

# Exploring The Relationship Between Parental Control, Fear Of Missing Out And Perceived Autonomy Among Female Students

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## **Abstract**

The psychological significance of parental supervision, fear of missing out (FoMO), and perceived autonomy has increased due to the growing integration of digital technology in students' lives, especially among female students in collectivistic societies. During the crucial developmental phases of adolescence and early adulthood, identity formation, the search for autonomy, and social connection become important. Due to safety concerns, gendered expectations, and traditional family values, girls frequently suffer increased parental surveillance in many cultural situations, particularly in India. Even though this kind of management is often assumed as protective, it may inadvertently limit young women's autonomy and raise their level of FoMO as they rely on digital platforms to remain socially engaged. This conceptual paper examines the interconnected influence of parental control, FoMO, and perceived autonomy among female students. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, Parental Control Theory, and FoMO Theory, the paper argues that restrictive and psychologically controlling parenting practices undermine autonomy and belonging needs. Consequently, female students may experience increased FoMO, greater emotional dependence on online interactions, and reduced autonomy across academic, social, and personal domains. Although prior research has examined parenting and FoMO independently, little attention has been given to how these constructs jointly shape perceived autonomy within India's sociocultural landscape. The proposed conceptual model suggests that parental control indirectly influences perceived autonomy through the mediating role of FoMO, with gendered norms and collectivistic cultural expectations serving as potential moderators. This paper contributes to theoretical understanding and highlights implications for parents, educators, and mental health professionals in promoting healthy autonomy while preserving family cohesion.

**Keywords:** Parental Control, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Perceived Autonomy, Female Students, Self-Determination Theory, Social media.

## Introduction

The everyday lives of young people, particularly female students traversing adolescence and early adulthood, have been profoundly altered by the quick integration of smartphones, social media, and digital communication (Elsayed, 2025; Darekar, 2025). Increased independence, growing academic responsibilities, and heightened sensitivity to peer connections are characteristics of this developmental stage (Przybylski et al., 2013a). Family dynamics, especially the degree of parental control, are crucial in determining psychological outcomes during these shifts (Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences, n.d.; Chadda & Deb, 2013). Due to cultural expectations, safety concerns, and gender-specific norms, parents in many collectivistic societies like India tend to exercise more control, supervision, and decision-making authority over their daughters (Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences, n.d.; Rematch.in, 2025). Parental control may inadvertently affect young women's emotional growth, social involvement, and sense of autonomy, even if it is frequently driven by concern and protection (Soenens et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024). At the same time, peer visibility and regular interaction have become vital components of student life due to the growth of social media platforms. Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), the ongoing worry that others are enjoying fulfilling moments without one's participation, is becoming increasingly common in this environment (Gupta & Sharma, 2021; Przybylski et al., 2013a). FoMO can exacerbate social comparison, promote obsessive online behaviours, and raise emotional reliance on digital interactions (International Journal of Indian Psychology, 2025; Thomas, 2025). FoMO may be particularly noticeable for female students who already experience restrictive parental supervision as they try to balance peer-driven internet participation with family expectations (Thomas, 2025; Darekar, 2025). In addition, a crucial psychological requirement during adolescence and the early stages of adulthood is perceived autonomy, which is described as the subjective sensation of independence, self-governance, and control over personal decisions (Soenens et al., 2021; Fousiani et al., 2014). Self-Determination Theory holds that identity formation, motivation, and well-being all depend on autonomy (Liu et al., 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Excessive parental control, however, can result in less autonomy, which may force students to resort to the internet for approval and a sense of belonging, thereby exacerbating FoMO (Elsayed, 2025; Przybylski et al., 2013b). Because decreased autonomy is linked to lower academic motivation, increased stress, and decreased psychological well-being, it is critical to comprehend this triadic relationship (Soenens et al., 2021; International Journal of Indian Psychology, 2025). There is no study on the specific interactions between parental style, autonomy, and FoMO among female students, even though the literature currently in publication examines the independent effects of these categories (International Journal of Indian Psychology, 2025; Thomas, 2025). In collectivistic situations, the majority of research overlooks the sociocultural subtleties of gendered norms, digital behaviour, and family dynamics (Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences, n.d.; Chadda & Deb, 2013). A conceptual understanding that incorporates these elements into a coherent framework is therefore urgently needed (Parenting Narratives in Indian Context, 2025). This conceptual paper aims to investigate the relationships among female students' perceived autonomy, parental control, and FoMO. The paper presents a conceptual model that may guide future empirical studies and inspire useful interventions for parents, educators, and mental health practitioners by synthesising theoretical perspectives and identifying gaps in current research (Elsayed, 2025; Soenens et al., 2021).

## Background and Need for the Concept

Biological, emotional, cognitive, and social changes occur rapidly during adolescence and early adulthood, with autonomy, making independent decisions and managing one's own life being a critical developmental task. In collectivistic cultures like India, family expectations emphasise obedience and dependency, often leading to more pronounced parental control, especially over female students who experience increased protective supervision and less mobility. While parental control aims for safety and moral guidance, excessive psychological control (e.g., emotional manipulation, guilt induction) and restrictive behavioural control can undermine autonomy development, particularly affecting female students navigating academic and social demands (Shah et al., 2022).

The digital environment plays a significant role parallel to these family dynamics, offering young people constant social comparison and access to peers' activities through social media. This exposure heightens the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), a psychological state linked to anxiety about missing rewarding social experiences. For female students facing restrictive parental control, FoMO can exacerbate feelings of social alienation and increase their drive to remain active online. Perceived autonomy acts as a crucial mediator, where limited offline autonomy leads students to seek voice, connection, and independence on digital platforms. However, such compensatory use can foster compulsive digital dependence, further diminishing real-world autonomy (Shah et al., 2022; Song et al., 2025).

Despite increased attention to autonomy, parenting styles, and FoMO, research is limited concerning their intersections in female students within collectivistic cultures. Cultural norms shape gendered parental control, yet the combined effect of parental oversight and FoMO on autonomy remains underexplored. Addressing this gap, an integrated conceptual exploration focusing on female students helps in understanding these dynamics, promoting culturally sensitive interventions and guiding future research to support healthy autonomy development within familial and digital contexts (Song et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024).

## **Review of Literature**

Understanding the relationship between parental control, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and perceived autonomy among female students requires examining the theoretical foundations and empirical evidence that connect these constructs.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the three basic psychological needs essential for intrinsic motivation and well-being. Autonomy is defined as the experience of volition and psychological freedom, facilitating internalisation and self-regulation processes (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Supporting autonomy leads to better mental health and motivation, while thwarting it diminishes well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Parental psychological control, characterised by intrusive behaviours such as guilt induction or withdrawal of love, restricts adolescent autonomy and contributes to maladaptive emotional outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and problem behaviours (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010; Cui, 2014). This control undermines adolescents' ability to function independently and fosters controlled rather than autonomous regulation (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010; Cui, 2014).

Research shows that autonomy-restricting parenting behaviours during early adolescence have stronger predictive effects on dependency and reduced functional independence in emerging adulthood than similar

behaviours in late adolescence (Soenens et al., 2022). Developmentally appropriate autonomy support promotes better adolescent outcomes (Soenens et al., 2022).

Parental autonomy support is positively associated with academic autonomous motivation, mediated by reciprocal filial piety in certain cultural contexts. Psychological control, inversely, shows significant negative impacts on motivation and well-being (Zhang et al., 2021). Thus, parenting style fundamentally influences adolescents' self-determination and motivation.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) reflects an unmet need for relatedness, leading adolescents to excessive social media use as a compensatory behaviour to maintain social connection and approval (Przybylski et al., 2013; Elhai et al., 2020). This over-engagement can increase anxiety and stress, potentially undermining autonomy and competence (Wang et al., 2025).

Studies indicate that social media use both supports and thwarts adolescents' basic psychological needs. While it can facilitate relatedness and autonomy through self-expression and social interaction, excessive or problematic use driven by FoMO or controlling influences can frustrate these needs, increasing risks of addiction and emotional distress (West, 2024).

Parental mediation of adolescents' media use that supports autonomy (e.g., through open communication) leads to better digital wellbeing outcomes compared to controlling mediation strategies such as punishment or withdrawal of access, which are linked to perceived controlling parenting and autonomy restriction (Wang et al., 2022).

Recent research highlights the complexity of FoMO's impact, with findings suggesting it may sometimes motivate engagement or learning but also exacerbate anxiety and problematic social media use. Effective coping and self-regulation may moderate these outcomes (Kong et al., 2024; Ascenzi, 2021).

### **Conceptual Development / Argument**

Adolescence and emerging adulthood are marked by a heightened striving for autonomy, defined as the experience of volition, psychological freedom, and self-endorsed action. Within Self-Determination Theory (SDT), autonomy is a basic psychological need whose frustration undermines well-being and adaptive self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In collectivistic contexts such as India, where familial obligations, gendered expectations, and social norm adherence are strongly emphasized, the path to autonomy for female students is especially complex, as they must negotiate cultural prescriptions of obedience alongside growing personal aspirations and exposure to globalized digital cultures (Parihar & Verma, 2025).

SDT distinguishes between autonomy-supportive parenting, which provides choice, rationale, and acknowledgement of the child's perspective, and psychologically controlling parenting, which uses guilt, love withdrawal, and intrusive monitoring to coerce compliance (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Empirical work shows that parental autonomy-restricting behaviours predict higher internalizing problems, lower academic motivation, and reduced functional independence across adolescence (Shah et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). In many Indian families, especially for daughters, heightened protection, mobility restrictions, and more intensive supervision are common, often justified in terms of safety and honour, yet these practices can inadvertently constrain opportunities for independent decision-making and

self-directed exploration (Parihar & Verma, 2025). Conceptually, such patterns can be understood as chronic thwarting of the autonomy need, pushing female students toward controlled forms of regulation.

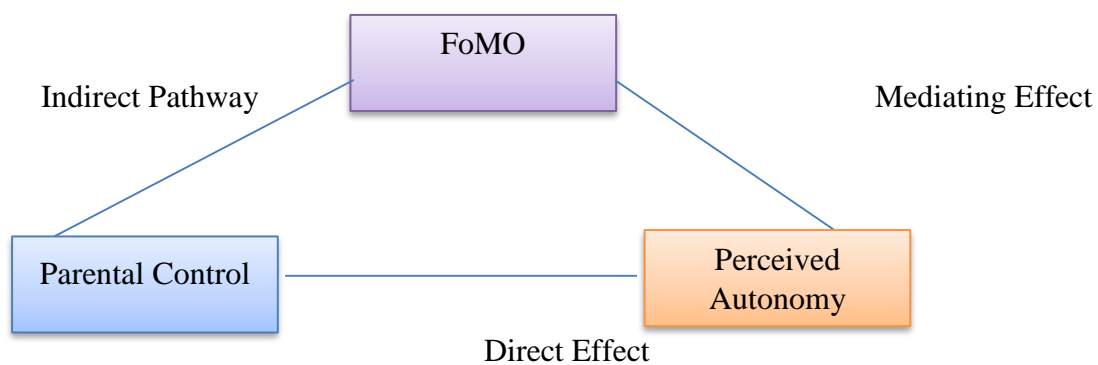
Parallel to these family dynamics, the digital environment offers an alternative arena where young people can observe, compare, and perform different versions of themselves. Social media platforms provide immediate access to peers' activities and achievements, fostering upward comparison and the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), defined as apprehension about missing rewarding social experiences (Przybylski et al., 2013; Stead & Bibby, 2021). From an SDT perspective, FoMO reflects frustrated relatedness and autonomy needs, and has been linked to greater social media engagement, problematic use, and emotional distress (Elhai et al., 2020; Groenestein et al., 2025). For female students experiencing restrictive parental control and limited offline freedom, social media may function as a compensatory autonomy space a domain where they can explore identities, build peer connections, and exercise perceived choice that is less available in their physical environment (Song et al., 2025). This suggests a pathway whereby constrained offline autonomy intensifies the subjective value of online participation, thereby heightening FoMO when access or inclusion is threatened.

Perceived autonomy thus emerges as a central mediator linking parenting, FoMO, and digital behaviour. When parental practices are autonomy-supportive, adolescents report higher need satisfaction, greater self-regulation, and less vulnerability to externally driven motives such as FoMO-based engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wang et al., 2024). Conversely, psychological control and restrictive behavioural control may reduce perceived autonomy, prompting female students to seek alternative channels of agency and connection online. In turn, FoMO-driven, compensatory social media use can become increasingly compulsive, reinforcing a reliance on external validation and further weakening self-directed decision-making in offline life (Groenestein et al., 2025; Elhai et al., 2020). Conceptually, this points to a bidirectional process: parental control limits offline autonomy, which amplifies FoMO and digital dependence, and these digital patterns reciprocally erode the development of robust, internalised autonomy.

A culturally grounded conceptual model for female students in India must account for these intersecting forces. First, it must differentiate between psychological and behavioural control, recognising that both may have distinct implications for perceived autonomy and FoMO. Second, it must position perceived autonomy as a psychological bridge between family context and digital engagement, rather than treating FoMO as only a technology-driven phenomenon. Third, it must foreground gendered cultural scripts that intensify parental control for daughters, making them especially likely to turn to online settings as spaces of constrained autonomy and conditional belonging (Parihar & Verma, 2025; Shah et al., 2022). This paper, therefore, argues that, among female students in collectivistic societies, high parental control will be associated with lower perceived autonomy and higher FoMO, and that social media functions both as a compensatory arena for need satisfaction and as a context that can entrench controlled forms of motivation. Such a framework integrates SDT, parenting research, and FoMO scholarship into a coherent, culturally sensitive argument that can guide future empirical testing and intervention design.

## Proposed Conceptual Model

Parental Control → FoMO → Perceived Autonomy



- Moderators:
- Gender norms
- Cultural expectations
- Digital exposure
- Family communication patterns
- Mediators:
- FoMO
- Social comparison
- Emotional dependency

## Implications

### Academic Implications

Understanding the interplay between parental control, FoMO, and perceived autonomy offers valuable insights for academic research on adolescent and young-adult development. Integrating these constructs expands existing theories such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) by demonstrating how offline family dynamics shape online emotional vulnerabilities. The conceptual model proposed in this paper can guide researchers in examining gender-specific pathways of autonomy development within collectivistic contexts, where parental regulation is both culturally embedded and psychologically influential. Moreover, it highlights the need to study FoMO



not merely as a digital behaviour but as a consequence of unmet autonomy needs and restrictive parenting environments.

### **Practical Implications**

The insights derived from this conceptual framework can support parents, educators, counsellors, and mental-health practitioners in designing interventions that promote healthier autonomy, communication, and digital engagement among female students. Parents can benefit from understanding the difference between behavioural control and psychological control, learning to set appropriate boundaries without undermining autonomy. Schools and universities may integrate psychoeducational modules on digital well-being and FoMO management, helping students recognise the triggers of online comparison and compulsive platform use. Mental health practitioners can use this framework to address autonomy-related distress, helping young women develop assertive communication skills and balanced online–offline identities.

Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of gender-sensitive approaches in counselling and parental guidance. Given that cultural norms often constrain the autonomy of young women more than men, family-based interventions should include discussions on gender expectations, safety concerns, and evolving digital identities (Kumar & Lal, 2017). Supporting healthy autonomy development may reduce students' reliance on online validation, thus lowering FoMO and improving emotional resilience.

### **Future Research Relevance**

This conceptual model opens several avenues for future research. Empirical studies are needed to examine causal pathways between parental control, FoMO, and autonomy using longitudinal and cross-cultural designs. Researchers may also explore moderating variables such as attachment style, cultural values, self-esteem, and digital literacy. The unique experiences of female students particularly within collectivistic societies warrant deeper investigation to understand how gender norms amplify or buffer these psychological processes. Future research can also test intervention models that target autonomy enhancement and FoMO reduction, assessing their impact on academic outcomes, well-being, and digital behaviour.

Furthermore, qualitative studies can provide rich insights into how young women negotiate autonomy within family structures while simultaneously managing digital pressures. Understanding these lived experiences may contribute to more culturally informed and gender-responsive frameworks.

### **Conclusion**

The relationship between parental control, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and perceived autonomy is increasingly significant in the lives of female students, particularly within collectivistic cultural settings where gender norms shape developmental experiences. This conceptual paper highlights how parental control especially psychological control can restrict autonomy, leading young women to rely more heavily on online platforms for social connection, validation, and identity exploration. In such situations, FoMO becomes not merely a digital phenomenon but a psychological response rooted in unmet needs for autonomy and social belonging.

By integrating developmental, motivational, and digital-behaviour perspectives, this paper proposes a framework that positions FoMO as a mediator linking parental control and reduced autonomy. The review also underscores the cultural and gendered contexts that intensify these interactions, making female students particularly vulnerable to emotional pressure, online comparison, and compromised autonomy development.

The implications of this framework extend to academic research, educational settings, family systems, and mental health practices. Recognising the interconnectedness of these variables can guide culturally sensitive interventions that promote healthier autonomy, balanced digital engagement, and supportive parenting strategies. Ultimately, understanding these dynamics is essential for fostering emotional well-being, academic resilience, and positive identity formation among young women navigating the complexities of modern digital life.

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