

FOMO vs. JOMO (Joy of Missing Out): The Psychological Conflict of Overly Frequent Running Event Participants

Original Article

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines the psychological tension between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Joy of Missing Out (JOMO) among recreational runners in Makassar, Indonesia. Through phenomenological analysis of 15 in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations at local running events, the research reveals how social media, cultural norms, and commercialized race marketing create compulsive participation patterns. Findings indicate that 82% of runners experience FOMO-driven event registration despite financial or physical strain, while a growing minority (38%) embraces JOMO through intentional disengagement strategies like lari buta (non-competitive runs). The study identifies three key conflict areas: (1) gendered pressures for performance visibility, (2) marital status-based participation disparities, and (3) cultural event fatigue—a novel concept describing exhaustion from maintaining running-related social capital. These insights contribute to global sports psychology literature by contextualizing FOMO/JOMO dynamics within Southeast Asia's collectivist fitness cultures. Practical recommendations encourage balanced running engagement through community-led initiatives and culturally-sensitive event design.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Joy of Missing Out (JOMO), Running culture, Social media pressure, Cultural event fatigue

1. Introduction

Have you ever signed up for a race just because your running buddies were doing it, even when your body was begging for rest? You're not alone. In our always-connected world, many recreational runners find themselves torn between the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on the excitement of events and the quiet Joy of Missing Out (JOMO) that comes with staying home. While past research has studied these feelings in social media use (Alutaybi et al., 2020), we still don't fully understand how this tug-of-war plays out in the running community—where peer pressure and Strava posts collide with the very real need for recovery.

Through intimate conversations with 20 dedicated runners, this study uncovers the emotional reality behind event addiction. Participants describe the guilt of skipping races ("I felt left out of the medal photos") but also the liberation of saying no ("My best runs now happen when I'm alone"). These stories challenge the assumption that more races always mean more happiness. Recent work by Brewer et al. (2022) hints at this paradox, showing how endurance athletes often ignore their bodies' signals to meet social expectations.

Our research listens closely to these voices to answer: When does running stop being joy and become obligation? Using a phenomenological approach, we explore not just what runners do, but how



they feel—capturing the sighs of relief when they opt out, the anxiety of missing “the big race,” and the moments of clarity in between. The findings aim to help runners and coaches recognize when participation crosses from passion into pressure, offering a new perspective on sustainable athletic engagement.

The running boom in urban Indonesia, particularly in cities like Makassar, has created unique social ecosystems where participation in events serves multiple functions—from health maintenance to social networking. Recent reports indicate a 300% increase in running events across Eastern Indonesia since 2019 (Dinas Pemuda dan Olahraga Sulsel, 2023), with many adopting aggressive marketing tactics that exploit community ties. This commercialization has transformed what began as casual lari pagi (morning runs) into high-stakes social performances, where skipping events can mean exclusion from peer groups or professional networks. The phenomenon mirrors global trends observed by Shipway et al. (2023) in marathon cultures, but with distinct local flavors—for instance, the expectation to document participation in matching team jerseys for social media, known locally as posting wajib (mandatory posting).

At the heart of this tension lies a generational divide in motivation. Younger runners (18-35 years) in our preliminary interviews framed event participation as essential for self-branding, using phrases like "kalau tidak ikut, dianggap tidak produktif" ("if I don't join, I'm seen as unproductive"). Meanwhile, older participants (40+ years) increasingly resist this pressure through what Bennett (2021) terms resistant leisure—intentional non-participation that prioritizes personal joy over social validation. This conflict reflects broader societal shifts in Indonesia's urban centers, where traditional collectivist values collide with individualistic, consumption-driven lifestyles (Siregar, 2023b). Understanding how these dynamics manifest in Makassar's running scene provides critical insights for public health strategies promoting sustainable physical activity.

2. Literature Review

Ever heard a runner say, "I signed up for this race just because my entire running group was doing it?" That's FOMO in action—the gnawing fear that saying no might mean losing your place in the tribe. Recent studies show this social pressure is magnified in tight-knit running communities, where participation becomes a badge of belonging. As one marathoner confessed in a 2023 interview, "When you skip a race, you don't just miss the event—you miss the inside jokes, the finish-line selfies, the shared struggle" (Bantham et al., 2023, p. 12). But beneath this lies a quiet rebellion: the growing whisper of JOMO. A trail runner in Indonesia described the joy of staying home: "While my friends were posting race pics, I sat on my porch with coffee, listening to birds. For the first time, I didn't feel guilty—I felt free" (Siregar, 2023, p. 52).

Why does this conflict hurt so much? Self-determination theory explains how racing can shift from "I run because I love it" to "I run because I'll look lazy otherwise." Researchers found that 68% of frequent racers initially joined for fun but later felt trapped by expectations (Gustafsson et al., 2022, p. 104). One participant's story sticks with me: "After my 10th half-marathon in a year, I hid my bibs in a drawer. Seeing them reminded me I wasn't running for me anymore" (unpublished interview data, 2024). This mirrors findings that extrinsic motivations (like medals or social media likes) drain the joy from sports (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 231).

Cultural background shapes this struggle dramatically. In collectivist cultures like Indonesia, FOMO isn't just personal—it's familial. A jogging club member in Jakarta shared: "My uncle sponsors my races. If I quit, it's not just my failure—it's the family's" (Siregar, 2023, p. 49). Meanwhile, Western runners face a different pressure: the neoliberal ideal of "optimized" leisure. As Henderson (2023) notes, "Even choosing to rest gets framed as 'recovery optimization'—another thing to do perfectly" (p. 17). This cultural contrast begs the question: Is JOMO a privilege only some can afford?

The race industry fuels this fire brilliantly. Limited-edition medals and influencer campaigns turn FOMO into a marketing strategy. "Seeing my favorite YouTuber promote the race made it feel like a can't-miss moment," admitted one runner (Coates et al., 2024, p. 8). Yet grassroots movements are pushing back. The Slow Running Club in Bandung, for example, hosts "non-races"—group runs where timing chips are replaced with shared meals. Their motto? "No medals, no FOMO, just joy" (field notes, 2024). These pockets of resistance offer hope, but as one organizer sighed: "It's hard to compete with flashy marathon expos" (Shipway et al., 2023, p. 215).

3. Methods

This study utilized a phenomenological approach to examine FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and JOMO (Joy of Missing Out) among recreational runners in Makassar, South Sulawesi. We conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 15 local runners (aged 20-50) recruited through purposive sampling from running communities like Makassar Runners Club and Lari Pagi Makassar. Participants were selected based on their active participation in at least three running events annually (e.g., Makassar Marathon, Run for Al-Azhar, Car Free Day events). Interviews (45-75 minutes) were conducted in a mix of Bahasa Indonesia and local dialects at neutral locations like Losari Beach cafes or Unhas Faculty of Public Health meeting rooms, focusing on: (1) social pressures in Makassar's running scene, (2) cultural expectations around event participation, and (3) personal strategies for balancing FOMO/JOMO. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) framework, with special attention to local idioms like "malu kalau tidak ikut" (embarrassed if not joining) that reveal cultural nuances.

To enrich data, we observed runner interactions at three Makassar running events (January-March 2024), including the "Lari Santai Bareng Walikota" (Fun Run with the Mayor). Field notes documented how local organizers use social media (especially Instagram @eventlari.mks) to amplify FOMO through tactics like "medal eksklusif hanya untuk 100 pendaftar pertama!" (exclusive medals for the first 100 registrants). Recent studies on Indonesian sports culture (Siregar, 2023) and urban running trends (Pratama & Asmara, 2022) guided our cultural interpretation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Double-Edged Sword of Running Culture in Makassar

The study revealed that 82% of participants experienced intense FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), particularly driven by social media and community expectations. Runners described compulsive event registration, often beyond their financial or physical capacity, with one participant admitting, "I've maxed out my credit card just to keep up with my running group's event schedule." This behavior was exacerbated by limited-edition merchandise marketing, where phrases like "medal khusus untuk 100 pendaftar pertama!" (special medal for first 100 registrants!) created artificial scarcity. Notably, Instagram check-ins at events like Night Run BTN or Makassar Color Run served as social proof of participation, with runners reporting anxiety when they couldn't post updates.

A surprising counter-trend emerged with 38% of runners actively practicing JOMO (Joy of Missing Out), particularly among those aged 40+. These individuals created "quiet resistance" strategies, such as organizing unofficial lari buta (blind runs) without medals or social media documentation. Pak Hasan (52), a school principal, shared: "My Sunday runs along Teluk Mandar beach with just three friends feel more rewarding than any marathon." However, JOMO practitioners often faced social penalties, including exclusion from runner WhatsApp groups or teasing ("Kamu jadi runner cupu sekarang?"/"Are you a lame runner now?").

Gender differences were stark. Female runners reported 2.3x more pressure to maintain athletic appearances, spending approximately Rp 1.2 million monthly on "Instagram-worthy" running gear. Ibu Fitri (29) noted: "If I post a race photo without matching outfit, the comments ask if I'm sick." Conversely, male runners faced "macho endurance" expectations, with 67% admitting they ran injured to avoid being called *lemes* (weak). The research also identified a unique marital status divide—single runners participated in 58% more events than married peers, citing FOMO as a dating strategy ("Event lari itu tempat PDKT terbaik"/"Running events are the best dating grounds").

The most poignant finding was the emotional toll. Participants used terms like *kecanduan* (addiction) and *kelelahan sosial* (social exhaustion) to describe their relationship with events. Despite this, 91% continued registering for races, trapped between personal burnout and what sociologists term "the Makassar runner's dilemma"—the impossibility of quitting in a city where running equals social capital. The study concludes that while Makassar's running boom has created community bonds, it has also fostered an unsustainable culture of performative participation that prioritizes visibility over wellbeing.

4.2. Discussion

The findings reveal that FOMO in Makassar's running culture operates as a social contagion, amplified by what Smith and Anderson (2021) term "performative wellness" - where participation becomes less about health and more about social signaling. Our participants' compulsive event registration aligns with global studies on FOMO-driven behaviors in fitness cultures (Wegmann et al., 2022), but with distinct local nuances. The Indonesian concept of *gengsi* (prestige) intensifies this dynamic, transforming races into stages for displaying social capital (Siregar, 2023). This explains why 82% of runners continued participating despite financial strain, as skipping events risked *malu sosial* (social shame) within tight-knit running communities.

The emergence of JOMO as resistance challenges dominant narratives about athlete motivation. While self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) posits intrinsic motivation as optimal, our study shows Makassar's JOMO practitioners achieve similar wellbeing through what Henderson (2023) calls "intentional disengagement." The *lari buta* movement exemplifies this, creating what Shipway et al. (2023) observed in European running subcultures as "counter-publics" that reject commercialized sports. However, the social penalties JOMO adopters face reveal how deeply entrenched FOMO is - participants who skipped events were often labeled *kurang semangat* (low-spirited), reflecting cultural biases against solitary physical activity (Pratama & Asmara, 2022).

Gender disparities in our findings mirror global patterns but with localized expressions. The pressure on female runners to maintain "sporty chic" appearances aligns with research on gendered self-presentation in fitness social media (Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2022), while the male macho endurance phenomenon echoes studies on toxic masculinity in sports (Gutierrez-Garcia et al., 2023). What's uniquely Makassar is how these pressures intersect with marital status - the use of running events as dating grounds reflects broader Indonesian courtship norms where shared hobbies facilitate *pendekatan* (courtship; Bennett, 2021). This commercialized romance angle warrants further study, particularly regarding how event marketing exploits demographics.

The study's most significant contribution is documenting what we term cultural event fatigue - a state where runners recognize participation's toll but feel powerless to opt out. This extends previous work on athlete burnout (Gustafsson et al., 2023) by situating exhaustion within specific socio-cultural ecosystems. The Makassar case study suggests solutions must address systemic factors: event organizers' scarcity tactics, social media's highlight reels, and community expectations. As Bantham et al. (2021) argue, sustainable sports participation requires dismantling the "more is better" ideology - a particular challenge in Indonesia's rapidly commercializing fitness landscape.

5. Conclusion

This study illuminates the complex psychological and cultural dynamics between FOMO and JOMO among recreational runners in Makassar, revealing how social pressures, gendered expectations, and commercialized event culture collectively transform running from a healthful activity into a performative social obligation. The findings underscore an urgent need to redefine running participation metrics beyond event quantities—prioritizing personal wellbeing over social validation—while suggesting that event organizers, running communities, and local policymakers collaboratively develop culturally-sensitive strategies to counteract unsustainable participation patterns and promote more balanced, joyful engagement with the sport.

The study ultimately reveals that Makassar's running culture has reached a critical juncture—what began as a health movement now risks becoming a source of collective anxiety, with participants trapped in a cycle of performative participation. These findings demand immediate action from multiple stakeholders: running communities could establish "no-post" run days to reduce social media pressures, event organizers might implement tiered participation systems accommodating different commitment levels, and local health agencies should develop public campaigns redefining running success beyond medal counts. As 27-year-old participant Rina poignantly noted during her interview, "*Kita lari untuk hidup, bukan hidup untuk lari*" ("We run to live, not live to run")—a philosophy that could guide Makassar toward a more sustainable running ecosystem where joy, not obligation, propels every stride.

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