



Smartphone addiction, cyberloafing, stress and social support among university students: A path analysis

Şahin Gökçeşlan^{a,*}, Çelebi Uluyol^b, Sami Şahin^b

^a Department of Informatics, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey

^b Computer Education and Instructional Technology Department, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between smartphone addiction, cyberloafing, stress and social support. The research data were collected from 885 undergraduate students studying at a public university in Turkey using an online questionnaire. The relationship between the variables was tested by path analysis. The results of the research showed that class level, family income and place of residence had no significant effect on smartphone addiction, cyberloafing, stress and perceived social support. Smartphone addiction, stress and perceived social support differed significantly by gender. Stress has significant effect on cyberloafing and smartphone addiction, and cyberloafing has significant effect on smartphone addiction. Social support has a small but significant effect on cyberloafing, but it has no significant effect on stress. The results of the research are discussed with regard to higher education students and future studies.

1. Introduction

Alexander Graham Bell would probably never have predicted the current forms his invention would take when he introduced a new communication tool in Philadelphia in 1876 (Gorman & Carlson, 1990). Nowadays, the functions of this invention, which was designed for the sole purpose of transmitting speech, have become ever more diverse, first through mobile phones, and then through smartphones. Smartphones offer applications that appeal to people of all ages and attract users by functioning as mobile computers that they can carry everywhere with them. Smartphones are helpful in overcoming the challenges of everyday life, from organizing everyday tasks to maintaining communication, from entertainment and shopping to mobile learning. For smartphone users, the first thing they look at in the morning and the last thing they look at before sleeping is their smartphone (Lee, Chang, Lin, & Cheng, 2014). Besides the positive features that smart phones add to human life, there are also various negative effects. Problematic phone usage can be classified as ‘dangerous’ (using a mobile phone while driving), as ‘inappropriate’ (using it in cinema or class) and as ‘overuse’ (Walsh, White, & Young, 2007). It is possible that young people today, who have been called the ‘Wired Generation’ (Barnes, 2009), may overuse their smartphones and that this may cause social, familial and academic problems (Gökçeşlan, Mumcu, Haşlamam, & Çevik, 2016).

In parallel with increasing technological development and use of

smartphones, one of the issues that researchers have been working on extensively in recent times is addiction. In a survey on smartphone addiction, the level of addiction of undergraduate students was very high at 48% (Aljomaa, Qudah, Albursan, Bakhiet, & Abduljabbar, 2016). This addiction rate of undergraduate students is thought-provoking and significant (Doorn, 2011). These and other research results have further sparked academics’ interest in the subject of smartphone addiction (Park, Kim, Shon, & Shim, 2013).

Smartphone addiction leads directly or indirectly to many different problems both inside and outside the classroom (Choi, Lee, & Ha, 2012). The use of smartphones for irrelevant activities in the classroom environment is called cyberloafing (Selwyn, 2008). Cyberloafing is considered to be a negative situation that leads to diminished academic success (Tang & Austin, 2009) and is associated with smartphone addiction (Gökçeşlan, Mumcu, Haşlamam, & Çevik, 2016). As a result of phenomenological research conducted with university students, smartphone addiction was found to cause anger problems, psychological disturbances in individuals, and disruption in daily work (Ko, Lee, & Kim, 2012). Young adults may also show signs of stress, sleep disturbances and depression that are associated with smartphone use (Thomee, Harenstam, & Hagberg, 2011). Moreover, it has recently been emphasized that the stress levels of university students are both worrying (Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2013) and alarming (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). Regehr, Glancy, and Pitts (2013) suggest that research should be conducted on how to lower the stress levels of university students. In

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: sgokcearslan@gazi.edu.tr (Ş. Gökçeşlan), celebi@gazi.edu.tr (Ç. Uluyol), sami@gazi.edu.tr (S. Şahin).

the treatment of stress and related disorders, which are often referred to as psychological disturbances, one of the most important factors is receiving social support. The use of social support networks for stress reduction is one of the topics specifically described in the main reference books on psychology and health (Cohen & McKay, 1984).

This research aimed to reveal university students' perceptions of smartphone addiction, stress, cyberloafing and their social support networks through a path analysis. In the conclusion of the research, descriptive findings from the data collection tools and their relation to some demographic variables (gender, class level, place of residence and income level) will also be discussed. First, however, a literature review regarding the variables used in the study is given below.

2. Literature review

2.1. Smartphone addiction

When thinking about addiction, various different types, such as addictions to drugs, gambling, sex, eating and drinking, shopping, love and sports, may come to mind (Karim & Chaudhri, 2012). Whatever the type, addiction causes medical, psychological and social harm to the individual by removing freedom of choice (West, 2001). The rapid development and transformation of information and communication technologies has thus led to concepts of internet, gaming or smartphone addiction (Kwon, Kim, Cho, & Yang, 2013). The number of smartphone users in 2014 was 1.75 billion people (EMarketer, 2014a, 2014b). According to the data from 2016, 58.7% of the world's population (4.30 billion) was using mobile phones. Nearly half of this number (2.14 billion) is estimated to have been using smartphones (EMarketer, 2016). It is estimated that in 2017 there are 2.4 billion smartphone users (Murphy, 2017). According to Statista (2015), nearly 100 billion free applications had been downloaded from application (“app”) stores by 2013. According to data from April 2017, 4.5 million applications are available to access in app stores (Statistica, 2017). By the way, students can not do without smartphone and a study showed that 42.6% of young adult have nomophobia (Yildirim, Sumuer, Adnan & Yildirim, 2016). Although different terms, such as “problematic mobile phone use”, “habitual mobile phone use” and “extreme mobile phone use” have previously been used to describe mobile phone addiction in the literature (Kim & Byrne, 2011), nowadays the concept of the “smartphone”, with its applications and computer-like features, is more frequently used. Therefore, the term “smartphone addiction” will be used in this study. “Such problematic mobile phone use can be considered to be an addiction-like behavior” (Takao, Takahashi, & Kitamura, 2009). The term “addiction” refers not to a dependency at the clinical level (Yellowlees & Marks, 2007).

Smartphone addiction can be defined as an individual's excessive use of a smartphone and its negative effects on her/his life as a consequence of her/his inability to control this behavior (Park & Lee, 2012). Smartphone addiction has been examined in light of four categories, “tolerance”, “withdrawal”, “excessiveness” and “functional disorder” (Lin et al., 2014). Overuse of smartphones is related to the following problems: sleep disturbances (Min, Jin-young, Hyun-Jin, & Hye-Jin, 2017); stress and depression (Thomee, Harenstam, & Hagberg, 2011); psychological distress (Chesley, 2005); physical and mental development problems (Hadlington, 2015; Park & Park, 2014); mental health issues (Choi, Lee, & Ha, 2012; Demirci, Akgönül, & Akpinar, 2015). However, most of the factors affecting smartphone addiction have not yet been elaborated (Pi, 2013).

2.2. Cyberloafing

Cyberloafing can be defined as the use of the internet for purposes that are not related to work during working hours (Lim, 2002). Perceived justice is expressed as the root cause of cyberloafing in the workplace (Lim, 2002). Cyberloafing is a withdrawal behavior (Askew

et al., 2014), and “is a method of coping with certain workplace stressors” (Henle & Blanchard, 2008). It can lead to professional “burnout” in working life (Aghaz & Sheikh, 2016), but some positive effects have also been noted (Lim & Chen, 2012). Escaping from work stress and increasing creativity have been mentioned as positive aspects of cyberloafing (Block, 2001). Cyberloafing allows the worker to take a break from the work environment and re-focus on their work (Anandarajan & Simmers, 2005; Lim & Chen, 2012).

Cyberloafing at school has been defined as the use of the internet by students during lessons for activities that are not related to school work (Kalaycı, 2010). The working environment and learning environment are very different from each other, and students and employees differ significantly in terms of cyberloafing (Akbulut, Dönmez, & Dursun, 2017). Studies on cyberloafing in educational environments are relatively new and the surroundings and atmosphere of the workplace may not reflect those of the classroom environment (Akbulut, Dursun, Dönmez, & Şahin, 2016). Classroom and business environments differ in terms of how they are regulated, the rights of the employees and the students, the economic situation (e.g. cyberloafing in the form of shopping), the mode of communication, the daily schedule and the systems of monitoring (Akbulut, Dönmez, & Dursun, 2017). While the use of smartphones in learning activities offers mobile learning opportunities, cyberloafing has a negative impact on learning environments and processes (Wagner, Barnes, Lim, & Ferris, 2012), so there are both positive and negative aspects to it. Students may not achieve their learning goals if they use the online environment to meet their personal needs rather than to complete their learning activities in the classroom. The use of social networks and texting in the classroom negatively affect student achievement (GPA) (Junco, 2012). In the classroom environment, students use text messaging extensively, indicating that they are not even aware of the adverse effects of this type of cyberloafing on the learning process (Tindell & Bohlander, 2012).

2.3. Stress

Stress is a specific psychological condition that individuals experience in their lives (Gadzella, 1991). The stress that is part of everyday life today has become an integral part of the experience of the modern individual. The reason for this is the multitude of environmental factors threatening his/her wellbeing. Stress can be defined as a reaction to these threatening environmental factors (Allen, 1983; Arslan, 2017; Baloğlu & ve Bardakçı, 2010; Pehlivan, 1995; Selye, 1997). In the literature in the field two types of stress are generally discussed, beneficial eustress and distress (Le Fevre, Matheny, & Kolt, 2003). In the majority of these studies, a more intense focus has been put on distress.

Nowadays smartphones have become more multi-functional thanks to the applications they run. It is a fact known to everybody that the vast majority of university students carry a smartphone. Individuals, who are now able to access millions of applications using smartphones, also face different challenges. Samaha and Hawi's (2016) study showed that there is a positive relationship between smartphone addiction and stress. Shaw and Black (2008) came to the conclusion that inappropriate and excessive use of technology leads to impairment or distress. A similar result was also found by Hur (2006). Hur (2006) emphasized that the misuse of technology leads to psychological and mental health problems.

2.4. Social support and stress

In the last 50 years in particular there have been many medical studies on the importance of social support (familial support, support of friends, support of partner) for helping individuals to overcome their illnesses and continue to live a healthy life. Many different studies have shown that people who receive social support from their family and friends are healthier than those who do not have any social support (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). There is a negative

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