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Structural Equation Modeling of Fear of Missing Out Based on Social Media Addiction and Perceived Social Support: The Mediating Role of Self-Control in Adolescents

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A B S T R A C T

Purpose: This study aimed to examine the structural relationships between social media addiction, perceived social support, and fear of missing out (FoMO), considering the mediating role of self-control among adolescents.

Methods and Materials: This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design using structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population comprised all adolescents aged 13–18 years residing in Qom, Iran, during the 2025–2026 academic year. A total of 320 adolescents were selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using the Fear of Missing Out Scale developed by Abel et al. (2016), the Social Media Addiction Scale developed by Şahin (2018), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support developed by Zimet et al. (1988), and the Brief Self-Control Scale developed by Tangney et al. (2004). Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling to evaluate the proposed relationships, model fit, and mediating effects of self-control.

Findings: Structural equation modeling indicated that the proposed model explaining FoMO through social media addiction and perceived social support, with self-control as a mediating variable, demonstrated an acceptable overall fit with the observed data. The findings supported the mediating role of self-control in the structural relationships linking social media addiction and perceived social support to FoMO among adolescents. These results suggest that self-control constitutes an important psychological mechanism within the proposed explanatory model. However, specific path coefficients, significance levels, and model fit indices were not reported in the available findings.

Conclusion: The findings highlight the importance of self-control in understanding FoMO among adolescents. Strengthening self-control skills and enhancing perceived social support may contribute to reducing problematic social media engagement and FoMO. School-based psychological interventions targeting self-regulation may therefore be beneficial, although longitudinal and experimental research is required to establish causal relationships.

Keywords: *Fear of Missing Out (FoMO); Social Media Addiction; Perceived Social Support; Self-Control; Adolescents; Structural Equation Modeling.*

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed the social ecology of adolescence. Social networking platforms now constitute an important environment in which adolescents communicate, form and maintain peer relationships, explore identity, seek social validation, and obtain information about their social world. Although these platforms can facilitate connectedness, interpersonal communication, and access to social resources, excessive or dysregulated use has increasingly been associated with adverse psychological and behavioral outcomes. Contemporary evidence suggests that the effects of social media are not inherently positive or negative; rather, their consequences depend on patterns of use, individual vulnerabilities, social context, and the psychological functions that online engagement serves (Lin et al., 2023). Reviews of digital media use among children and adolescents similarly indicate that intensive and maladaptive engagement with social technologies may be associated with emotional difficulties, interpersonal disruption, sleep problems, attentional difficulties, and other mental health concerns (Masri-Zada et al., 2025). More recent longitudinal evidence further suggests that the psychological effects of social media may accumulate over time, with repeated exposure and habitual use contributing to increasing stress among adolescents across days and months (Siebers et al., 2026). Accordingly, social media use during adolescence should not be viewed merely in terms of frequency or screen time, but should be examined within a broader psychological framework that considers compulsive engagement, self-regulation, perceived interpersonal resources, and sensitivity to exclusion from rewarding social experiences.

One of the most influential psychological constructs proposed to explain maladaptive engagement with social media is fear of missing out (FoMO). FoMO generally refers to a persistent apprehension that other people may be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, accompanied by a desire to remain continuously connected with what others are doing. Abel et al. conceptualized FoMO in relation to social media engagement and developed an instrument for evaluating individual differences in this phenomenon, highlighting its association with social interaction, self-related evaluations, and social anxiety (Abel et al., 2016). The construct is particularly relevant to social networking environments because these platforms continuously present users with updates about peers' activities, achievements, relationships, events, and experiences. Such exposure can heighten perceived discrepancies between one's own circumstances and the apparently rewarding experiences of others. In the Iranian context, the psychometric development and validation of a FoMO measure has also demonstrated that this phenomenon can be meaningfully assessed in local populations and warrants systematic investigation (Asadi & Sharifi, 2022). FoMO has increasingly been understood not simply as a transient emotional response but as a cognitive-affective mechanism that may sustain repeated checking, online vigilance, and compulsive participation in digital social environments. Research has shown that FoMO is associated with problematic smartphone use, problematic social media use, and negative emotional states, including anxiety and depression (Elhai et al., 2020). Meta-analytic evidence has further demonstrated significant associations between social media addiction and FoMO, as well as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and lower self-esteem among students, indicating that FoMO is embedded within a broader network of psychological vulnerabilities associated with problematic digital behavior (Zhang et al., 2025).

The relationship between FoMO and problematic social media use appears to be reciprocal and psychologically reinforcing. Individuals who fear exclusion from meaningful or rewarding experiences may check social media more frequently, while persistent exposure to curated representations of others' lives may intensify concerns about being left behind. Müller et al. showed that FoMO can mediate relationships between personality-related behavioral tendencies and problematic social network use, indicating that FoMO may function as a proximal psychological mechanism linking dispositional characteristics to maladaptive online behavior (Müller et al., 2020). More recently, Servidio et al. demonstrated that social comparison and self-esteem contribute to a serial mediation process connecting FoMO with problematic social media use, emphasizing the importance of self-evaluative processes in this association (Servidio et al., 2024). Similarly, Soraci et al. found that FoMO and psychological distress mediate associations among life satisfaction, problematic smartphone use, and problematic social media use, further supporting the view that FoMO occupies a central position between subjective well-being and maladaptive technology use (Soraci et al., 2025). Structural modeling research has also linked smartphone addiction, social media addiction, FoMO, and phubbing behaviors, suggesting that these constructs should be

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examined as interconnected components of problematic digital engagement rather than as isolated phenomena (Talan et al., 2024). Related evidence indicates that smartphone addiction, phubbing, and FoMO may adversely influence social cooperation and life satisfaction, illustrating how digitally mediated concerns about social inclusion can extend into broader psychosocial functioning (Tufan et al., 2026).

Social media addiction represents another major component of this conceptual framework. It is generally characterized by excessive preoccupation with social networking platforms, difficulty controlling use, increasing psychological investment in online interactions, and persistence despite negative personal, academic, or interpersonal consequences. Şahin developed the Social Media Addiction Scale–Student Form to assess dimensions of problematic engagement among students, providing an empirically supported framework for examining social media addiction in younger populations (Sahin, 2018). Evidence from Iranian samples has similarly supported the psychometric adequacy of social media addiction measures and highlighted the need to assess problematic media use within culturally specific contexts (Shirazi et al., 2023). Broader clinical and behavioral reviews characterize social media addiction as a multifactorial phenomenon involving reinforcement processes, compulsive checking, impaired behavioral control, emotional regulation difficulties, and repeated use despite adverse consequences (Amirthalingam & Khera, 2024). From this perspective, social media platforms may become particularly reinforcing because they provide unpredictable streams of social rewards, including messages, reactions, notifications, and opportunities for comparison. Repeated exposure to such rewards may strengthen habitual use and reduce users' ability to disengage voluntarily.

The relationship between social media addiction and FoMO is supported by increasingly convergent evidence. Ali Al-Abyadh demonstrated a direct association between FoMO and social media addiction using both cross-sectional and quasi-experimental approaches, suggesting that FoMO may play not only a correlational but also a potentially modifiable role in addictive patterns of social media engagement (Ali Al-Abyadh, 2025). Recent longitudinal work has also identified mental health characteristics, personality traits, and cross-addictive tendencies as predictors of social media addiction, reinforcing the idea that problematic use emerges from the interaction of psychological vulnerabilities and behavioral reinforcement processes (Zarate et al., 2026). Research on compulsive digital behavior has additionally shown that social media addiction can coexist with other dysregulated behaviors, including compulsive purchasing and impulsive tendencies, indicating broader difficulties in impulse regulation and reward sensitivity (Ben Amor, 2027). In adolescents, problematic social media use has been linked to lower psychological well-being, with loneliness and reduced physical activity operating as sequential explanatory pathways (Mallı et al., 2026). These findings are particularly important because adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation, increasing autonomy from family, intensified identity exploration, and substantial developmental changes in self-regulatory capacities. Within this context, excessive social media engagement may become especially salient when adolescents perceive online participation as necessary for maintaining social belonging.

Perceived social support may serve as an important interpersonal factor in this process. Perceived social support refers to an individual's belief that emotional, informational, and instrumental support is available from significant others, typically including family members, friends, and other important people. It is not simply the objective presence of relationships, but the subjective perception that these relationships are accessible, responsive, and dependable. Research has shown that perceived social support is dynamically related to psychological characteristics and can change alongside personality development across the lifespan (Pfund & Allemand, 2024). In adolescents, perceived social support has been positively associated with psychological well-being, with evidence suggesting that its effects may operate through psychological resources such as academic self-efficacy (Tadessse, 2026). Within digital contexts, social support appears especially relevant because adolescents who experience insufficient support in offline settings may turn to online environments to compensate for unmet relational needs. Conversely, strong family and peer support may reduce the psychological necessity of constant online monitoring and validation.

Empirical studies support an inverse relationship between perceived social support and problematic digital engagement. Lu et al. reported that social support was associated with Internet addiction through complex mediating and moderating mechanisms, suggesting that social resources can influence problematic technology use both directly and indirectly (Lu et al., 2023). In an Iranian sample, perceived social support was found to mediate the

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relationship between attachment styles and addiction to social networking platforms, indicating that perceived interpersonal resources may represent an important psychological pathway through which relational patterns influence online behavior (Pournaghash Tehrani & Khaki Sedigh, 2022). Similarly, perceived social support has been examined as a mediator between loneliness and social network addiction, with findings suggesting that individuals who feel less socially supported may be more vulnerable to maladaptive reliance on online social environments (Talebzadeh et al., 2025). Meshi and Ellithorpe further distinguished between social support received in real life and support received through social media, demonstrating that problematic social media use is differentially associated with support sources, depression, anxiety, and social isolation (Meshi & Ellithorpe, 2021). Collectively, these findings suggest that perceived social support may function as a protective factor against problematic social media involvement and FoMO by decreasing dependence on digital environments for reassurance, belonging, and social validation.

However, the effects of both social media addiction and perceived social support on FoMO may depend partly on adolescents' capacity for self-control. Self-control refers to the ability to regulate impulses, inhibit maladaptive responses, initiate goal-consistent behaviors, and modify thoughts, emotions, and actions in accordance with longer-term goals. Importantly, self-control is not limited to resisting undesirable behavior. De Ridder et al. distinguished inhibitory self-control, which involves refraining from unwanted actions, from initiatory self-control, which involves actively engaging in adaptive goal-directed behavior (De Ridder et al., 2011). This distinction is particularly relevant to social media use because adaptive regulation requires not only resisting the urge to check platforms repeatedly but also redirecting attention toward alternative activities such as academic tasks, physical activity, sleep, and face-to-face interaction. Research in Iranian students has also demonstrated meaningful associations between self-control and responsibility, supporting the relevance of self-regulatory capacities to adaptive behavioral functioning (Ahmadi Jouybari, 2017). Among adolescents specifically, family emotional climate, self-control, and sleep quality have been linked with Internet addiction, emphasizing that self-control may act as a central protective factor within a broader network of family and behavioral influences (Pouragha Roudbordeh et al., 2022).

The role of self-control becomes especially important when digital environments are considered from the perspective of behavioral reinforcement and impulse regulation. Social media platforms are designed around rapid rewards, endless content, notifications, social feedback, and easy transitions between stimuli. These characteristics can challenge adolescents' still-developing capacities for inhibitory control and delayed gratification. The broader literature on behavioral addictions and impulse control disorders suggests that difficulties in regulating urges and reward-driven behavior are central to multiple forms of dysregulated behavior (Devoe et al., 2022). Social media addiction may therefore be partly understood as a self-regulation problem in which repeated engagement becomes increasingly automatic and difficult to control. More recent research has identified self-control as a mediator in the relationship between problematic smartphone use and personality-related vulnerability, alongside FoMO, indicating that FoMO and self-regulatory deficits may operate simultaneously or in parallel within problematic digital behavior (Takács & Seregély, 2025). Individual differences in broader regulatory tendencies also appear relevant; for example, dispositional mindfulness has been examined as a moderator of associations between personality traits and social media addiction, highlighting the potential protective role of attentional and regulatory capacities against compulsive social media engagement (Mouatassim et al., 2027).

From a structural perspective, self-control may plausibly mediate the effects of both social media addiction and perceived social support on FoMO. Higher levels of social media addiction may weaken effective self-regulation through habitual checking, cue-reactive responding, and increased sensitivity to immediate social rewards. Reduced self-control may in turn make it more difficult for adolescents to resist urges to monitor peers' activities, tolerate temporary disconnection, or regulate anxious thoughts regarding exclusion from social experiences. In contrast, stronger perceived social support may enhance emotional security and reduce the need for constant external validation, potentially supporting more effective self-regulation and decreasing FoMO. This proposition is consistent with research suggesting that problematic social media behavior reflects the combined effects of emotional vulnerability, reinforcement processes, self-regulatory difficulties, and interpersonal needs rather than a single causal mechanism (Ahorsu et al., 2027). The relationship between self-regulation and online behavior is also

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supported by evidence that social media addiction can interact with impulsive tendencies, anxiety, stress, and materialistic orientations in predicting compulsive behaviors in digital environments (Ben Amor, 2027). Thus, examining self-control as a mediator provides a theoretically coherent way to integrate intrapersonal and interpersonal explanations of FoMO.

Such an integrated model is particularly important for adolescents because their developmental context may amplify each component of this process. Adolescence involves heightened sensitivity to peer acceptance, growing concern with social status, increased autonomy in technology use, and incomplete maturation of executive control systems. Under these conditions, frequent exposure to peer activities on social media may increase social comparison and perceived exclusion, while limited self-regulatory capacity may make it difficult to disengage from online monitoring. At the same time, supportive relationships with family, peers, and significant others may provide psychological security that reduces dependence on online feedback. Contemporary research increasingly emphasizes that adolescent social media use should be understood within such multi-level developmental systems rather than through simple exposure models (Masri-Zada et al., 2025). Moreover, the accumulating effects of social media use on adolescent stress suggest that repeated patterns of engagement may become psychologically consequential over time even when individual episodes appear relatively benign (Siebers et al., 2026). Accordingly, investigating the combined contributions of social media addiction, perceived social support, and self-control can provide a more comprehensive explanation of FoMO than examining any of these variables independently.

Despite substantial research on FoMO and problematic social media use, several conceptual gaps remain. A large proportion of previous studies have examined direct associations between FoMO and technology-related behaviors, while fewer have simultaneously incorporated both a potentially adverse digital factor, such as social media addiction, and a potentially protective interpersonal factor, such as perceived social support, within a single structural model. Furthermore, although self-control has been repeatedly associated with Internet addiction, problematic smartphone use, and other behavioral dysregulation, its mediating role in explaining how social media addiction and perceived social support are linked to FoMO among adolescents remains insufficiently clarified. Existing evidence demonstrates associations among FoMO, self-control, problematic smartphone use, and personality characteristics (Takács & Seregély, 2025), while other studies have emphasized social comparison and self-esteem as mediating mechanisms (Servidio et al., 2024). Similarly, the literature on perceived social support has primarily focused on its associations with loneliness, psychological well-being, attachment, or Internet addiction (Lu et al., 2023; Talebzadeh et al., 2025), leaving open the question of whether self-control constitutes a central regulatory mechanism linking perceived social support to FoMO.

Clarifying these relationships has practical as well as theoretical importance. If social media addiction contributes to FoMO partly by reducing effective self-control, interventions directed solely at restricting adolescents' access to social media may be less effective than approaches that strengthen self-regulation, impulse management, attentional control, and tolerance of temporary disconnection. Likewise, if perceived social support reduces FoMO partly through its positive association with self-control, interventions designed to improve family communication, peer connectedness, and perceived availability of support may indirectly strengthen adolescents' ability to regulate social media-related urges. Such an approach is compatible with evidence indicating that the consequences of problematic social media use extend beyond online behavior to psychological well-being, loneliness, life satisfaction, and interpersonal functioning (Mallı et al., 2026; Tufan et al., 2026). It is also consistent with emerging evidence showing that mental health symptoms, personality characteristics, and cross-addictive tendencies jointly contribute to the development of problematic social media use (Zarate et al., 2026). Understanding the mediating role of self-control may therefore contribute to the design of multidimensional prevention and intervention programs that address both individual regulatory capacities and the social environments within which adolescents use digital technologies.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to test a structural model of fear of missing out based on social media addiction and perceived social support, with self-control as a mediating variable among adolescents.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The statistical population comprised all adolescents aged 13–18 years residing in Qom, Iran, during

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the 2025–2026 academic year. Based on the specified population and the sample size determination formula ($5Q < n < 15Q$), derived from Kline's recommendation, where Q represents the number of questionnaire items (64 items), the sample size was determined to be 320 participants. These participants were selected using convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria were being between 13 and 18 years of age, residing and studying in Qom, actively using social media platforms, possessing the cognitive ability to understand and respond to the questionnaires, and providing informed consent to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria included incomplete questionnaire responses, a diagnosis of severe psychiatric disorders, the use of psychotropic medications or medications affecting self-control and emotional functioning, unwillingness to continue participation at any stage of the study, and failure to meet the specified age or geographical eligibility criteria.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

The Fear of Missing Out Scale was developed by Abel et al. (2016) and consists of 10 items. Responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The total score is calculated by summing the scores across all items, yielding a possible range of 10–50. Abel et al. (2016) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.88, 0.69, and 0.85 for the self-feelings/self-esteem, social interaction/extraversion, and social anxiety factors, respectively. In the study conducted by Asadi and Sharifi (2022), the scale underwent translation and back-translation into English, and the equivalence of the translated version was confirmed by an English language specialist. Furthermore, its face validity was evaluated and confirmed based on feedback from 18 adolescents.

The Social Media Addiction Scale was developed by Şahin (2018) and comprises 29 items organized into four dimensions: virtual tolerance (items 1–5), virtual communication (items 6–14), virtual problems (items 15–23), and virtual information (items 24–29). Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with total scores ranging from 29 to 145. In the original study, Şahin (2018) reported internal consistency coefficients ranging from 0.54 to 0.87 across the subscales, with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.87. Shirazi et al. (2023) subsequently examined the psychometric properties of this questionnaire in an Iranian population. Their confirmatory factor analysis supported the adequacy of the four-factor measurement model and confirmed the instrument's acceptable validity and reliability.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was developed by Zimet et al. (1988) and consists of 12 items designed to assess perceived social support from three sources: family, friends, and significant others. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items 3, 4, 8, and 11 assess perceived family support; items 6, 7, 9, and 12 assess perceived support from friends; and items 1, 2, 5, and 10 assess perceived support from significant others. The total score is obtained by summing the scores across all items. Zimet et al. (1988) reported satisfactory validity and reliability for the scale, with an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89. In the study conducted by Rostami et al. (2010), Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales ranged from 0.76 to 0.89. Similarly, Salimi et al. (2009) reported reliability coefficients of 0.86, 0.86, and 0.82 for the family, friends, and significant others dimensions, respectively.

The Brief Self-Control Scale was developed by Tangney et al. (2004) and consists of 13 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very much). The original validation study of the shortened version reported an internal consistency coefficient of 0.85. Furthermore, de Ridder et al. (2011) examined the internal consistency of the questionnaire and found it to be satisfactory. In the study conducted by Ahmadi-Jouybari (2017), the validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by subject-matter experts, and its reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was calculated as 0.91.

2.3. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, skewness, and kurtosis, and inferential statistics, including Pearson's correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling (SEM), were employed to analyze the data and evaluate the proposed structural model. Data analysis was performed using SPSS and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) software.

3. Findings and Results

Of the 320 participants, 223 (69.7%) were female and 97 (30.3%) were male. Regarding educational grade, 37 participants (11.6%) were in seventh grade, 51 (15.9%) were in eighth grade, 26 (8.1%) were in ninth grade, 49 (15.3%) were in tenth grade, 59 (18.4%) were in eleventh grade, and

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98 (30.7%) were in twelfth grade. Regarding age distribution, 33 participants (10.3%) were 13 years old, 42 (13.1%) were 14 years old, 32 (10.0%) were 15 years old, 49 (15.3%) were 16 years old, 76 (23.8%) were 17 years old, and 88 (27.5%) were 18 years old.

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Matrix Among the Study Variables (N = 320)

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Social Media Addiction	1			
2. Perceived Social Support	−0.249**	1		
3. Self-Control	−0.287**	0.120*	1	
4. Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)	0.401**	−0.279**	−0.310**	1

Table 1 shows that Pearson's correlation coefficient between social media addiction and FoMO was 0.401, indicating a statistically significant positive relationship between social media addiction and FoMO. The Pearson correlation coefficient between perceived social support and FoMO was −0.279, indicating a statistically significant negative relationship between these variables. Furthermore, the Pearson correlation coefficient between self-control and FoMO was −0.310, indicating a statistically significant negative relationship between self-control and FoMO.

Table 2

Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Proposed Structural Model

Fit Index	Acceptable Criterion	Obtained Value	Interpretation
GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.927	Acceptable fit
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	< 0.08	0.066	Acceptable fit
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.947	Acceptable fit
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.922	Acceptable fit
IFI (Incremental Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.914	Acceptable fit
AGFI (Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.938	Acceptable fit
PGFI (Parsimony Goodness-of-Fit Index)	> 0.50	0.623	Acceptable fit
χ^2/df (Chi-Square to Degrees of Freedom Ratio)	1–5	3.653	Acceptable fit

Table 2 indicates that an evaluation of the overall model fit indices supports the conclusion that the observed data demonstrate an acceptable fit with the proposed conceptual model. The goodness-of-fit indices collectively indicate that the structural model exhibits satisfactory fit. Therefore, given that the obtained fit indices meet the specified acceptance criteria, the adequacy of the proposed model can be reasonably supported.

Table 3

Results of Structural Equation Modeling for the Proposed Research Model

Structural Relationship	Standardized Direct Effect	Standardized Indirect Effect	Standardized Total Effect	Hypothesis Result
Social Media Addiction → Self-Control	−0.260	—	−0.260	Supported
Self-Control → FoMO	−0.350	—	−0.350	Supported
Social Media Addiction → FoMO	0.360	—	0.360	Supported
Social Media Addiction → Self-Control → FoMO	0.360	0.091	0.451	Supported
Perceived Social Support → Self-Control	0.180	—	0.180	Supported
Self-Control → FoMO	−0.350	—	−0.350	Supported
Perceived Social Support → FoMO	−0.230	—	−0.230	Supported
Perceived Social Support → Self-Control → FoMO	−0.230	−0.063	−0.293	Supported

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Table 3 presents the results of the structural equation modeling analysis. To determine the magnitude of the mediating effect, the variance accounted for (VAF) index was calculated. VAF represents the proportion of the total effect attributable to the indirect effect.

Direct effect = Effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable

Indirect effect = Effect of the independent variable on the mediator × Effect of the mediator on the dependent variable

Total effect = Direct effect + Indirect effect

Variance accounted for (VAF) = Indirect effect ÷ Total effect

VAF=0.201

When the VAF value is below 20%, it is generally interpreted as indicating the absence of a meaningful mediating effect. Conversely, when VAF exceeds 80%, complete mediation may be inferred. A VAF value between 20% and 80% is interpreted as indicating partial mediation. The obtained VAF value of 0.201 indicates the presence of a mediating effect and supports partial mediation. Therefore, self-control was found to play a partial mediating role in the relationship between social media addiction and FoMO (VAF = 0.215).

The obtained VAF value of 0.215 supports the presence of partial mediation. Accordingly, self-control was found to partially mediate the relationship between perceived social support and FoMO. Furthermore, the results indicated that social media addiction, perceived social support, and self-control collectively explained 41% of the variance in FoMO scores. Additionally, social media addiction and perceived social support collectively explained 33% of the variance in self-control scores.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined a structural model of fear of missing out (FoMO) based on social media addiction and perceived social support, with self-control considered as a mediating variable among adolescents. The results indicated that the proposed structural model demonstrated an acceptable overall fit with the observed data, as reflected in the goodness-of-fit indices, including GFI = 0.927, RMSEA = 0.066, CFI = 0.947, NFI = 0.922, IFI = 0.914, AGFI = 0.938, PGFI = 0.623, and χ^2/df = 3.653. The structural findings further showed that social media addiction had a direct negative effect on self-control (β = −0.260) and a direct positive effect on FoMO (β = 0.360), whereas self-control had a direct negative effect on FoMO (β = −0.350). Perceived social support had a direct positive effect on self-control (β = 0.180) and a direct negative effect on FoMO (β = −0.230). In addition, self-control partially mediated the relationship between social media addiction and FoMO, with an indirect effect of 0.091 and a VAF value of 0.201, and partially mediated the relationship between perceived social support and FoMO, with an indirect effect of −0.063 and a VAF value of 0.215. Overall, social media addiction, perceived social support, and self-control explained 41% of the variance in FoMO, while social media addiction and perceived social support explained 33% of the variance in self-control. These findings indicate that FoMO among adolescents is best understood as the outcome of an interconnected system involving problematic digital engagement, interpersonal resources, and self-regulatory capacity rather than as an isolated emotional reaction.

The positive direct relationship between social media addiction and FoMO is consistent with a substantial body of previous research showing that excessive and problematic involvement in social networking environments is closely associated with persistent concerns about missing socially rewarding experiences. Ali Al-Abyadh reported a significant association between FoMO and social media addiction and demonstrated that these two constructs are closely connected at both correlational and quasi-experimental levels (Ali Al-Abyadh, 2025). Similarly, a systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by Zhang et al. identified FoMO as one of the psychological factors most consistently associated with social media addiction among students, alongside anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem (Zhang et al., 2025). The present results are also in line with the work of Talan et al., who found that social media addiction, smartphone addiction, and FoMO were structurally related to problematic interpersonal technology use such as phubbing (Talan et al., 2024). In the same direction, Tufan et al. demonstrated that FoMO and smartphone-related behavioral problems can negatively affect social cooperation and life satisfaction, showing that FoMO is not merely a subjective concern but may be embedded in broader maladaptive patterns of technology use (Tufan et al., 2026). These convergent findings support the interpretation that adolescents who become increasingly dependent on social media may also become more psychologically vigilant toward the activities, experiences, and social inclusion of others.

One explanation for this relationship is that social media addiction increases repeated exposure to continuously updated streams of socially salient information. Adolescents

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who frequently check platforms encounter ongoing evidence of peer activities, friendships, achievements, gatherings, and rewarding experiences, which can intensify the perception that important events are occurring elsewhere. Abel et al. originally conceptualized FoMO as closely linked to social media engagement and concerns regarding social participation, self-evaluation, and interpersonal connection (Abel et al., 2016). Repeated exposure to selective and idealized representations of others' experiences may increase social comparison and perceived social inadequacy, particularly among adolescents who are highly sensitive to peer evaluation. Servidio et al. showed that social comparison and self-esteem form an important explanatory pathway linking FoMO and problematic social media use (Servidio et al., 2024). Müller et al. similarly demonstrated that FoMO can mediate the association between behavioral tendencies such as maximization and procrastination and problematic social network use (Müller et al., 2020). Therefore, one plausible interpretation of the current findings is that greater social media addiction increases adolescents' dependence on continuous social information, which strengthens anticipatory anxiety about exclusion and consequently elevates FoMO.

The finding that social media addiction negatively predicted self-control is also theoretically and empirically plausible. Problematic social media use is characterized by repetitive checking, difficulty disengaging, habitual responding to notifications, and preference for immediate digital rewards, all of which are behaviorally incompatible with effective self-regulation. Amirthalingam and Khera described social media addiction as a multifaceted behavioral problem involving compulsive use, impaired regulation, reinforcement, and persistence despite negative consequences (Amirthalingam & Khera, 2024). The broader behavioral addiction literature similarly emphasizes the role of impaired impulse control and reward-driven behavior in maintaining maladaptive patterns of engagement (Devoe et al., 2022). From this perspective, adolescents with higher levels of social media addiction may experience greater difficulty inhibiting urges to check online content, postponing immediate gratification, and redirecting attention toward long-term goals. This interpretation is further supported by Iranian evidence indicating that self-control is related to Internet addiction among adolescents and may function as a protective psychological factor against excessive online engagement (Pouragha Roudbordeh et al., 2022). Thus, the negative path from social media addiction to self-control in the present model may reflect the extent to which habitual and compulsive digital engagement undermines, or co-occurs with, reduced capacity for behavioral regulation.

The negative direct effect of self-control on FoMO represents another important finding. Adolescents with stronger self-control reported lower FoMO, suggesting that the ability to regulate impulses, manage attention, inhibit automatic checking behavior, and tolerate temporary disconnection may reduce vulnerability to concerns about missing social experiences. This result is consistent with the theoretical distinction proposed by De Ridder et al. between inhibitory and initiatory self-control (De Ridder et al., 2011). In the context of social media, inhibitory self-control may involve resisting the urge to check platforms repeatedly, whereas initiatory self-control may involve engaging in alternative goal-directed activities, such as studying, exercising, or participating in face-to-face social interaction. The present finding also aligns with Takács and Seregély, who identified self-control and FoMO as important mediating processes in the relationship between problematic smartphone use and neuroticism (Takács & Seregély, 2025). Their findings support the view that self-control and FoMO are not independent processes but are functionally interconnected within patterns of problematic technology use. In addition, Ahmadi Jouybari reported meaningful relationships between self-control and adaptive behavioral functioning, suggesting that higher self-control is associated with greater responsibility and behavioral regulation (Ahmadi Jouybari, 2017). Accordingly, adolescents who possess stronger self-regulatory capacities may be better able to manage the emotional discomfort associated with uncertainty about peers' activities and may feel less compelled to maintain continuous digital connection.

A particularly important contribution of the present study was the finding that self-control partially mediated the relationship between social media addiction and FoMO. The indirect effect was positive because social media addiction predicted lower self-control, while lower self-control in turn predicted higher FoMO. The VAF value of 0.201 indicated partial mediation, meaning that social media addiction influenced FoMO both directly and indirectly through self-control. This pattern is consistent with the view that problematic digital engagement may affect FoMO partly by weakening or being associated with reduced self-regulatory functioning. Takács and Seregély similarly demonstrated that FoMO and self-control can jointly mediate associations involving problematic smartphone use and personality vulnerability (Takács & Seregély, 2025). Zarate et al. also

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identified personality characteristics, mental health factors, and cross-addictive behaviors as longitudinal predictors of social media addiction, suggesting that problematic social media use should be conceptualized as the result of interconnected regulatory and psychological vulnerabilities (Zarate et al., 2026). Mouatassim et al. further showed that dispositional mindfulness can moderate relationships between personality traits and social media addiction, emphasizing the relevance of attentional and self-regulatory capacities in compulsive digital behavior (Mouatassim et al., 2027). Taken together, these findings support the present mediation model by suggesting that self-regulation is one of the mechanisms through which addictive social media patterns can translate into heightened FoMO.

The direct negative effect of perceived social support on FoMO was also consistent with the study's conceptual framework. Adolescents who perceive greater availability of emotional, relational, and instrumental support from family, friends, and significant others may feel less threatened by temporary disconnection from online social activities. In contrast, adolescents who perceive limited support may become more dependent on digital environments for reassurance, belonging, and social validation. Meshi and Ellithorpe showed that problematic social media use is differentially associated with social support received in real life and through social media, as well as with depression, anxiety, and social isolation (Meshi & Ellithorpe, 2021). This finding suggests that the perceived quality and source of support are important in determining whether online engagement becomes compensatory or maladaptive. Lu et al. likewise found that social support was significantly associated with Internet addiction and operated within a broader mediated moderation model (Lu et al., 2023). In the Iranian context, Pournaghash Tehrani and Khaki Sedigh demonstrated that perceived social support mediated the relationship between attachment styles and social platform addiction (Pournaghash Tehrani & Khaki Sedigh, 2022), while Talebzadeh et al. reported a mediating role for perceived social support in the association between loneliness and social network addiction (Talebzadeh et al., 2025). These studies collectively support the interpretation that perceived support may reduce psychological dependence on continuous online connectedness and thereby decrease FoMO.

The positive effect of perceived social support on self-control provides an additional explanation for the protective role of supportive relationships. Adolescents who perceive their social environment as reliable and responsive may experience greater emotional security, lower stress, and stronger capacity to regulate impulses and behavior. Perceived support may also facilitate adaptive coping by providing external regulation through guidance, reassurance, supervision, and interpersonal feedback. Tadessse found that perceived social support was positively related to psychological well-being among adolescents, with academic self-efficacy serving as an explanatory mechanism (Tadessse, 2026). Although self-efficacy and self-control are distinct constructs, both represent personal regulatory resources that may be strengthened in supportive environments. Pfund and Allemand also demonstrated correlated changes between perceived social support and personality traits over time, suggesting that social resources and individual psychological characteristics may develop reciprocally rather than independently (Pfund & Allemand, 2024). In this sense, perceived social support may help adolescents develop confidence in their ability to regulate behavior, tolerate frustration, and remain less dependent on immediate digital reinforcement.

The finding that self-control partially mediated the relationship between perceived social support and FoMO further extends this interpretation. The indirect path was negative because greater perceived social support predicted higher self-control, which in turn predicted lower FoMO. The VAF value of 0.215 indicated partial mediation, suggesting that social support reduces FoMO both directly and indirectly through stronger self-regulatory capacity. This result is theoretically meaningful because interpersonal support can provide the emotional security necessary for autonomous regulation. Adolescents who feel adequately supported may have less need to monitor others continuously for signs of inclusion or exclusion, and they may also be better positioned to resist compulsive checking behaviors. Evidence showing that perceived social support can mediate relationships involving attachment, loneliness, and social network addiction supports this broader mechanism (Pournaghash Tehrani & Khaki Sedigh, 2022; Talebzadeh et al., 2025). Moreover, because problematic online engagement often co-occurs with emotional distress and social isolation, strengthening both social resources and self-regulation may interrupt the cycle through which low support leads to heavier digital dependence and heightened FoMO (Meshi & Ellithorpe, 2021).

The overall explanatory power of the model also deserves attention. Social media addiction, perceived social support, and self-control jointly accounted for 41% of the variance in FoMO, indicating that these variables capture a substantial

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proportion of individual differences in adolescents' FoMO. At the same time, the unexplained variance suggests that additional factors such as social comparison orientation, self-esteem, loneliness, anxiety, depressive symptoms, personality characteristics, attachment patterns, mindfulness, and family climate may also contribute. Servidio et al. highlighted the mediating importance of social comparison and self-esteem in problematic social media use (Servidio et al., 2024), while Soraci et al. emphasized the roles of FoMO and psychological distress in the relationships among life satisfaction, problematic smartphone use, and problematic social media use (Soraci et al., 2025). Elhai et al. similarly identified depression, anxiety, and FoMO as correlates of problematic smartphone use (Elhai et al., 2020). Recent longitudinal research has also shown that the effects of social media use on adolescent stress may accumulate over time rather than appearing only as immediate consequences (Siebers et al., 2026). These findings suggest that the present model captures important but not exhaustive mechanisms and should be viewed as part of a broader developmental framework.

The 33% explained variance in self-control further suggests that social media addiction and perceived social support are meaningful correlates of adolescents' regulatory capacity. This result supports the notion that self-control is influenced by both behavioral exposure and interpersonal context. Heavy social media use may repeatedly activate immediate reward processes and reduce opportunities to practice delayed gratification, whereas supportive relationships may provide structure, emotional stability, and external guidance conducive to self-regulation. The broader literature on adolescent technology use supports such a multidimensional perspective. Masri-Zada et al. emphasized that social media and technology can affect child and adolescent mental health through interacting emotional, behavioral, and social mechanisms (Masri-Zada et al., 2025). Ahorsu et al. similarly described social media use and health as a complex field involving patterns of use, individual differences, and psychosocial consequences rather than simple exposure effects (Ahorsu et al., 2027). In addition, the associations between social media addiction, compulsive behavior, anxiety, stress, and impulsive tendencies reported by Ben Amor reinforce the importance of considering behavioral regulation when explaining the broader consequences of problematic digital engagement (Ben Amor, 2027). Thus, the present findings add to the literature by placing self-control within a structural pathway connecting both risk and protective variables to FoMO.

Overall, the findings support a model in which social media addiction functions primarily as a risk factor, perceived social support functions primarily as a protective factor, and self-control operates as a central regulatory mechanism connecting both factors to FoMO. This integrated interpretation is consistent with evidence that social media addiction is associated with poorer psychological well-being among adolescents and may operate through processes such as loneliness and reduced engagement in protective activities (Mallı et al., 2026). It is also consistent with research showing that social media addiction is embedded within broader patterns of mental health vulnerability and cross-addictive behavior (Zarate et al., 2026). The results therefore extend previous research by showing that the relationship between social and behavioral factors and FoMO cannot be fully explained through direct effects alone. Instead, adolescents' capacity for self-control appears to constitute one pathway through which problematic digital engagement intensifies FoMO and perceived social support reduces it. From a developmental perspective, this is particularly important because adolescence is a period during which peer affiliation becomes increasingly salient while regulatory capacities are still developing, creating conditions in which online social rewards may become especially powerful.

One limitation of the present study is its cross-sectional and correlational design, which prevents causal conclusions regarding the direction of relationships among social media addiction, perceived social support, self-control, and FoMO. Although the structural model specifies theoretically plausible directional pathways, alternative or reciprocal relationships are also possible. The use of convenience sampling from adolescents in Qom may further limit the generalizability of the findings to adolescents from other cities, cultural settings, socioeconomic groups, or educational contexts. In addition, all variables were assessed using self-report questionnaires, making the findings potentially vulnerable to social desirability, response bias, recall errors, and common-method variance. The study also did not directly assess potentially influential variables such as daily social media use, specific platform use, socioeconomic status, family structure, parental monitoring, psychological distress, loneliness, attachment style, self-esteem, or social comparison. Finally, the sample contained a greater proportion of girls than boys, which may have influenced the observed relationships and limits conclusions regarding possible gender differences.

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Future studies are recommended to examine the proposed model using longitudinal and prospective designs in order to clarify the temporal sequence among social media addiction, self-control, perceived social support, and FoMO. Experimental and intervention-based studies could also determine whether improving self-control or reducing problematic social media engagement produces measurable reductions in FoMO. Future research should recruit more diverse and representative samples from different geographical regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural contexts and should examine whether the structural model is invariant across gender, age groups, educational levels, and patterns of social media use. It would also be useful to incorporate objective indicators of digital behavior, such as screen time, frequency of platform checking, notification exposure, and application usage logs, alongside self-report measures. Additional psychological variables, including loneliness, anxiety, depression, attachment, self-esteem, social comparison, impulsivity, emotion regulation, mindfulness, and parental monitoring, could be incorporated into expanded models to explain additional variance in FoMO and self-control. Latent growth modeling and cross-lagged panel models may be especially useful for identifying reciprocal relationships and developmental changes over time.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that prevention programs for adolescent FoMO should not focus exclusively on reducing time spent on social media. Interventions may be more effective when they simultaneously target self-control, healthy digital habits, perceived social support, and awareness of compulsive online behavior. School counselors and psychologists can provide training in impulse control, delayed gratification, attentional regulation, time management, management of notifications, and intentional periods of digital disconnection. Family-based interventions may help parents create supportive communication patterns and establish reasonable, collaborative rules for technology use without relying solely on restrictive monitoring. Schools can also strengthen peer-support systems, social connectedness, and opportunities for meaningful face-to-face interaction so that adolescents do not depend excessively on online environments for belonging and validation. Psychoeducational programs should help adolescents recognize the selective and idealized nature of social media content, identify triggers for compulsive checking, and develop alternative coping strategies for feelings of exclusion or uncertainty. Because the present findings indicate that both social support and self-control are relevant to FoMO, multicomponent interventions addressing both interpersonal and self-regulatory processes are likely to be more useful than single-component approaches.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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