navigate the challenges they face and use it as a coping mechanism (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). But the mean score when compared to the ranges levels of the questionnaire, it indicates that both Youth have a high level of Para social interaction. Adolescents have more Para social interaction than young adults. It can be due to the phase of life where identity formation is occurring and they need a role model for it. Therefore, the non-significant difference in PSI between adolescents and young adults could be due to shared developmental needs (psychological grounding) and similar mediated communication structures that foster comparable parasocial relationships (communication grounding). PSI's effects may be moderated more by media context or individual traits (e.g., self-esteem, media literacy) than by age.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a significant difference in fear of missing out among youth.

**Table 3:** Mean, SD and t- value obtained by fear of missing out among youth.

	Mean	SD	t-value	P value
Adolescents	27.61	7.515	-2.239	.026*
Young adults.	25.35	6.737		

\*Significant at 0.05

Table 3 shows the mean, standard deviation, of adolescents. The p value turned out to be less than 0.05 showing, the hypothesis 'There is a significant difference in fear of missing out among Youth' is accepted. From the table it was found that the adolescents have higher rates of fear of missing out compared to young adults. There can be several reasons for this result. One is that the adolescent is the stage of identity versus role confusion. It is the age

where identity formation takes place. For this, they may choose a person whom they want to use as a role model for identity formation. (Erikson, 1968). This person can be a media persona. Adolescents give more importance to social validation and can give into peer influences as they fear to be left out from the group. This can also be due to lack of autonomy and external restrictions. They often have less autonomy and more restrictions especially by parents about their social engagements making them more anxious about missing out on opportunities as well as the pressure to keep up (Przybylski et al., 2013). When the means were taken it was found that both the groups have a moderate level of fear of missing out. The design of digital platforms amplifies FOMO. Adolescents—often more involved in heavy social media use—are exposed to continuous highlight reels, peer activities, and influencer content, fostering a heightened fear of missing out (Verywell Mind, 2020) ([Verywell Mind][4]). The affordances of immediacy, social comparison, and constant updates heighten FOMO particularly among those less media-savvy, which often includes adolescents. Combined, these psychological vulnerabilities and communication environment factors help explain why FOMO significantly differs across these age groups: adolescents' psychological development makes them more prone to FOMO, and media design facilitates it.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is a significant difference in the mental health among youth.

**Table 4:** Mean, SD and t- value obtained by mental health among youth.

	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p
Adolescents	12.99	6.053	-.623	198	.534
Young adults.	12.47	5.744			

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation of mental health of Youth. So, the hypothesis, 'There is a significant difference in the mental health among Youth' is rejected. When the mean scores were interpreted based on the questionnaire it was found that both the groups have a moderate level of psychological stress. This may be due to that both the populations may have similar social and environmental stressors such as academic

Pressure, social media influence and peer influence. These factors may lead to similar emotional struggles, such as anxiety or depression. They may have similar or coping mechanisms as well as they may be able to handle stress similarly. While each group may experience these factors differently, the overall challenges of identity formation, social pressures and biological changes can result in comparable mental health concerns.(Arnett, 2000).

**Hypothesis 4:**There is significant relationship between para social interaction and fear of missing out among youth.

**Table 5**

*Correlation coefficient between para social interaction and fear of missing out among youth.*

Variables	Mean	S.D	r value	P value
PSI	63.84	12.774	.008	.913
FOMO	26.48	7.208		

Note: PSI = para social interaction, FOMO = fear of missing out

Table 5 shows the correlation between para social interaction and fear of missing out among youth. The value turned out to be .913 which means that the hypothesis There is significant relationship between para social interaction and fear of missing out among adolescent is rejected. This may be due to several factors such as nature of para social interaction, developmental factors such as motivations and social versus environment needs, cultural. This group of youth may see their para social interactions as separate from their real-life peer interactions. They may admire influencers or celebrities but not feel a direct sense of missing out on social events leading to weak social comparisons. Psychosocially, PSI can act as a substitution effect, where emotional investment in media figures reduces real-world social comparisons (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019). Unlike FoMO, which arises from peer influence, PSI may stem from admiration rather than direct social competition. Another factor may be due to type of media consumption. They may engage passively or in passive contents like watching videos only leading to less fear of missing out. Developmental factors such as motivation for creating para social bonds for emotional support, escapism or identity formation rather

than fear of missing out experiences. They may also create such bonds as a coping mechanisms for loneliness or anxiety (Blackwell et al., 2017). Cultural factors such as giving importance to in person interactions, good family support, good social relations can also lead to less fear of missing out due to para social interaction. But there is a weak positive correlation between para social interaction and fear of missing out, which means that when the intensity of para social interaction increases the fear of missing out also increases. Personality also plays a role—introverted or socially anxious individuals may find comfort in parasocial interaction without feeling like they’re missing out on real-life social interactions. Media exposure that fosters PSI (e.g., following an influencer consistently) may not trigger FOMO unless the content is event-centric or time-sensitive. Moreover, previous research suggests PSI can even promote well-being by providing a sense of intimacy (Bartosiak et al., 2025) so PSI doesn’t inherently elevate FOMO.

**Hypothesis 5:**There is significant relationship between para social interaction and mental health among youth.

**Table 6:** *Correlation coefficient between para social interaction and mental health among youth.*

Variables	Mean	S.D	r value	P value
PSI	63.84	12.774	-.040	.577
MH	12.73	5.892		

Note: PSI = para social interaction, MH = Mental Health.

Table 6 shows the correlation between para social interaction and mental health among youth. The score turned out to be .577, which means that the hypothesis There is significant relationship between para social interaction and mental health among youth, is rejected. This indicates that the one-sided relationships with media persons do NOT impact the mental health of the Youth. And there is a moderate positive relationship between the variables that means as parasocial interaction increases mental health issues also increases. These can be due to several factors. Parasocial interactions (PSI) may not correlate with mental health among young adults due to various psychosocial factors. One reason

might be is that PSI complements real-world relationships rather than replacing it. Young adults with strong social support networks may engage in PSI without experiencing adverse effects on well-being (Jin& Park, 2021).

Additionally, PSI can serve as a coping mechanism, offering emotional security without necessarily contributing to distress(Moyer-Gusé, 2019).The normalization of PSI in digital culture further mitigates its potential negative impact. As digital natives, young adults may view PSI as a natural extension of social interaction rather than a sign of isolation(Giles &Maltby, 2004). Moreover, individual differences, such as personality traits and social motivations, influence the effects of PSI. For those with higher self-esteem PSI might act as a positive engagement rather than a compensatory mechanism for loneliness (Oberst et al., 2017). These factors suggest that PSI's influence on mental health is complex and context-dependent.

Despite lack of significant correlation, it should be noted that the scores indicate a weak negative correlation between the two, showing as parasocial interaction increases mental health issues also decreases.

**Hypothesis 6:**There is a significant relationship between fear of missing out and mental health among youth.

**Table 7:** Correlation coefficient betweenfear of missing out and mental health among youth.

Variables	Mean	S.D	r value	P value
FOMO	26.48	7.208	.244	.000**
MH	12.73	5.892		

\*\*Significant at 0.01

Note: FOMO = Fear of missing out, MH = Mental Health.

Table 7 shows correlation between fear of missing out and mental health among young adults. The scores shows that the hypothesis, There is a significant relationship between fear of missing out and mental health among youth is accepted and the correlation has moderate positive level, indicating as fear of missing out increases, the mental health issues also increases. Several studies do support this

finding. Fear of missing out (FoMO) can be closely linked to mental health due to a combination of biopsychosocial factors. Dopamine-mediated reward-seeking behaviors elevate the FOMO, reinforcing compulsive social media use. Elevated cortisol levels from chronic social comparison can increase stress and anxiety. Psychosocially, social comparison and low self-esteem intensify Fear of missing out, as youth measure their worth against others' curated lives (Elhai et al., 2018). The rise of constant digital connectivity and communication in participatory medias fosters an "always-on" culture, making disengagement difficult in these platforms. Insecure attachment styles and a need for external validation further increase this vulnerability. Societal pressures in individualistic cultures emphasize achievement and visibility, exacerbating Fear of missing out (Baker, Krieger, & LeRoy, 2016). Additionally, cognitive distortions, such as "Everyone else has a better life than me," fuel anxiety and depressive symptoms. Together, these factors create a cycle of compulsive social media use, heightened distress, and declining mental well-being. Features such as highlight reels, curated influencer content, and peer postings accentuate FOMO, leading to worsened mental health outcomes (Verywell Mind, 2020) ([Verywell Mind][4]).

**3.2 Limitations of The Study:**

The sample size was limited to 200. The demographic area chosen was small. Cultural and societal influences were not included. Less exploration on potential moderators or mediators.

**3.3 Suggestions for Future Research:**

A large sample would give wider scope for generalizing the result. Provisions should be given to the participants so that the participation would be more genuine. Future studies should include larger, diverse samples, longitudinal effects, and additional variables to ensure broader, more genuine insights.

**4.CONCLUSION**

The study was an attempt to find the relationship between parasocial interaction, fear of missing out and mental health among Youth. In the sight of the experience of the investigator, it was found that there is no significant difference in the parasocial interaction and mental health among Youth.

But there is significant difference in the fear of missing out among both the groups. There is no significant relationship between parasocial interaction and fear of missing out, parasocial interaction and mental health. But a significant positive relationship between fear of missing out and mental health among both the population.

Hence it shows that both the section youth, do have high level of para social interaction, moderate level of feeling of missing out and good mental health. Even though they have high level of para social interaction they do not let the interaction actively impact on creating a feeling of fear of missing out. But the fear of missing out does affect their mental health as well as the parasocial interaction and there is a significant correlation between the variables. This means that some other factors other than para social interaction play a role in creating a feeling of missing out which affects their mental health. The study also shed a light on the need for devising intervention strategies for psychological well-being of the youth in the digital world.

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