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SMARTPHONE DEPENDENCE AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN GILGIT CITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF NOMOPHOBIA

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Abstract

Smartphone use has created new problems for young people, such as nomophobia, which is an anxiety caused by being without a smartphone. This paper aimed to investigate smartphone dependence of 120 students and the influence on their academic activities. The research method included a questionnaire with subsequent processing of results in SPSS. A convenience sample was used in the investigation, and the smartphone dependence scale consisted of 32 items, which demonstrated good reliability (Cronach alpha, .718). Among the respondents, 53.3% were male, and 46.7% were female, with 47.5% of the sample aged between 22 and 25 years old. The results indicated that 58.3% of the students used their smartphone for more than six hours per day. At the same time, 60% of the students indicated that they experienced higher levels of nomophobia when their battery was low, and 74.2% of the respondents stated that nomophobia negatively impacted their studies. Consequently, it is crucial to promote responsible smartphone use and educate students on the importance of limiting time spent on various devices to increase academic performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Smartphones have become an integral part of modern-day human life. Young people use cell phones for communication, education, entertainment, getting information, socializing, and maintaining relationships. The development of mobile technology has brought many benefits, and now students can learn online, using video lectures, e-books, research documents, apps, and other tools. However, constant smartphone usage may be harmful and even addictive. Moreover, there is a new phantom called nomophobia. Nomophobia is defined as a condition when individuals experience a fear, anxiety, or discomfort that arises from an inability to access or use one's

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phone. It was coined from the idea of a phone's importance in modern life due to its extreme dependence. Scientists claim that it is related to addiction and associated with negative consequences such as increased risks for depression, distractibility, sleep loss, anxiety, and poor academic performances (Bhattacharya & Srivastava, 2019; Notara et al., 2021). It is especially relevant to nomophobia in young people since it is crucial for their life at school or university. Previous studies have shown that nomophobia is common and prevalent among university students. Tuco et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis and concluded that the prevalence rate of moderate and severe nomophobia among university students is very high. Another study by Al-Mamun et al. (2023) concluded that there are associations between nomophobia, smartphone addiction, insomnia, and depression in university students. This implies that students who are addicted to using smartphones go beyond regular use which is detrimental to their overall well-being (mental and academic). The situation in Pakistan is particularly relevant since the usage of smartphones has experienced a significant boom among young people. Schwaiger and Tahir (2020) found out that there is a high level of nomophobia among the undergraduates in Lahore, and the number one predictor was the daily usage time of their smartphones. Farooq et al. (2022) also found a high level of nomophobia among Pakistani undergraduates, and almost half of them have a moderate level and more than a quarter have a severe level. Mir and Akhtar (2020) found that separation from mobile phones increases anxiety in undergraduates who score moderately on nomophobia scales. Recent Pakistani evidence still draws attention to the relationships between smartphones' overuse, the risks of developing depressive states, and the consequences for academic performance. Thus, Masood et al. (2026) in their work with Lahore University students revealed the connections between nomophobia and the tendencies towards depression, anxiety, and stress levels, academic warnings, attendance, hours of study, and overall performance, providing a solid foundation for further research in this area. The present article however reworks the initial thesis research on smartphone dependency and academic performance instead of replicating the original thesis title. The article focuses on researching how students perceive the connections between their academic performance, level of physical activity, time spent on phones, and nomophobia in Gilgit City. The sociological significance of the research is defined by the fact that it contributes to a better understanding of how modern people adapt new technologies in their lives and how this progress affects their education and lifestyle.

Objectives

- To explore the extent of smartphone dependence and nomophobic tendency among youth
- To examine respondents' perceptions regarding the academic implications of nomophobia
- To observe selected behavioural implications associated with smartphone dependence
- To describe daily duration of smartphone usage among the respondents

Methodology

The research undertaken by the investigators was quantitative in nature. The data was collected from the sample size of 120 respondents selected through the purposeful sampling technique from Gilgit City. The data collection instrument used was a questionnaire comprising 32 items. The reliability of the tool was established through Cronbach's Alpha test whose value was .718 which was satisfactory for the study. The study focused on young adults and examined the role of smartphone addiction on the academic performance of the students, social life, physical health, and anxiety towards the daily use of smartphones. The respondents had given their informed consent for the researchers to use the data collected from them and the responses collected were kept anonymous. The data analysis was done using

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the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The description of the data was done by determining the frequencies and percentages of the demographic variables and the Likert responses selected by the participants in response to each item included in the questionnaire. The study had a cross-sectional design which is why the results cannot establish a causal relationship between the variables investigated in the study. Secondly, the data collected from the participants through self-reported questionnaires cannot be generalized to represent the target population under investigation. Instead, the results reflect the views of the respondents at a specific point in time.

Results and Discussion

The general description of the sample indicates that the majority of the students were young and presumably received a good education. Indeed, 64 participants were male (53.3%), while 56 were female (46.7%). Concerning the students' ages, 56 respondents (46.7%) were between 18 and 21 years old, 57 participants (47.5%) were between 22 and 25 years old, whereas only 7 students (5.8%) were between 26 and 30 years old. Finally, 83 respondents (69.2%) had bachelor's education, 21 students (17.5%) had intermediate education, 11 participants (9.2%) had master's education or higher, whereas 5 students (4.2%) had matriculation education. Considering that a significant majority of the students were young adults, it could be hypothesized that they were highly dependent on technological tools in terms of education and/or entertainment.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents According to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	64	53.3
Female	56	46.7
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Original thesis data.

The gender distribution appears to be relatively equal, albeit with a slight predominance of males. This allows for representation of both genders' views in the matter of smartphone dependency.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents According to Age

Age group	Frequency	Percent
18–21	56	46.7
22–25	57	47.5
26–30	7	5.8
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Original thesis data.

Almost 94% of respondents fell within the 18-25 age group. This fact is significant since young people represent one of the largest populations of individuals who use cell phones for communication, entertainment, education or social media. This result aligns with previous studies which identified young people as the population of interest for nomophobia research (Gurbuz & Ozkan, 2020; Notara et al., 2021).

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Table 3. Increase in Nomophobia When Mobile Phone Battery Is Low

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	7	5.8
Disagree	18	15.0
Neutral	23	19.2
Agree	55	45.8
Strongly Agree	17	14.2
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Original thesis data.

The results suggest that a significant number of people have a high degree of reliance on mobile phones. 55 respondents (45.8%) agreed and 17 (14.2%) strongly agreed that their nomophobia increases when their mobile phone battery is low. Therefore, 60.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Moreover, 20.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 19.2% were neutral. The result highlights one of the key characteristics of nomophobia, which is anxiety about a prospective loss of connectivity and access to information. Smartphones offer unparalleled convenience because of their ability to provide constant connectivity. However, this can cause issues for some people due to their level of reliance on mobile phones. Similar results were previously reported by Ahmed & Yousaf (2023) and Schwaiger & Tahir (2020) who associated nomophobia with smartphone attachment and anxiety about losing an opportunity to use device.

Table 4. Perceived Impact of Nomophobia on Academic Performance

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	7	5.8
Disagree	9	7.5
Neutral	15	12.5
Agree	53	44.2
Strongly Agree	36	30.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Original thesis data.

The strongest pattern found in the results is the perceived academic consequences. Over three-quarters of respondents tended to agree to some extent that their nomophobia impacted their academic performance: 53 respondents (44.2%) agreed and 36 (30%) strongly agreed. Only 16 respondents (13.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. This outcome aligns with prior research that established a link between problematic smartphone attachment and students' academic performance. Indeed, Barton et al. (2021) explored the relationship between students' level of nomophobia and their academic achievement and found a connection between the two. Similarly, Aldhahir et al. (2023) investigated the impact of nomophobia on the academic performance of respiratory therapy students. Janatolmakan et al. (2024) also found an association between nomophobia and the academic performance of nursing students. The result should nevertheless be interpreted as a perceived relationship rather than causality. The fact that the study is cross-sectional and based on self-reported data prevents establishing a causal relationship between students' level of nomophobia and their academic performance. The study habits, mental health, social life, and smartphone usage patterns might contribute to the observed association.

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Table 5. Daily Duration of Mobile Phone Use

Daily smartphone use	Frequency	Percent
1–2 hours	9	7.5
3–4 hours	20	16.7
5–6 hours	21	17.5
More than 6 hours	70	58.3
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Original thesis data.

The given statistics demonstrate that the participants spend a considerable amount of time on their phones. Thus, 70 respondents or 58.3% use their mobile phones for more than six hours a day. In addition, another 21 participants or 17.5% use their SMART devices 5-6 hours a day. Altogether, 91 respondents or 75.8% use their smartphones for more than 5 hours a day. It is essential to note that the time spent on mobile phones is one of the critical predictors of nomophobia. Indeed, Schwaiger and Tahir (2020) found daily smartphone duration as a significant indicator of nomophobia development among the undergraduate students in Lahore. Similarly, the study conducted by Al-Mamun et al. (2023) unveiled the association between smartphone's usage behaviour and the presence of nomophobia. However, it is essential to distinguish between useful and pure entertainment or addiction. Implications of physical and social behaviours reveal the tendency towards physical activities and interacting with others. The first hypothesis was that 56 respondents (46.7%) agreed, 26 (21.7%) strongly agreed that increased nomophobia is related to decreased physical activity on a daily basis, respectively. This trend can be explained by research that excessive use of smartphones could result in reduced exercise and altered lifestyle (Torlak et al., 2022). Additionally, studies associate the nomophobia with disrupted sleeping pattern, anxiety, and other psychological conditions (Kubrusly et al., 2021; Bernabé-Mateo et al., 2025). From the sociological perspective, these findings illustrate an increasing role of digital devices in structuring everyday behaviour. Smartphone is no longer a communication device, but it is a medium through which educational, social, recreational, and personal activities are organized. Consequently, the device's

dependence could influence how young adults spend time, communicate with others, participate in social activities, and manage academic responsibilities.

Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that many young people are excessively addicted to smartphones and nomophobia. Over half of the respondents use their smartphones for more than six hours a day, while sixty percent of students admitted that they experience increased nomophobia when their phone is low on battery. Seventy-four percent of respondents agreed that it has adversely affected their studies. Previous studies have shown that prolonged use of smartphones could lead to a decline in academic performance, increased levels of anxiety, insomnia, and social adjustment problems (Farooq et al., 2022; Masood et al., 2026; Tuco et al., 2023). The problem is not the phones per se but the fact that they are used excessively and uncontrollably. Educational institutions must encourage smartphone literacy while helping students develop cognitive-behavioral skills to unlock themselves from constant phone use. The same can be achieved by limiting notifications and alerts, restricting the use of devices in specific settings, avoiding excessive use through apps, and encouraging social interactions and physical activities. Further research on this topic would be interesting, considering a larger sample size and

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geographical spread to determine the extent to which nomophobia affects students' academic performance.

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