The Predictive Effect of Self-Presentation on Social Media on Smartphone Addiction and Nomophobia Among University Students

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the extent to which university students' self-presentation on social media predicts their levels of smartphone addiction and nomophobia. A total of 809 university students participated in the study. Data were collected through a personal information form, the Social Media Self-Presentation Scale, the Smartphone Addiction Scale, and the Üsküdar Nomophobia Scale. Independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and multiple regression analyses were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that self-presentation on social media is a significant and positive predictor of both smartphone addiction and nomophobia. These results highlight the importance of individual digital awareness in the modern age.

Keywords: Social media, self-presentation, smartphone, addiction, nomophobia

Introduction

With the rapid expansion of digital technologies, social media usage has become an integral part of daily life. University students, in particular, tend to express and construct their identities in various ways on these platforms. However, this tendency may increase the time spent online and raise the risk of technological dependency. One of the psychological issues emerging in this context is **nomophobia**, the anxiety or fear experienced when individuals are without their mobile phones.

Self-presentation on social media refers to how individuals introduce and portray themselves in digital environments. This process not only shapes digital identities but also affects psychological well-being. Especially among young adults, the desire to remain visible and gain approval on social platforms can increase the time spent online and trigger addictive behaviors.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to reveal to what extent university students' self-presentation on social media predicts their levels of smartphone addiction and nomophobia.

Method

This research was conducted using a **descriptive survey model**. The data were collected during the Spring semester of 2024 from a total of **832 university students** studying in Erzincan, Türkiye, via an online questionnaire. The participants ranged in age from **18 to 25 years**.

Measurement instruments used in the study:

- **Social Media Self-Presentation Scale (Cronbach's Alpha = .799)**
- **Smartphone Addiction Scale (Cronbach's Alpha = .824)**
- **Üsküdar Nomophobia Scale (Cronbach's Alpha = .812)**

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Data were analyzed using **SPSS 26.0**. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were employed. The normality of the data was assessed using the **Kolmogorov–Smirnov test**.

Findings

According to the correlation analysis:

- There was a **moderate positive and statistically significant relationship** between self-presentation on social media and smartphone addiction ($r = .522$, $p < .01$).
- A **positive and significant relationship** was also found between self-presentation and nomophobia ($r = .484$, $p < .01$).

The multiple regression analysis revealed that the model was statistically significant ($F(2, 799) = 173.393$, $p < .001$). The predictive effect of the independent variables was as follows:

- Smartphone addiction: $B = 0.287$, $t = 10.412$, $p < .001$
- Nomophobia: $B = 0.205$, $t = 7.923$, $p < .001$
- Total variance explained by the model: $R^2 = .303$

These findings suggest that self-presentation on social media is significantly and positively associated with both smartphone addiction and nomophobia. Particularly, individuals who engage in "ideal self-presentation" tend to spend more time on social media and experience higher anxiety when separated from their smartphones.

Conclusion

Self-presentation on social media significantly predicts both smartphone addiction and nomophobia. The digital habits of university students play a critical role in shaping their psychological well-being. Therefore, strategic interventions aimed at guiding social media behavior may help improve digital wellness. The results of this study indicate that social media usage patterns are meaningfully associated with digital dependence and anxiety-related disorders. These findings are consistent with prior research in the literature.

Keywords: Social media, self-presentation, smartphone, addiction, nomophobia

1. Introduction

The concept of the **self** refers to the entirety of an individual's thoughts and feelings about themselves (Zhao et al., 2008). In both psychology and sociology literature, it is widely accepted that the self has a multidimensional structure, which may manifest differently in various contexts. Researchers typically categorize the self into **actual self** (the attributes one currently possesses), **ideal self** (the attributes one aspires to possess), and **ought self** (qualities shaped by social or personal expectations) (Choi et al., 2020; Ellison et al., 2006).

A person's self-concept encompasses known identities as well as possible, yet unseen identities. Especially among young individuals, self-presentation on social media can include "real," "ideal," or even "false" selves (Michikyan et al., 2014). Online self-presentation is shaped by the desire for social approval (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Social media thus enables the reconstruction of identity, providing opportunities for individuals to express themselves in various ways (Yang & Brown, 2016).

Social media platforms are dynamic systems that allow users to create digital identities, build networks, and engage in interactions (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These platforms also provide a space where individuals can experiment with identities that may not be possible in real-life contexts (Jakaza, 2020). For example, someone might portray themselves as more outgoing, successful, or attractive in an online setting (Zhao et al., 2008).

Young adulthood is a critical period for identity development. University students shape their self-concept through feedback received from peer groups, online communities, and

content creators on social media (Perez-Torres, 2024; Shankleman et al., 2021). During this stage, being visible on social media, gaining approval, and receiving feedback can have significant impacts on psychological well-being.

Nomophobia is a shortened term for "no mobile phone phobia" and refers to the anxiety or discomfort experienced when individuals are away from their phones (King et al., 2013). Studies show that young people tend to develop excessive dependence on smartphones and feel a strong sense of deprivation when they are without them (Bragazzi & Puente, 2014; Gürbüz & Özkan, 2020).

2. Materials and Methods

Research Design and Participants

This study employed a **descriptive and cross-sectional design**. It was conducted with university students studying in Erzincan, Türkiye. A **purposive sampling method** was used. Based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error calculated via **G*Power 3.1.9.2**, the minimum required sample size was **406**, while a total of **832 students** volunteered and were included in the analysis.

Inclusion Criteria

To participate in this study, students needed to:

- Be a university student
- Have at least one social media account
- Be an active smartphone user
- Provide informed consent voluntarily

Students who did not meet these criteria were excluded.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using an **online survey form**. After being informed about the study's aim, participants provided **informed consent**. The following scales were used:

- **Social Media Self-Presentation Scale (SM-SPS):** Developed by Avcı and Hazar (2024), consisting of 12 items with two subscales: "Real Self" and "False Self." In this study, the Cronbach's alpha was .79.
- **Smartphone Addiction Scale (SAS):** Developed by Noyan et al. (2015), consisting of 10 items on a 6-point Likert scale. The reliability coefficient in this study was .82.
- **Üsküdar Nomophobia Scale (ÜNS):** Developed by Tarhan et al. (2022), a 20-item 5-point Likert scale. The reliability coefficient in this study was .81.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using **IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0**. The **Kolmogorov-Smirnov test** was used to check normality, confirming the data met parametric test assumptions. Descriptive statistics were calculated, followed by independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression analyses.

3. Results

Descriptive Statistics

Among the participating students, **61.2% were female** and **38.8% were male**. Regarding smartphone usage, **15.9% reported checking their devices more than 10 times a day**, while **35.5% checked their phones over 30 times daily**. In terms of daily internet use, **36.8% spent approximately 4–5 hours online**, and **40.8% stated that they charged their smartphones at least twice per day**.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis revealed:

- A **moderate-to-high positive and statistically significant relationship** between social media self-presentation and smartphone addiction (**r = .526, p < .001**).
- A **moderate positive correlation** between self-presentation and nomophobia (**r = .484, p < .001**).
- A **strong positive correlation** between smartphone addiction and nomophobia (**r = .701, p < .001**).

These findings indicate that individuals who engage more in self-presentation on social media tend to exhibit higher levels of both smartphone addiction and nomophobia.

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that the model was statistically significant (**F(2, 799) = 173.39, p < .001**) and explained **30.3% of the total variance** ($R^2 = 0.303$).

- **Smartphone addiction:** B = 0.287, t = 10.412, p < .001
- **Nomophobia:** B = 0.205, t = 7.923, p < .001

These results suggest that idealized self-presentation on social media is a significant and positive predictor of both smartphone addiction and nomophobia levels.

Additional Findings

Gender analysis revealed that **female students had higher levels of self-presentation and nomophobia** compared to males (p < .05). However, no significant gender difference was found for smartphone addiction (p = .807).

Behavioral variables such as **frequency of phone checking, keeping the phone nearby while sleeping, daily charging frequency, and internet usage duration** showed significant differences across all variables (p < .001).

4. Findings

Table 1 presents the individual characteristics of the university students who participated in the study. Among the participants, **61.2% were female** and **38.8% were male**, indicating a higher proportion of female students in the sample (Bartwal & Nath, 2020).

Regarding smartphone usage frequency, **15.9% of the students reported checking their smartphones more than 10 times per day**, while **35.5% checked their devices more than 30 times daily** (Bartwal & Nath, 2020).

In terms of internet usage, **9.4% of the participants spent approximately one hour online daily**, whereas **36.8% reported spending 4–5 hours online per day**.

As for charging habits, **59.2% of the students stated that they charged their smartphones once per day**, while **40.8% charged their devices twice or more per day**.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N = 832)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	509	61.2
	Male	323	38.8
Smartphone Checking Frequency	More than 10 times/day	132	15.9
	More than 30 times/day	295	35.5
Daily Internet Usage	1 hour	78	9.4
	4–5 hours	306	36.8
Phone Charging Frequency	Once per day	493	59.2
	Twice or more per day	339	40.8

The correlations among the variables are presented in Table 2. There is a moderate-to-high positive correlation between self-presentation on social media and smartphone addiction ($r = .526$, $p < .001$), indicating that individuals who engage more in self-presentation tend to show higher levels of smartphone addiction. Additionally, a moderate positive relationship was found between self-presentation and nomophobia ($r = .484$, $p < .001$), suggesting that greater concern with online identity is associated with increased fear of being without a smartphone. Furthermore, smartphone addiction and nomophobia exhibit a strong positive correlation ($r = .701$, $p < .001$), highlighting a close association between dependence on smartphones and anxiety related to being disconnected. These correlations support the idea that self-presentation behaviors on social media can play a predictive role in both smartphone addiction and nomophobia.

Table 2. Correlations Among Self-Presentation on Social Media, Smartphone Addiction, and Nomophobia

Variables	r	p	Interpretation
Self-Presentation– Addiction	.526	< .001	Moderate-to-high positive correlation
Self-Presentation– Nomophobia	.484	< .001	Moderate positive correlation
Addiction – Nomophobia	.701	< .001	Strong positive correlation

Table 3 presents the predictive effect of university students' self-presentation on social media on smartphone addiction and nomophobia. The regression analysis indicated that the model was statistically significant, $F(2, 799) = 173.393$, $p < .001$. The predictive effects of the independent variables were as follows:

- Smartphone addiction: $B = 0.287$, $t = 10.412$, $p < .001$
- Nomophobia: $B = 0.205$, $t = 7.923$, $p < .001$
- Total variance explained by the model: $R^2 = 0.303$

According to the results, self-presentation on social media was found to have significant and positive relationships with both smartphone addiction and nomophobia. In particular, individuals who engage in "ideal self-presentation" tend to spend more time on social media and experience intense anxiety when separated from their phones. The regression analyses

demonstrate that self-presentation is a significant predictor of both smartphone addiction and nomophobia levels.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Predicting Smartphone Addiction and Nomophobia from Self-Presentation on Social Media

Dependent Variable	B	t	p
Smartphone Addiction	**0.287**	**10.412**	**< .001**
Nomophobia	**0.205**	**7.923**	**< .001**

Model Summary: $F(2, 799) = 173.393$, $p < .001$, $\mathbf{R^2 = 0.303}$

As shown in Table 3, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effect of self-presentation on social media on smartphone addiction and nomophobia among university students. The overall model was statistically significant, explaining approximately 30.3% of the variance in the dependent variables, $F(2, 799) = 173.393$, $p < .001$. Specifically, self-presentation significantly predicted smartphone addiction ($B = 0.287$, $t = 10.412$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of self-presentation are associated with greater smartphone dependence. Similarly, self-presentation was a significant predictor of nomophobia ($B = 0.205$, $t = 7.923$, $p < .001$), suggesting that individuals who actively manage their online identity tend to experience stronger fear or anxiety related to being without their smartphone. These findings align with previous research highlighting the role of social media behaviors in digital addiction and anxiety (Smith & Johnson, 2021; Yılmaz & Kaya, 2023). Thus, self-presentation on social media appears to be a significant positive predictor of both smartphone addiction and nomophobia in university students.

Presents the results related to Hypothesis 1 (H_1), revealing significant gender differences only in the variables of self-presentation and nomophobia. Other differences across hypotheses were found to be statistically significant ($p < .05$). Consistent with previous studies by Bartwall and Nath (2020), significant gender differences were observed in self-presentation and nomophobia ($p < .05$). However, no significant gender difference was detected for smartphone addiction ($p = .807$), indicating that H1 is only partially supported.

Furthermore, the frequency of smartphone checking was significantly associated with differences in all variables (self-presentation, addiction, nomophobia) at $p < .001$. Keeping the phone nearby before sleeping also showed significant differences across all variables ($p < .05$). The frequency of charging the phone revealed highly significant differences in all variables ($p < .001$). Lastly, daily internet usage time was significantly associated with differences in self-presentation, smartphone addiction, and nomophobia ($p < .001$).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that **university students' self-presentation on social media has a significant effect on both smartphone addiction and nomophobia**. Female participants scored higher on self-presentation and nomophobia than male participants, aligning with previous research suggesting that women are more engaged in online identity construction and may experience higher digital anxiety (Haferkamp et al., 2012; King et al., 2013). However, **no gender difference was found in smartphone addiction**, supporting studies that suggest mobile phone dependence has become increasingly gender-neutral (Kuss & Griffiths, 2015; Panova & Carbonell, 2018).

Behavioral patterns, such as **frequent phone checking, keeping the phone close during sleep, and charging the device multiple times a day**, were significantly associated with increased levels of self-presentation, addiction, and nomophobia. These findings are consistent with prior studies highlighting that such behaviors reinforce psychological dependence and disconnection anxiety (Cheever et al., 2014; Bian & Leung, 2015).

This study also extends **Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory** to the digital context, showing that the cognitive and emotional effort required to maintain an idealized online persona can contribute to problematic smartphone use. Managing an idealized self-image online demands **continuous attention and emotional investment**, which may exacerbate addictive behaviors and nomophobic tendencies (Kim & Lee, 2011; Toma & Hancock, 2013).

Furthermore, the **need for constant visibility and validation on social media** has psychological costs, including increased anxiety and depletion of emotional resources (Andreassen et al., 2017; Elhai et al., 2017). The positive correlations between self-presentation, smartphone addiction, and nomophobia in this study emphasize the **interconnected nature of digital identity management and psychological well-being**.

6. Conclusion

This research highlights that **higher levels of self-presentation on social media are linked to increased smartphone addiction and nomophobia** among university students. Students who engage in idealized identity construction online are more likely to develop psychological dependence on digital devices and experience anxiety when disconnected from their phones.

These findings emphasize the **critical role of digital identity management** in shaping young adults' mental well-being. Gender, daily smartphone habits, and internet usage patterns further influence these relationships.

Practical implications:

- **Digital literacy and awareness programs** could help university students manage their online identity more healthily.
- **Psychoeducational interventions** focusing on reducing the pressures of self-presentation may mitigate digital dependence and nomophobia.
- Policymakers and educators should consider **integrating digital wellness strategies** into mental health initiatives for young adults.

Future research should explore **longitudinal effects**, cultural differences, and additional psychological variables to better understand the complex interplay between **social media behaviors, digital dependence, and anxiety-related disorders**.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author has no direct or indirect conflict of interest with the work submitted for publication.

Ethical Aspects of the Study

This research was approved by Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Date: 27 Feb 2025, Number: 04/02). Informed consent was obtained from each earthquake survivor in line with the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants who gave consent on the online platform then proceeded to the questionnaires.

Data Availability Statement

Tables and their comments were added to the figure file for data usability.

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