

FROM FEAR OF MISSING OUT TO FEAR OF MISSING GOOD: A QUR'ANIC REORIENTATION OF SOCIAL COMPARISSON IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract: *The rapid expansion of social media has intensified Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), a psychological condition characterized by apprehension that others are experiencing rewarding activities from which one is absent. Although contemporary FOMO research has extensively examined its psychological determinants and behavioral consequences, its underlying value orientation and ethical dimensions remain comparatively underexplored, particularly from an Islamic perspective. This study aims to examine how Qur'anic discourse on social comparison, desire, worldly attraction, and competition can provide an ethical reorientation of FOMO in the digital age. Employing a qualitative conceptual design and tafsir mawdū'i (thematic Qur'anic interpretation), the study analyzes selected Qur'anic verses, including Q.S. al-Nisā' (4):32, Ṭāhā (20):131, al-Qaṣaṣ (28):79–80, al-Takāthur (102):1–2, al-Baqarah (2):148, and Āli 'Imrān (3):133, in dialogue with contemporary FOMO theory. The findings indicate that the Qur'an addresses the mechanisms underlying FOMO through four ethical processes: regulating the gaze, regulating desire, reconstructing the meaning of success, and redirecting competition toward goodness. Based on this synthesis, the study proposes Fear of Missing Good (FOMG) as a conceptual reconstruction of Qur'anic moral urgency. Unlike FOMO, which is primarily oriented toward social comparison, external validation, and fear of exclusion, FOMG redirects human attention toward opportunities for goodness, forgiveness, moral growth, and spiritual flourishing. The study contributes a Qur'anically grounded ethical framework for understanding digital desire and suggests that Islamic ethics can complement psychological approaches to FOMO by addressing not only behavioral regulation but also the underlying construction of value and aspiration.*

Keywords: *Fear of Missing Out; Fear of Missing Good; Social Comparison; Digital Well-being; Islamic Psychology.*

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital media has fundamentally transformed the ways individuals perceive themselves, relate to others, and evaluate their own lives. Social media platforms provide unprecedented opportunities for communication, self-expression, information exchange, and participation in diverse social experiences.¹ At the same time, these platforms continuously expose users to carefully selected representations of other people's activities, achievements, possessions, relationships, and lifestyles. Such exposure may create a persistent awareness that others are participating in rewarding experiences from which one is absent.² This phenomenon is commonly conceptualized as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), defined as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, accompanied by a desire to remain continually connected with what others are doing.³ FOMO has therefore become an important psychological phenomenon for understanding digital behavior, particularly because social media intensifies opportunities for comparison, monitoring, and perceived social exclusion.

The theoretical development of FOMO is closely associated with the Self-Determination Theory framework, particularly the psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Przybylski et al. conceptualized FOMO as a dispositional tendency characterized by a desire for ongoing awareness of what others are experiencing and a concern that one may be excluded from rewarding social experiences.⁴ Subsequent studies have demonstrated its association with problematic social media engagement, anxiety, reduced well-being, compulsive checking behaviors, and difficulties in regulating digital consumption.⁵ In this context, FOMO is not merely a fear of being absent from a particular event. Rather, it represents a broader psychological orientation in which individuals continually evaluate their own circumstances against the perceived experiences and achievements of others.

¹ Arjun K.C., 'Exploring Identity in the Digital Age : Social Media on Self-Perception and Interpersonal Relationships', *Contemporary Social Sciences*, 33.3 (2024), 98–108.

² Ellen Groenestein and others, 'The Relationship between Fear of Missing out, Digital Technology Use, and Psychological Well-Being: A Scoping Review of Conceptual and Empirical Issues', *PLOS ONE*, 19.10 (2024), 1–29.

³ Mayank Gupta and Aditya Sharma, 'Fear of Missing out: A Brief Overview of Origin, Theoretical Underpinnings and Relationship with Mental Health', *World Journal of Clinical Cases*, 9 (2021), 4881–89.

⁴ Andrew Przybylski and others, 'Motivational, Emotional, and Behavioral Correlates of Fear of Missing Out', *Comput. Hum. Behav.*, 29 (2013), 1841–48.

⁵ J Elhai, Haibo Yang, and C Montag, 'Fear of Missing out (FOMO): Overview, Theoretical Underpinnings, and Literature Review on Relations with Severity of Negative Affectivity and Problematic Technology Use', *Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry*, 43 (2020), 203–9.

The digital environment amplifies this tendency because social media makes the activities of others visible, immediate, quantifiable, and seemingly continuous.⁶

One of the central mechanisms underlying FOMO is therefore social comparison. Individuals do not experience FOMO in isolation; rather, the perception that something is being missed often emerges through observing what others possess, experience, or accomplish. The comparison may involve material wealth, social recognition, physical appearance, professional success, travel, relationships, religious activities, or other markers of a desirable life. In digital environments, the repeated exposure to such representations can produce an asymmetry between one's ordinary lived experience and the selectively presented experiences of others.⁷ Consequently, individuals may interpret the lives of others as more successful, enjoyable, meaningful, or complete than their own. The psychological sequence can be represented as: exposure to others' experiences → social comparison → perception of personal deficiency → fear of exclusion or deprivation → desire to participate or acquire → continued digital engagement. FOMO thus represents not only an emotional condition but also a particular mode of relating to the social world.

This phenomenon raises an important ethical question from an Islamic perspective: What should be the proper orientation of human desire when confronted with the blessings, experiences, and achievements of others? The Qur'an does not employ the modern term FOMO, nor does it formulate a psychological theory of FOMO in the contemporary sense. Nevertheless, it addresses several dimensions that constitute the phenomenon, including comparison with others, desire for what others possess, preoccupation with worldly abundance, competition for status, and the regulation of human desire.⁸ The Qur'anic discourse is particularly relevant because it does not simply condemn desire or social comparison. Instead, it seeks to reorient the object, direction, and ethical basis of human desire. This provides an important foundation for moving beyond a purely descriptive understanding of FOMO toward a normative framework capable of addressing its underlying psychological and moral dynamics.

Several Qur'anic passages illustrate this relevance. Qur'an 4:32 cautions believers against desiring the particular advantages that Allah has granted to

⁶ Aarif Alutaybi and others, 'Combating Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) on Social Media: The FoMO-R Method', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17.17 (2020), 1–18.

⁷ Mohammed Kaddouhah, 'An Economic Definition of "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO)', *Finance Research Letters*, 63 (2024), 10–23.

⁸ Rebecca Rowson, 'Fear of Missing Out', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 112.1 (2025), 38–50.

some people over others and directs them instead toward seeking Allah's bounty. This verse provides a significant normative response to comparison-based dissatisfaction because it recognizes individual differences while discouraging the transformation of comparison into covetous desire. Similarly, Qur'an 20:131 instructs believers not to fix their gaze upon the worldly pleasures granted to certain groups, emphasizing that the provision of God is better and more enduring. The narrative of Qārūn in Qur'an 28:79 is even more illustrative: when people saw Qārūn's extraordinary wealth, some expressed the wish to possess what he had been given, perceiving him as extraordinarily fortunate. The passage captures a psychological movement from observation of another's privilege to upward comparison and desire for equivalent possession. Meanwhile, Sūrat al-Takāthur (102:1–2) portrays the dynamics of competitive accumulation and status-seeking as a form of distraction that can dominate human consciousness.

These passages suggest that the Qur'an offers a distinctive perspective on the psychological dynamics underlying FOMO. Whereas contemporary FOMO is often organized around the question, "*What am I missing because others are experiencing or possessing something that I do not?*",⁹ the Qur'anic framework redirects the question toward a different axis: "*What is genuinely valuable, and what should I fear missing?*" This distinction is theoretically significant. The first orientation is governed primarily by social comparison, external validation, and perceived social participation; the second is governed by divine values, moral purpose, and ultimate human flourishing. The Qur'an therefore provides not merely a prohibition against envy or excessive comparison but a potential reorientation of desire.

Such reorientation becomes particularly evident when the Qur'an employs the language of haste and competition in relation to goodness. Believers are commanded to "race toward good deeds" (Qur'an 2:148) and to "hasten toward forgiveness from your Lord" (Qur'an 3:133). At first glance, these commands may appear structurally similar to the competitive urgency associated with FOMO. Yet their object is fundamentally different. FOMO directs urgency toward maintaining social inclusion, acquiring experiences, or avoiding the perception of being left behind.¹⁰ Qur'anic urgency directs human energy toward khayr, divine forgiveness, righteousness, and enduring forms of well-being. This distinction opens the possibility of conceptualizing a positive counterpart to FOMO: rather than fearing that one is missing out on what other people possess, individuals may develop a "Fear of Missing Good"—a

⁹ Benjamin Riordan and others, 'The Development of a Single Item FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) Scale', *Current Psychology*, 2020, 1–6.

¹⁰ M Milyavskaya and others, 'Fear of Missing out: Prevalence, Dynamics, and Consequences of Experiencing FOMO', *Motivation and Emotion*, 42 (2018), 725–37.

heightened awareness that opportunities for goodness, moral growth, service, forgiveness, and spiritual transformation should not be neglected.

The concept of *Fear of Missing Good* proposed in this article should not be understood as a direct psychological equivalent of FOMO or as a claim that the Qur'an explicitly formulates such a construct. Rather, it is introduced as a conceptual and normative reconstruction derived from the Qur'anic reorientation of desire. Its purpose is to distinguish between two fundamentally different forms of urgency. The first is socially generated urgency, in which individuals fear exclusion from experiences perceived as valuable because others are participating in them. The second is ethically and spiritually oriented urgency, in which individuals recognize the value of opportunities for good and seek to avoid missing them. The difference is therefore not simply between negative and positive emotions, but between two epistemologies of value: one derives value primarily from the observed behavior and possessions of others, while the other derives value from a transcendent moral framework.

This distinction addresses an important gap in existing discussions of FOMO. Much of the literature has focused on its psychological antecedents, behavioral consequences, relationships with social media use, and implications for individual well-being.¹¹ While these approaches are important, they generally examine FOMO within psychological and behavioral frameworks without sufficiently addressing the ethical construction of desire that determines why certain experiences become objects of fear, comparison, and pursuit. From an Islamic perspective, the problem is not simply excessive digital engagement. More fundamentally, it concerns the formation of a value system in which the visibility of other people's lives determines what an individual considers desirable, necessary, or worthy of pursuit. A Qur'anic approach can therefore contribute to the discussion by introducing a normative dimension that places desire within the broader framework of human purpose, accountability, gratitude, moderation, and spiritual flourishing.

¹¹ Jacqueline Rifkin, Cindy Chan, and Barbara Kahn, 'Anxiety about the Social Consequences of Missed Group Experiences Intensifies Fear of Missing out (FOMO).', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 18.2 (2024), 300–313; Anushree Tandon and others, 'Fear of Missing out (FoMO) among Social Media Users: A Systematic Literature Review, Synthesis and Framework for Future Research', *Internet Res.*, 31 (2021), 782–821; Amna Alabri, 'Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): The Effects of the Need to Belong, Perceived Centrality, and Fear of Social Exclusion', *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2022, 1–12; Dmitri Rozgonjuk and others, 'Individual Differences in Fear of Missing Out (FoMO): Age, Gender, and the Big Five Personality Trait Domains, Facets, and Items', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 17.1 (2021), 1–24.

Accordingly, this article seeks to answer two interrelated questions: (1) How can the Qur'anic discourse on social comparison, worldly desire, and competitive accumulation illuminate the underlying dynamics of contemporary FOMO? and (2) How can these Qur'anic principles be reconstructed into an alternative ethical orientation from "Fear of Missing Out" toward "Fear of Missing Good" in the digital age? To address these questions, the article employs a thematic Qur'anic analysis (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) by examining relevant verses concerning comparison, desire, worldly attraction, competition, and the pursuit of good. The analysis is situated in dialogue with contemporary FOMO theory, particularly the psychological construct developed within Self-Determination Theory. Rather than attempting to equate Qur'anic concepts with modern psychological constructs, the study places them in a critical dialogue in order to identify convergences, differences, and possibilities for conceptual reconstruction.

The article argues that the Qur'an provides a reorientational ethics of desire that can respond to the social-comparison mechanism underlying FOMO. This ethics does not require the elimination of human desire or social awareness. Instead, it transforms the basis of comparison, the object of desire, and the direction of human urgency: from comparison with others toward self-accountability, from worldly possession toward divine bounty, from competitive accumulation toward competition in goodness, and from fear of social exclusion toward concern for missed moral and spiritual opportunities. In this sense, the movement "from Fear of Missing Out to Fear of Missing Good" represents a conceptual shift from externally driven comparison to internally grounded ethical intentionality. Such a framework offers a potentially significant contribution to contemporary Islamic thought by positioning the Qur'an not merely as a source of moral prohibitions concerning digital behavior, but as a source of ethical resources for cultivating healthier forms of desire, comparison, and digital well-being.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, conceptual research design using a thematic Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), social comparison, and Qur'anic ethics of desire.¹² The study combines contemporary FOMO theory with a thematic analysis of relevant Qur'anic verses. FOMO theory, particularly the conceptualization developed by Przybylski et al., is used as the analytical framework for identifying its principal dimensions, including fear of

¹² A. H. Al-Farmawi, *Al-Bidāyah Fī Al-Tafsīr Al-Mawḍū'ī* (Cairo: Al-Hadharah al-'Arabiyyah, 1977).

exclusion, social comparison, desire for continuous awareness of others' experiences, and anxiety over missing rewarding experiences.

Qur'anic data were selected purposively based on their substantive relevance to these dimensions rather than on the occurrence of the term FOMO itself. Key verses concerning social comparison, desire for others' possessions, worldly attraction, competitive accumulation, and competition in goodness were examined, including Q.S. al-Nisā'/4:32, Tāhā/20:131, al-Qaṣaṣ/28:79–80, al-Takāthur/102:1–2, al-Baqarah/2:148, and Āli 'Imrān/3:133. The selected verses were analyzed through contextual reading, semantic examination of key concepts, and comparison with classical and contemporary Qur'anic commentaries.

The analysis proceeded in three stages: (1) conceptual mapping, identifying the psychological dimensions of FOMO; (2) thematic reconstruction, relating these dimensions to relevant Qur'anic concepts of comparison, desire, competition, and goodness; and (3) ethical synthesis, reconstructing the Qur'anic principles into an alternative orientation termed Fear of Missing Good (FOMG). The study does not claim that FOMO is an explicit Qur'anic concept; rather, it uses contemporary FOMO theory as a dialogical lens to identify how Qur'anic ethics can critically reorient the mechanisms of comparison and desire in the digital age.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

FOMO as a Social-Comparison Mechanism

The analysis indicates that FOMO is fundamentally connected to the way individuals evaluate their own circumstances through the perceived experiences and achievements of others. In the digital age, social media intensifies this mechanism by making other people's activities continuously visible. Individuals are therefore exposed not only to what others possess but also to what they appear to experience, achieve, and enjoy.¹³ The resulting psychological process can be represented as visibility → comparison → perceived deficiency → anxiety → desire for participation.

This mechanism corresponds closely with the Qur'anic concern regarding excessive attention to what others have received. Q.S. al-Nisā' (4):32 states:

وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ ۚ لِلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا اكْتَسَبُوا وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا
اَكْتَسَبْنَ ۚ وَسَأَلُوا اللَّهَ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا

¹³ R Servidio and others, 'Social Comparison Orientation and Fear of Missing out as Mediators between Self-Concept Clarity and Problematic Smartphone Use.', *Addictive Behaviors*, 122 (2021), 107–14.

“Do not wish for what Allah has favored some of you over others.” The verse is significant because it does not merely prohibit envy; it addresses the psychological movement generated by observing differences among people. Human beings naturally encounter unequal distributions of wealth, status, ability, opportunity, and social recognition.¹⁴ The ethical problem emerges when observation develops into an excessive desire to possess what another person has.

From the perspective of FOMO theory, this verse can therefore be understood as providing an ethical intervention at the comparison stage. Rather than allowing social comparison to determine one's perception of personal worth, the Qur'an redirects the individual toward personal agency and divine provision: “For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned. And ask Allah of His bounty.” The verse thus shifts the locus of evaluation from comparison with others toward one's own effort and relationship with God.¹⁵

This finding suggests that the Qur'anic response to FOMO is not simply to discourage social media use or social awareness. Rather, it seeks to transform the meaning assigned to difference. Differences between individuals do not automatically signify personal deficiency. Consequently, the Qur'anic framework challenges one of the assumptions that can sustain FOMO: that another person's possession or experience necessarily represents something that the observer lacks and therefore must obtain.

Qārūn and the Psychology of Upward Social Comparison

The narrative of Qārūn provides an especially important Qur'anic illustration of the psychological mechanism underlying FOMO. Q.S. al-Qaṣaṣ (28):79 describes how Qārūn appeared before his people in great splendor, prompting some observers to say:

فَخَرَجَ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ فِي زِينَتِهِ قَالَ الَّذِينَ يُرِيدُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا لَيْلَتْ لَنَا مَثَلُ مَا أُوتِيَ قَارُونُ إِنَّهُ لَذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ

“Would that we had the like of what Qārūn has been given! Indeed, he is a possessor of great fortune.” The significance of this passage lies in the sequence between visual exposure and desire. The people did not initially express dissatisfaction with their own circumstances in isolation. Their desire emerged after witnessing Qārūn's extraordinary wealth. The perception of another

¹⁴ Zhechen Wang, J Jetten, and Niklas Steffens, ‘Restless in an Unequal World: Economic Inequality Fuels the Desire for Wealth and Status’, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 49 (2022), 871–90.

¹⁵ Abigail Batchelder and M Hagan, ‘The Clinical Relevance of a Socioecological Conceptualization of Self-Worth’, *Review of General Psychology*, 27 (2022), 62–79.

person's prosperity generated an upward comparison, which then produced the wish to possess an equivalent condition.

This dynamic is highly relevant to contemporary FOMO. Social media platforms can function as a digital environment analogous to the public display described in the Qārūn narrative. Users encounter representations of luxury, travel, professional achievement, physical appearance, social relationships, and consumption. Although the technological context is radically different, the underlying psychological mechanism may be similar: seeing another person's desirable condition can generate the perception that one's own condition is incomplete.¹⁶

The Qur'anic narrative, however, introduces an important corrective. Q.S. al-Qaṣaṣ (28):80 records the response of those endowed with knowledge:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ وَيَلَكُمْ ثَوَابُ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لِّمَن آمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَلَا يُلْقِيهَا إِلَّا الصَّابِرُونَ

“Woe to you! The reward of Allah is better for those who believe and do righteous deeds.” The narrative therefore moves from comparison and desire toward revaluation. What initially appears to constitute “great fortune” is challenged by a deeper conception of value. The Qur'an does not merely tell individuals not to desire Qārūn's wealth; it questions the assumption that wealth itself is the ultimate measure of success.

This provides a significant theoretical contribution to the understanding of FOMO. FOMO is sustained not only by the fear of missing an experience but also by an implicit hierarchy of value. Individuals must first believe that what others possess is desirable before they can fear missing it.¹⁷ The Qur'anic narrative intervenes at this deeper level by asking whether the object of comparison is genuinely valuable. Hence, a Qur'anic response to FOMO requires not only emotional regulation but also value reconstruction.

The Gaze toward Others and the Construction of Digital Desire

Q.S. Ṭāhā (20):131 provides another important dimension of the Qur'anic ethics of comparison:

وَلَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ زَهْرَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ وَرِزْقُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ

“Do not extend your eyes toward what We have given some groups among them to enjoy—the splendor of worldly life by which We test them.” The expression concerning extending one's gaze is particularly relevant to the contemporary

¹⁶ Felix Reer, Wai Yen Tang, and T Quandt, ‘Psychosocial Well-Being and Social Media Engagement: The Mediating Roles of Social Comparison Orientation and Fear of Missing Out’, *New Media & Society*, 21 (2019), 1486–1505.

¹⁷ Megan Good and M Hyman, “Fear of Missing out”: Antecedents and Influence on Purchase Likelihood’, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 28 (2020), 330–41.

digital environment. FOMO is reinforced through repeated observation. The more individuals monitor the lives of others, the greater the possibility that they will encounter experiences that appear desirable and conclude that they are missing something. Digital platforms make this process continuous because users can repeatedly inspect the lives of others through feeds, stories, short videos, and other forms of mediated visibility.¹⁸

The Qur'anic instruction therefore addresses not merely the object being observed but the orientation of the gaze. The problem is not that worldly blessings exist or that individuals become aware of them. Rather, excessive fixation upon them can transform attention into desire and desire into dissatisfaction. The verse concludes by emphasizing that God's provision is better and more enduring. The ethical movement is consequently from visual attraction → comparison → desire toward recognition of a more enduring source of value.

In this respect, the Qur'anic framework provides an important corrective to the architecture of digital attention. Contemporary platforms often encourage users to remain attentive to what others are doing. FOMO becomes a mechanism that sustains this attention: users continue checking their digital environments because they fear missing an important social experience.¹⁹ The Qur'anic ethic of the gaze offers an alternative orientation in which attention itself becomes morally significant. What individuals repeatedly look at, compare, and desire contributes to the formation of their inner orientation.

From Takāthur to Competitive FOMO

A further dimension of FOMO emerges through Q.S. al-Takāthur (102):1–2:

الْهَكُمُ الشَّكَائِرُ لَا حَتَّىٰ زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ ۚ

“Competition in worldly increase distracts you, until you visit the graves.” The concept of *takāthur* extends the phenomenon beyond individual comparison toward competitive social accumulation. Whereas FOMO begins with the fear of missing something others possess or experience, competitive FOMO may produce an active desire to catch up, keep pace, or surpass others. The individual is no longer merely observing; he or she becomes engaged in a continuous competition for status, possessions, experiences, and recognition.

¹⁸ Ceren Hayran, Lalin Anik, and Zeynep Gürhan-Canli, ‘A Threat to Loyalty: Fear of Missing out (FOMO) Leads to Reluctance to Repeat Current Experiences’, *PLoS ONE*, 15.4 (2020), 1–17.

¹⁹ Vittoria Franchina and others, ‘Fear of Missing Out as a Predictor of Problematic Social Media Use and Phubbing Behavior among Flemish Adolescents’, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15.10 (2018), 1–18.

This dynamic is particularly visible in digital culture, where social status can be quantified through followers, likes, views, comments, engagement, and other indicators. Such metrics can transform social comparison into a competitive process. The individual may feel compelled to produce, consume, travel, purchase, or display experiences not primarily because they are intrinsically meaningful, but because they are necessary to remain socially relevant.²⁰

The Qur'anic critique of *takāthur* is therefore relevant to what may be called competitive FOMO. The problem lies in allowing social competition to become the dominant organizing principle of life. The verse portrays this competition as *ilhā'*—something that distracts or diverts human beings from more fundamental purposes. From this perspective, FOMO becomes problematic when the fear of being left behind causes individuals to lose sight of what should actually be pursued.

From Fear of Missing Out to Fear of Missing Good

The most important finding of this study is that the Qur'an does not simply suppress the human tendency toward urgency and competition; instead, it reorients their object. This is evident in Q.S. al-Baqarah (2):148:

فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ

“Race toward good deeds.”

A similar orientation appears in Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3):133:

وَسَارِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ

“Race toward forgiveness from your Lord.”

these verses introduce an alternative form of urgency. The Qur'an recognizes that human beings can and should experience a sense of urgency concerning something valuable. However, the object of urgency is transformed. Instead of fearing that one is missing what others have, the individual is encouraged to avoid missing opportunities for *khayr*, forgiveness, righteousness, and spiritual growth.

This provides the conceptual foundation for Fear of Missing Good (FOMG). FOMG is proposed here as a normative construct in which awareness of valuable moral and spiritual opportunities generates positive urgency to participate in goodness. Unlike conventional FOMO, whose reference point is

²⁰ Astrid Rosenthal-Von Der Pütten and others, “‘Likes’ as Social Rewards: Their Role in Online Social Comparison and Decisions to like Other People’s Selfies”, *Comput. Hum. Behav.*, 92 (2019), 76–86.

primarily what others are doing, FOMG is oriented toward what is objectively good and ethically meaningful.²¹

The distinction can be summarized as follows:

Dimension	Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	Fear of Missing Good (FOMG)
Reference point	Other people's experiences	Divine and moral values
Primary stimulus	Social comparison	Ethical awareness
Object of desire	Status, experience, possession, inclusion	Goodness, forgiveness, virtue, service
Emotional orientation	Anxiety about being left behind	Positive urgency toward goodness
Social mechanism	Comparison and competition	Cooperation and moral competition
Digital consequence	Continuous checking and engagement	Intentional and selective engagement
Ultimate orientation	Social recognition	Spiritual and human flourishing

The conceptual shift is therefore not from “fear” to “no fear,” but from misdirected fear to ethically productive urgency. The Qur'an transforms the question from “*What am I missing compared with others?*” into “*What good opportunity might I be missing?*” This represents a fundamental transformation in the structure of desire.

A Qur'anic Reorientation of Social Comparison

The findings can be synthesized into a four-stage model of Qur'anic reorientation.

First, the Qur'an regulates the gaze. Q.S. Ṭāhā/20:131 warns against excessive fixation upon the worldly advantages of others. This provides an ethical response to the attention mechanism that sustains digital comparison.

Second, the Qur'an regulates desire. Q.S. al-Nisā'/4:32 discourages wishing for what has been granted to others and redirects individuals toward seeking God's bounty. Social comparison is therefore not allowed to become covetousness.

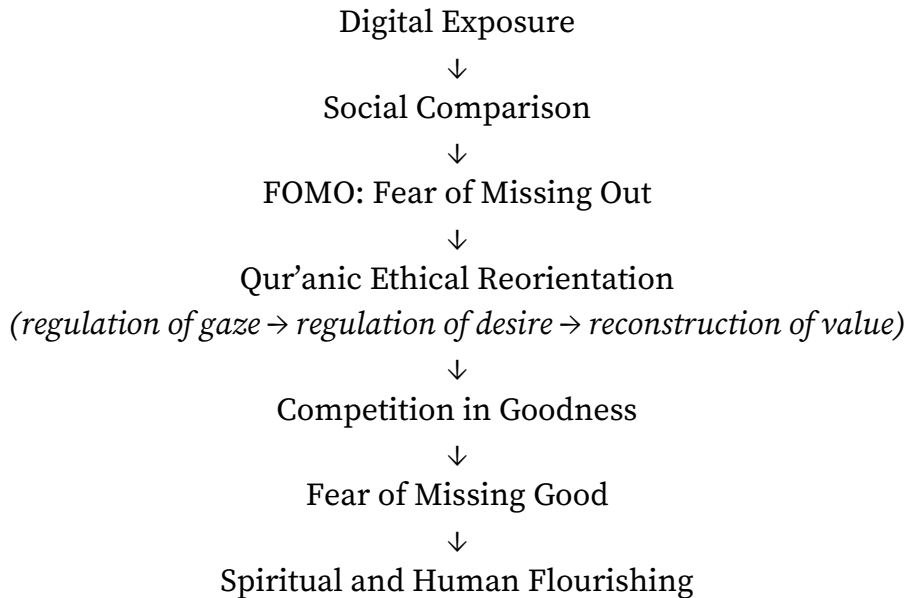
Third, the Qur'an reconstructs the meaning of success. The Qārūn narrative in Q.S. al-Qaṣaṣ/28:79–80 demonstrates that apparent worldly fortune

²¹ Teresa Turzo, ‘Corporate Social Responsibility and Spirituality: Emerging Paradigms and a Future Research Agenda’, *Journal of Sustainable Business*, 10.19 (2025), 1–16.

does not necessarily constitute genuine success. This challenges the value hierarchy underlying FOMO.

Fourth, the Qur'an redirects competition toward goodness. Q.S. al-Baqarah/2:148 and Āli 'Imrān/3:133 transform competitive urgency into *musābaqah fī al-khayrāt*—a race toward goodness and divine forgiveness.

The resulting framework can be represented as:



This model demonstrates that the Qur'anic response is transformative rather than merely prohibitive. It does not require individuals to withdraw completely from social comparison or digital environments. Instead, it develops a critical capacity to evaluate what deserves attention, desire, and pursuit.

Theoretical Implications for Digital Well-Being

The reconstructed framework has implications beyond the interpretation of individual verses. Contemporary discussions of digital well-being often focus on reducing screen time, limiting social media use, or improving self-regulation. These interventions are important but may remain incomplete if they do not address the value system that drives digital engagement. A person may reduce screen time temporarily while retaining the underlying desire for recognition, comparison, and social validation.²²

The Qur'anic framework suggests that sustainable digital well-being requires a transformation in the individual's relationship with desire. The central question is not simply "How much time do I spend online?", but "What

²² A Roffarello and Luigi De Russis, 'Achieving Digital Wellbeing Through Digital Self-Control Tools: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, 30 (2022), 1–66.

am I looking for when I am online?” and “Whose life determines what I consider valuable?” Such questions move the discussion from behavioral regulation toward ethical and existential reflection.

In this sense, the proposed concept of FOMG can complement psychological approaches to FOMO by introducing a normative dimension of value orientation.²³ FOMO theory explains why individuals fear being excluded from rewarding experiences; the Qur'anic framework asks whether those experiences should constitute the basis of human aspiration in the first place. This distinction allows Islamic ethics to contribute to contemporary discussions of digital well-being without reducing Qur'anic concepts to psychological variables.

Toward a Qur'anic Ethics of Digital Desire

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the Qur'an offers a coherent ethical response to the dynamics underlying FOMO. The response begins by regulating attention, continues through the regulation of comparison and desire, reconstructs the meaning of success, and culminates in redirecting human competition toward goodness. The Qur'anic framework therefore transforms the structure of social comparison rather than simply eliminating it.

The movement can be formulated as: “Do not measure yourself by what others possess”→ “Seek God’s bounty through your own effort”→ “Do not mistake worldly visibility for genuine success”→ “Compete in goodness rather than worldly accumulation.”

Accordingly, Fear of Missing Good should be understood as a conceptual reconstruction of Qur'anic moral urgency rather than a direct Qur'anic psychological construct. Its significance lies in providing an alternative answer to the central anxiety of the digital age. If FOMO asks whether one is missing what others are experiencing, FOMG asks whether one is missing opportunities to become better, to do good, to serve others, to seek forgiveness, and to cultivate a meaningful relationship with God.

The Qur'anic reorientation thus changes the direction of the gaze—from others to oneself, the object of desire—from possession to goodness, the basis of comparison—from social status to moral purpose, and the ultimate goal—from social inclusion to flourishing. In this respect, the Qur'an provides not merely a critique of excessive comparison but a positive ethical architecture for transforming digital anxiety into purposeful moral agency.

CONCLUSION

²³ Anushree Tandon and others, ‘Fear of Missing out (FoMO) among Social Media Users: A Systematic Literature Review, Synthesis and Framework for Future Research’, *Internet Res.*, 31 (2021), 782–821.

This study demonstrates that although the Qur'an does not explicitly formulate the contemporary psychological construct of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), its discourse provides substantial ethical resources for understanding and responding to the mechanisms underlying FOMO, particularly social comparison, excessive attention to others' possessions and experiences, covetous desire, and competitive accumulation. Through a thematic reading of Q.S. al-Nisā' (4):32, Ṭahā (20):131, al-Qaṣaṣ (28):79–80, al-Takāthur (102):1–2, al-Baqarah (2):148, and Āli 'Imrān (3):133, the study finds that the Qur'an addresses FOMO at a deeper level than behavioral regulation by questioning the values that make individuals perceive other people's experiences as objects that must be pursued.

The central contribution of this study is the proposed conceptual reorientation from Fear of Missing Out to Fear of Missing Good (FOMG). Whereas FOMO is primarily driven by social comparison and anxiety about being excluded from experiences perceived as rewarding, FOMG represents a Qur'anically informed orientation in which individuals develop a positive urgency toward opportunities for goodness, forgiveness, moral growth, and spiritual flourishing. The distinction is therefore not between fear and the absence of fear, but between two different objects and orientations of human desire: fear of missing what others have versus concern about missing what is genuinely good.

The Qur'anic framework reconstructed in this study operates through four interconnected processes: regulation of the gaze, regulation of desire, reconstruction of the meaning of success, and reorientation of competition toward goodness. This framework challenges the assumption that social visibility should determine personal value and offers an alternative ethical basis for navigating digital environments. Rather than eliminating social comparison altogether, the Qur'an redirects comparison from external status toward moral self-evaluation and transforms competition from *takāthur* into *musābaqah fī al-khayrāt*.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the emerging dialogue between Islamic studies, psychology, and digital well-being by demonstrating that Qur'anic ethics can provide a normative framework for interpreting contemporary psychological phenomena without reducing Qur'anic concepts to modern psychological categories. The concept of FOMG proposed here should therefore be regarded as a conceptual reconstruction, not as a claim that the Qur'an explicitly contains a psychological theory of FOMO. Future empirical research may operationalize this framework and examine whether Qur'anically grounded values such as gratitude, contentment, moderation, spiritual purpose, and competition in goodness can mediate or reduce maladaptive forms of FOMO among social media users.

Ultimately, the Qur'anic response to the anxiety of missing out is not withdrawal from the social world, but transformation of the object of aspiration. The fundamental question shifts from “*What am I missing because others have it?*” to “*What good am I at risk of missing?*” This reorientation offers a potentially constructive ethical paradigm for the digital age: from comparison to self-reflection, from envy to gratitude, from accumulation to goodness, and from the fear of being left behind by others to the aspiration not to be left behind in the pursuit of what is truly valuable.

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