





The Mediating Role of Phubbing in the Association between Social Media Addiction and Subjective Vitality among University Students

Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Sosyal Medya Bağımlılığı ile Öznel Zindelik Arasındaki İlişkide Sosyotelizmin Aracılık Rolü

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Abstract. This study aimed to examine the mediating role of phubbing in the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality of university students. The participants of the study were 352 university students, 227 female and 125 male, aged between 18 and 55 ($M_{age} = 23.608$, $SD = 6.561$). In the study, conditional process analysis was performed using the SPSS PROCESS macro add-in and the research hypotheses were tested. Additionally, the bootstrapping method was used for the statistical significance of the mediator variable. When the correlation findings of the study were examined, it was determined that subjective vitality was negatively correlated with both social media addiction and phubbing. Additionally, a significant positive relationship was found between social media addiction and phubbing. Conditional process analysis findings revealed that phubbing played a partial mediating role in the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality. The results obtained from the bootstrapping method also indicated that this mediation was statistically significant. All findings obtained within the scope of the research were discussed and interpreted in light of the literature, and recommendations were presented to both mental health practitioners and researchers.

Keywords: Social media addiction, Subjective vitality, Phubbing.

Öz. Bu çalışma, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile üniversite öğrencilerinin öznel zindelik arasındaki ilişkide sosyotelizmin aracılık rolünü incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Çalışmanın katılımcılarını, yaşları 18 ile 55 arasında değişen (Yaş ortalaması = 23.608, $SS = 6.561$) 227 kadın ve 125 erkek olmak üzere toplam 352 üniversite öğrencisi oluşturmuştur. Araştırmada, SPSS PROCESS makro eklentisi kullanılarak koşullu süreç analizi gerçekleştirilmiş ve araştırma hipotezleri test edilmiştir. Ayrıca, aracı değişkenin istatistiksel anlamlılığı için bootstrapping yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın korelasyon bulguları incelendiğinde, öznel zindelik ile hem sosyal medya bağımlılığı hem de sosyotelizm arasında negatif bir ilişki olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile sosyotelizm arasında anlamlı bir pozitif ilişki bulunmuştur. Koşullu süreç analizi bulguları, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile öznel zindelik arasındaki ilişkide sosyotelizmin kısmi aracılık rolü oynadığını ortaya koymuştur. Bootstrapping yöntemiyle elde edilen sonuçlar da bu aracılığın istatistiksel olarak anlamlı olduğunu göstermiştir. Araştırma kapsamında elde edilen tüm bulgular, literatür ışığında tartışılmış ve hem ruh sağlığı uzmanlarına hem de araştırmacılara yönelik öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal medya bağımlılığı, Öznel zindelik, Sosyotelizm.



Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş. Sosyal medya, bireylerin sanal topluluklara katılmasını ve diğer kişilerle etkileşimde bulunmasını sağlayan bir platformdur. Günümüzde, sosyal medya kullanımı önemli ölçüde artmıştır. 2024 yılı itibarıyla, dünya nüfusunun %62.3'ü aktif olarak sosyal medya kullanmaktadır. Bu oran, dünya çapında milyarlarca bireyin günlük yaşamlarının önemli bir bölümünü sosyal medya platformlarında geçirdiğini göstermektedir. Kullanıcılar, günde ortalama 2 saat 23 dakikalarını sosyal medya uygulamalarında geçirmektedir. Bu, bireylerin çevrimiçi aktivitelerinin %35.8'ini oluşturmaktadır.

Sosyal medya, bireylerin bilgi paylaşımı, video izleme ve mesajlaşma gibi birçok amaçla zaman harcadığı bir mecra haline gelmiştir. Ancak, sosyal medya kullanımının kontrolsüz ve aşırı seviyelere ulaşması, sosyal medya bağımlılığı gibi çeşitli sorunları beraberinde getirmektedir. Sosyal medya bağımlılığı, bireylerin sosyal medya uygulamalarına karşı aşırı ilgi duyması ve bu uygulamaları kontrolsüz şekilde kullanması olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu durum, bireyin günlük yaşamını olumsuz etkileyen davranışsal bağımlılık özelliklerini içermektedir. Üniversite öğrencileri arasında yaygın olan bu bağımlılık, düşük akademik başarı, fiziksel sağlık sorunları, sosyal ilişkilerde bozulmalar ve ruh sağlığı problemleri gibi çeşitli olumsuz sonuçlara neden olabilmektedir. Sosyal medya bağımlılığının bireylerin öznel zindelikleri üzerinde de etkili olabileceği düşünülmektedir. Öznel zindelik, bireyin fiziksel ve psikolojik enerji durumunu ifade eden bir kavramdır ve yaşamdan alınan doyum ile yakından ilişkilidir. Sosyotelizm, sosyal medya bağımlılığının dolaylı bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkan ve bireylerin sosyal etkileşim sırasında akıllı telefonlarına yönelmeleri ile karakterize edilen bir davranıştır. Sosyotelizm, sadece bireysel ilişkileri değil, aynı zamanda sosyal bağlamlarda iletişim kalitesini de olumsuz etkileyen bir faktördür. Sosyotelizmin, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile öznel zindelik arasındaki ilişkide aracılık rolü oynayabileceği düşünülmektedir. Bu bağlamda, bu araştırma, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile öznel zindelik arasındaki ilişkide sosyotelizm davranışlarının aracılık rolünü incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Yöntem. Araştırmanın örneklemini, yaşları 18 ile 55 arasında değişen, 227'si kadın (%64.5) ve 125'i erkek (%35.5) olmak üzere toplam 352 üniversite öğrencisi oluşturmuştur. Katılımcıların yaş ortalaması 23.608 ($SS = 6.561$) olarak belirlenmiştir. Ek olarak, katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu kendilerini orta ekonomik düzeyde algıladıklarını belirtmiştir ($n = 225$). Katılımcılardan çevrimiçi form yoluyla veri toplanmış ve kolayda/ulaşılabilir örnekleme yöntemi tercih edilmiştir. Katılımcılar, araştırma hakkında bilgilendirilmiş ve çalışmaya katılmadan önce onayları alınmıştır. Ayrıca, bu çalışmada etik ilkelere bağlı kalınarak anonimlik ve gizlilik sağlanmıştır. Araştırmada, Bergen Sosyal Medya Bağımlılığı Ölçeği, Sosyotelizm Ölçeği ve Öznel Zindelik Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde, öncelikle betimleyici istatistikler hesaplanmıştır. Sosyal medya bağımlılığı, sosyotelizm ve öznel zindelik değişkenlerinin normallik dağılımı, çarpıklık ve basıklık değerleri incelenmiştir. Tüm değişkenler normal dağılım göstermiştir (çarpıklık: -0.203 ile 0.184; basıklık: -0.782 ile -0.113). Daha sonra korelasyon analizi yapılmış ve değişkenler arasındaki ilişkiler incelenmiştir. Daha sonra, SPSS PROCESS makro eklentisiyle koşullu süreç analizi uygulanmış ve sosyotelizmin aracılık etkisi test edilmiştir. Ayrıca, bootstrapping yöntemi, 5000 örnekleme üzerinden, %95 güven aralığında aracılık etkisinin anlamlılığını değerlendirmek için kullanılmıştır. Cinsiyet ve yaş gibi demografik değişkenler modele kontrol değişkenleri olarak eklenmiştir.



Bulgular. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile öznel zindelik arasında negatif bir ilişki olduğu belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile sosyotelizm arasında pozitif, sosyotelizm ile öznel zindelik arasında ise negatif bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Koşullu süreç analizi bulguları, değişkenler arasındaki tüm yolların anlamlı olduğunu, modele sosyotelizm dâhil olduğunda sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile öznel zindelik arasındaki ilişkide yol katsayısının azaldığı fakat anlamlılığın korunduğu saptanmıştır. Bu da sosyotelizm davranışlarının, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile öznel zindelik arasındaki ilişkide kısmi bir aracı rol oynadığını göstermiştir. Bootstrapping yöntemi sonuçları, bu aracılığın %95 güven aralığında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı olduğunu ortaya koymuştur.

Tartışma ve Sonuç. Araştırma bulguları, sosyal medya bağımlılığının bireylerin öznel zindeliklerini olumsuz yönde etkileyebileceğini göstermektedir. Sosyal medya bağımlılığının yol açtığı psikolojik belirtiler, bireylerin yaşam enerjisini azaltarak öznel zindelik üzerinde olumsuz bir etki yaratabilir. Ayrıca, sosyotelizm davranışlarının sosyal ilişkilerde bozulmalara yol açtığı ve bu durumun bireylerin öznel zindeliklerini daha da azalttığı görülmektedir. Bu çalışma, sosyal medya bağımlılığı, sosyotelizm ve öznel zindelik arasındaki ilişkileri inceleyen sınırlı alanyazına önemli katkılar sağlamaktadır. Sonuçlar, sosyal medya bağımlılığını azaltmaya yönelik müdahale programlarının, bireylerin hem psikolojik sağlıklarını hem de sosyal ilişkilerini iyileştirebileceğini göstermektedir.

Bu araştırma, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile öznel zindelik arasındaki ilişkide sosyotelizm davranışlarının kısmi bir aracı rolü olduğunu göstermiştir. Sosyal medya bağımlılığının ve sosyotelizm davranışlarının bireylerin zihinsel sağlık ve yaşam enerjisi üzerindeki olumsuz etkileri, bu iki davranışın bir arada ele alınması gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bulgular, dijital çağda bireylerin iyi oluşlarını artırmak için sağlıklı sosyal medya kullanım alışkanlıklarının teşvik edilmesinin önemini vurgulamaktadır. Araştırmanın pratik sonuçları, özellikle genç yetişkinler arasında sosyal medya bağımlılığını azaltmayı hedefleyen eğitim programlarının geliştirilmesi yönünde uygulanabilir. Ayrıca, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile ilişkili olumsuz etkilerin daha kapsamlı bir şekilde değerlendirilmesi için karma yöntem çalışmalarının yürütülmesi önerilmektedir. Bu tür çalışmalar, sosyal medya bağımlılığının hem bireysel hem de toplumsal etkilerini anlamada daha bütüncül bir bakış açısı sunabilir. Ayrıca, gelecekteki çalışmalar için sosyal medya bağımlılığı ve öznel zindelik arasındaki nedensel ilişkilere odaklanan boylamsal ve deneysel araştırmalar önerilmektedir.



Introduction

Social media is a platform that allows people to follow virtual activities, join virtual communities, and interact with other people. Nowadays, social media usage has increased significantly. According to the report published by We Are Social (2024), 62.3% of the world's population are social media users. The same report states that a typical social media user spends an average of 2 hours and 23 minutes per day on social media applications. This constitutes 35.8% of people's daily online activities (We Are Social, 2024). People use social media to watch videos, send messages, search for information, share social media, and interact with other people (Çolak, 2022; Erzen et al., 2019). Some studies demonstrate that social media use has individual benefits in areas such as mood, cognitive function, and social support (e.g., Ellison et al., 2011; Patel et al., 2015). However, various problems occur as a result of excessive and uncontrolled use of social media. Social media addiction comes first among these problems (Primack ve Escobar-Viera, 2017).

Social media addiction, known as problematic social media use (Sun ve Zhang, 2011) or addiction to social networking sites (Kuss ve Griffiths, 2017), is characterized by a person's excessive interest in social media applications, an uncontrollable urge to engage with social media, and excessive social media use that adversely influences living spaces (van den Eijnden et al., 2016). Social media addiction is a complex concept and includes behavioral addiction components such as overuse, mood swings, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse (Andreassen, 2015). Social media addiction is also a common problem among university students (Pellegrino et al., 2022). A large-scale meta-analysis study revealed that 18.4% of university students suffer from social media addiction (Salari et al., 2025). Social media addiction is associated with various physical and psychosocial problems (Hamarta et al., 2023; Satıcı et al., 2023). Current research indicates that social media addiction is associated with obesity (Çakmak ve Tanrıöver, 2024), physical problems (Narin-Aral ve Keçelioğlu, 2023), nutritional problems (Ayyıldız ve Şahin, 2022), low academic achievement (Tülübaş et al., 2023), problems in social relationships (Jia et al., 2018; Okur et al., 2022), and mental health problems (Baltacı et al., 2021; Satıcı et al., 2023). In addition, meta-analysis studies have shown that social media addiction has negative effects on psychosocial life (Cunningham et al., 2021; Shin et al., 2022; Yiğiter et al., 2024). All these studies prove that individuals' addictive use of social media tools can indirectly affect their life energy. Individuals generally associate the concept of life energy with subjective vitality (Kütük et al., 2024). In the literature, the state of individuals having personal life energy, both physically and psychologically, indicates subjective vitality (Deci ve Ryan, 2000).

Social media addiction and subjective vitality

Social media addiction has a negative influence on the mental health of individuals. Recent research demonstrates that social media addiction has a negative significant relationship with variables related to personal well-being such as happiness, life satisfaction, optimism, and psychological resilience (e.g., Çiftçi ve Yıldız, 2023; Eroğlu et al., 2023; Kayış et al., 2022). One of the personal well-being variables affected by social media addiction is subjective vitality. Subjective vitality, based on self-determination theory, is an individual's sense of vitality and vitality (Deci ve Ryan, 2000).

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Individuals with high subjective vitality feel more energetic and lively in their life activities (Ryan ve Frederick, 1997). In this respect, subjective vitality has both physical and psychological content (Buchner et al., 2022). Additionally, individuals with high subjective vitality can cope more effectively with the problems they encounter in their lives and perceive the events around them as less disturbing (Benyamini et al., 2000). Due to all these, they get satisfaction from life and feel happy (Lavrusheva, 2020). In this respect, subjective vitality is an important indicator of personal well-being and a protective factor for mental health. On the other hand, an individual's addictive use of social media has the potential to negatively affect their subjective vitality.

There is no study in the literature that directly examines the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality. However, when the theoretical explanations of the concepts are examined, it can be said that social media addiction can negatively affect subjective vitality. Social media addiction has a negative impact on people's mental health (Satıcı et al., 2023). In a large cross-sectional study examining the relationship between social media addiction and psychiatric disorders and involving 23533 adults (Andreassen et al., 2016), it was found that symptoms of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression and anxiety were significant predictors of social media addiction. On the other hand, different studies show that people who use social media at an addictive level are more likely to experience psychological symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Haand ve Shuwang, 2020; Landa-Blanco et al., 2024; Tung et al., 2022). Similarly, research demonstrates that social media addiction is associated with lower happiness, life satisfaction, and optimism (Çiftci ve Yıldız, 2023; Eroğlu et al., 2023; Kayış et al., 2022). The deterioration of psychological well-being negatively affects the subjective vitality of the person. On the other hand, social media causes individuals to compare their own lives with the lives of others. This social comparison negatively influences self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2014). This situation may reduce subjective vitality. It is also known that people with a high risk of social media addiction feel lonelier and experience problems in their social relationships (Baltacı, 2019). Due to this situation, individuals may have a decreasing effect on their subjective vitality. Based on these studies and opinions, it can be said that there may be a significant relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality. Therewithal, other variables may also play a role in the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality. When the literature is examined, it can be said that phubbing may be one of these variables.

The mediating role of phubbing

The concept of phubbing is a combination of the words phone and snubbing and emphasizes the negative impact of smartphones on communication in social relationships (Capilla Garrido et al., 2021). In the literature, phubbing is defined as a situation where a person focuses on their smartphone while socially interacting with another person and as a result neglects the other person (Chotpitayasunondh ve Douglas, 2018; J. Sun ve Samp, 2022). Research demonstrates that phubbing behavior is a common problem among individuals (Barbed-Castrejón et al., 2024; Davey et al., 2018). Especially in recent years, with the widespread use of smartphones, the concept of phubbing has come to the fore. The use of social media applications mostly through smartphones (We Are Social, 2024) indicates that there may be a relationship between social media addiction and phubbing. As a matter



of fact, social media addiction causes individuals to use their smartphones uncontrollably and excessively (Kuss ve Griffiths, 2017). As a result, people can constantly focus on their smartphones during their social interactions (Karadağ et al., 2015). Because for social media addicts, being constantly active and interactive on social media is an extreme need. The way to meet this need is to focus on smartphones (Karadağ et al., 2015). Therefore, phubbing may be a result of social media addiction (Capilla Garrido et al., 2021). There are various studies in the literature that support this situation (e.g., Al-Saggaf, MacCulloch, ve Wiener, 2019; Ivanova et al., 2020; Nikel, Kolańska-Stronka, ve Krasa, 2025). In other words, it can be said that individuals with social media addiction may be more likely to exhibit phubbing behaviors.

Some problems may occur when individuals do not focus on the other person during communication and instead pay attention to their smartphones (Karadağ et al., 2016). The most common of these is communication impairment caused by excessive use of a smartphone in the presence of another person (Vanden Abeele, Abels, ve Hendrickson, 2020). Phubbing causes weakening of social relationships, decreased relationship satisfaction, increased loneliness, and social exclusion (e.g., Błachnio ve Przepiorka, 2018; David ve Roberts, 2017; Erzen et al., 2019; McDaniel ve Coyne, 2016). Additionally, phubbing creates a negative impact on people's well-being (Kadylak, 2019). Previous studies have shown a positive significant relationship between phubbing and depression, anxiety, and stress (e.g., Bitar et al., 2023; Guazzini, et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2017); and a negative significant relationship between phubbing and happiness, life satisfaction, and psychological resilience (e.g., Joshi, 2024; Li et al., 2022). From this perspective, it is possible to say that the concept of phubbing has an adverse impact on the well-being of the individual. Based on these findings, social media addiction may increase phubbing behavior and, as a result, individuals' subjective vitality may be negatively affected. Therefore, it is thought that phubbing behavior may mediate the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality.

The current study

This research hypothesizes that social media addiction may increase phubbing behaviors, which in turn may affect the subjective vitality of individuals. There are studies in the literature examining the effects of social media addiction and phubbing behaviors on the well-being of individuals. However, this research is important for understanding how these factors interact and potentially mediate each other. In this context, this research is important in terms of addressing the gap in academic literature. Understanding the complex relationship between these variables is important for planning studies to increase the well-being of individuals in the digital age. Findings from this study may provide valuable information for the development of interventions aimed at reducing the negative effects of social media use and promoting healthier digital habits. This research aims to test the mediating role of phubbing behaviors in the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality. For this main purpose, the following hypotheses were determined based on literature and previous research:

- *H1.* Social media addiction significantly predicts subjective vitality.
- *H2.* Phubbing behaviors play a mediating role in the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality.

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Method

Participants and procedure

The sample of this study consists of a total of 352 university students, 227 female (64.5%) and 125 male (35.5%). The average age of the participants, who ranged from 18 to 55 years old, was 23.608 ($SD = 6.561$). In addition, the majority of participants perceive their economic situation as moderate ($n = 225$), while a smaller group reported being in a lower ($n = 33$) and higher ($n = 94$) socio-economic level. Prior to the research, approval for the study was obtained from the [Omitted] University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Reference Number = [Omitted]). Then, research data were collected using an online form. The online survey link was distributed to university students through various social media platforms commonly used by students. Participants were informed about the study in the research form and their consent was obtained. Data were collected using the convenience sampling method, adhering to the principle of volunteering. No fee was paid to the participants.

Table 1.
Sample characteristics

Variable	Frequency (n)	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	227	64.5
Male	125	35.5
<i>Socio-economic level</i>		
Low	33	9.4
Medium	225	63.9
High	94	26.7

Measures

Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale

This scale was developed by Andreassen et al. (2016) and adapted to Turkish by Demirci (2019). There are no reverse items in the scale, which has a total of six items. The lowest possible score on the scale, which is scored on a five-point scale, is 6 and the highest possible score is 30. Possible high scores obtained from the scale indicate that the participants have a high level of social media addiction. The Cronbach's alpha reliability value of the scale was reported as 0.82. The Turkish version of the scale demonstrates robust psychometric properties, including very good construct validity (RMSEA = 0.039, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99).

Phubbing Scale

This scale, developed by Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2018), was adapted to Turkish culture by Ergün et al. (2019). There are no reverse items in the scale, which has 15 items in total. Scored on a seven-point scale, scores can range from 15 to 105. Increasing scores indicate that participants exhibit more phubbing behavior. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient Akbulut, O. F., Akad, M. ve Okur, S. (2025). The mediating role of phubbing in the association between social media addiction and subjective vitality among university students. *Western Anatolia Educational Sciences*, 16 (2), 2164-2181.

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obtained from the scale was announced as 0.90. The Turkish version of the scale demonstrates robust psychometric properties, including very good construct validity (RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = 0.95, GFI = 0.92).

Subjective Vitality Scale

This scale was developed by Ryan and Frederick (1997). The Turkish adaptation of the scale was made by Akin et al. (2012). The second item of the scale, which has a total of seven items, is reverse scored. In this scale, which is scored in a seven-point grading manner, a total score can be obtained after the reverse item is arranged. If the participants receive a score close to 49, it can be interpreted that their subjective vitality has increased. The Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was reported to be 0.84. The Turkish version of the scale demonstrates robust psychometric properties, including very good construct validity (RMSEA = 0.047, CFI = 1.00, GFI = 0.99).

Data analysis

In this study, firstly, descriptive statistics, normality assumption, reliability analysis, and correlation analysis were performed. Before testing the hypotheses, Mahalanobis distance value and outlier detection were performed; the determined extreme values were removed from the analysis to ensure the robustness of the results. Additionally, multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values, which indicated acceptable levels below the critical thresholds (VIF < 10, tolerance > 0.1). The Durbin-Watson coefficient was also calculated to evaluate the presence of autocorrelation in the residuals. Then, conditional process analysis was used to test the hypotheses of the research. In this context, Model 4 of Hayes' (2018) PROCESS macro was used, which allows testing of simple mediation models. This analysis was performed with Hayes' (2018) PROCESS macro plugin. In this regression-based analysis, possible mediator variables that play a role in the relationship between variables are examined in the hypothetical model. In addition, gender and age variables were included in this model as covariance variables in this study. For the PROCESS macro, the normality, linearity, multicollinearity problems and the relationships between the variables were examined. All these showed that the assumptions required for the PROCESS analysis were met. Following this analysis, the significance of mediation was examined with the bootstrapping method at a 95% confidence interval in 5,000 resamples (Hayes ve Preacher, 2014).

Results

In this section, firstly the preliminary analysis findings are given. Within the scope of preliminary analyses, skewness and kurtosis values of the variables were calculated for the normality assumption. The skewness value for the three variables is between -0.203 and 0.184 and the kurtosis value is between -0.782 and -0.113. This finding revealed that all three variables demonstrated normal distribution. Outliers were examined using Mahalanobis distance; extreme values were excluded to ensure the accuracy of the analysis. The internal consistency of the research variables, as measured by Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, ranged from 0.849 to 0.883, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability. In addition, multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values, all of which were within acceptable limits (VIF = 1.744, tolerance = 0.573). The Durbin-Watson

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coefficient was also calculated to evaluate autocorrelation and this value was found to be 0.074. Finally, in the correlation analysis, it was determined that subjective vitality had a negative relationship with social media addiction ($r = -0.260$, $p < 0.001$) and phubbing ($r = -0.254$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, social media addiction was significantly positively related to phubbing ($r = 0.653$, $p < 0.001$). All these findings are given in Table 2.

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Table 2.

Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations for the study variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Social media addiction	—		
2. Phubbing	0.653**	—	
3. Subjective vitality	-0.260**	-0.254**	—
Mean	17.026	44.588	29.506
SD	5.798	13.803	8.461
Skewness	-0.110	0.184	-0.203
Kurtosis	-0.782	-0.333	-0.113
Cronbach's α	0.849	0.877	0.883

Note. ** $p < 0.01$

Following these calculations, conditional process analysis was performed to test the hypotheses of the research. In the analyses, gender and age were included in the model as covariance variables on the dependent variable. The path coefficient between social media addiction and subjective vitality is -0.2510 ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, the path coefficient from social media addiction to phubbing is 0.6377 ($p < 0.001$), and from phubbing to subjective vitality is -0.1535 ($p < 0.05$). When phubbing was included as a mediator variable in this hypothetical model, the path coefficient between social media addiction and subjective vitality decreased to -0.1531 ($p < 0.05$). This decrease in the path coefficient reveals that phubbing plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality (see Figure 1). In the bootstrapping analysis performed for the significance of this mediation, it was determined that there was no zero between the lower and upper values, and the mediating role of phubbing was proven to be significant at the 95% confidence interval (bootstrap = -0.0979 , 95% CI $[-0.1843 - -0.0060]$ (see Table 3)).

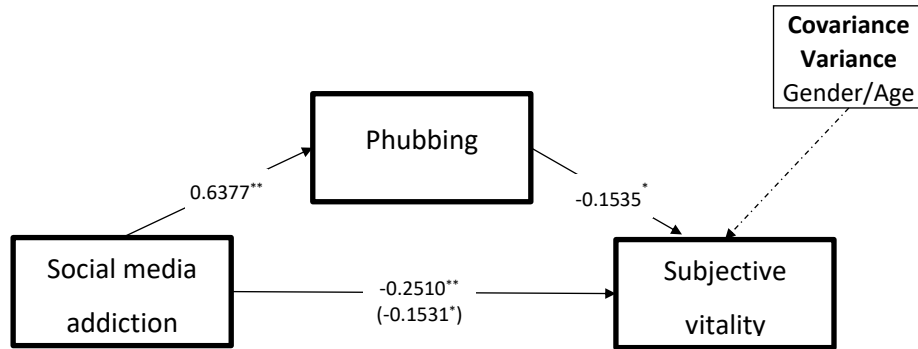


Figure 1. Standardized factor loading for the partially-mediated hypothetical model

Note. $N = 352$; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$



Table 3.
Standardized bootstrapping coefficients for the model

Model pathways	Coefficient*	95% CI	
		Lower	Upper
Indirect effect			
Social media addiction → Phubbing → Subjective vitality	-0.0979	-0.1843	-0.0060

*Because the CI do not cover zero, the coefficients are significant.

Discussion

In this study, the mediating role of phubbing behaviors in the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality was examined. In this context, the main findings are as follows: (1) social media addiction has a direct significant effect on subjective vitality and (2) phubbing behaviors mediate the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality. In summary, the hypotheses of the study were confirmed.

The findings confirmed the first hypothesis (H_1) of this research. The study found that social media addiction predicted subjective vitality positively and significantly. This finding indicates that using social media at an addictive level has a negative influence on subjective vitality. There is no study in the literature examining the effect of social media addiction on subjective vitality. However, when examined in terms of concepts close to these variables, there are many studies showing that problematic technology use behaviors have a negative impact on personal well-being (Andreassen et al., 2016; Ponnusamy et al., 2020; Zhao, 2021). Therefore, this finding obtained from the research is compatible with the literature. In addition, subjective vitality is considered a key component of eudaimonic well-being and is defined as the conscious experience of possessing energy and aliveness (Ryan ve Frederick, 1997). According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), subjective vitality reflects the fulfillment of basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—and its reduction is seen as an indicator of psychological distress and poor functioning. A decrease in subjective vitality may therefore pose risks for emotional regulation, motivation, and overall mental health. This theoretical framework provides important grounding for interpreting the negative effects of social media addiction on subjective vitality.

Social media addiction has negative effects on individuals' mental health and lives, and this causes symptoms (tolerance, mood swings, relapse, withdrawal, and conflict) to appear that will reduce their subjective vitality (Andreassen ve Pallesen, 2014). Individuals who use social media addictively state that they feel better when spending time on social media applications (Błachnio et al., 2016). According to the neuropsychological chain model (Young ve De Abreu, 2011), this state of feeling good and enthusiasm turns into a habit and will end with spending more time on social media. Excessive time spent on social media, uncontrolled use, and isolation from real life have negative effects on personal well-being (Kuss ve Griffiths, 2017). One of these effects is subjective vitality.

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However, it is important to note that some studies suggest social media use may temporarily enhance positive affect or perceived vitality, especially through social connection or entertainment (Verduyn et al., 2017). Nevertheless, such effects are typically short-lived and may not reflect sustained psychological well-being. In contrast, addictive and uncontrolled use, as addressed in the current study, is associated with long-term negative outcomes such as diminished subjective vitality. Therefore, the findings of this study are positioned within the context of problematic rather than normative or recreational use.

In the study, phubbing behaviors partially mediated the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality. More comprehensively, increased social media addiction was associated with increased phubbing behaviors, which in turn predicted lower subjective vitality. People who use social media at an addictive level constantly want to be active and interactive in social media applications (Karadağ et al., 2015). This is an important need for them. In order to meet these needs, they can actively use social media in different environments. This may cause them to check their smartphones frequently in social environments and damage their social relationships (Vanden Abeele et al., 2020). Thus, social media addiction may increase phubbing behaviors (Capilla Garrido et al., 2021). As a matter of fact, there are many studies in the literature that support this finding (Al-Saggaf et al., 2019; Ivanova et al., 2020; Nikel et al., n.d.). The increase in phubbing behaviors can increase the negative effects on the mental health of individuals (Kadylak, 2019). Existing research demonstrates that phubbing behaviors increase psychological symptoms (Guazzini et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2017) and decrease personal well-being (Joshi, 2024). These findings indicate that phubbing behaviors have negative effects on mental well-being. Therefore, these findings confirm the second hypothesis (H_2) of the current study. Moreover, cultural factors may play a significant role in how social media addiction and phubbing behaviors manifest and influence mental well-being. Considering that this study was conducted in Türkiye with university students, it is important to note that collectivist cultural characteristics and strong social norms around interpersonal respect and presence may intensify the negative social and psychological consequences of phubbing. In collectivist contexts like Türkiye, behaviors that disrupt in-person interactions—such as phubbing—may be perceived as more disrespectful or socially harmful, potentially exacerbating their effects on well-being. Future studies should further examine these cultural dynamics to deepen our understanding of phubbing's impact across different sociocultural settings.

Implications

Based on the findings of this research, various implications can be made and suggestions can be offered to readers. Firstly, considering the direct and indirect effects of social media addiction on subjective vitality, it may be recommended to prepare psycho-educational programs that will help individuals use social media in a healthy and controlled manner. Considering the importance of phubbing behaviors in social media addiction behavior, it may be important to include healthy social relationships in psycho-educational programs. Finally, qualitative research studies can be planned to evaluate the experiences of individuals in order to make a comprehensive assessment of the role of phubbing behaviors in the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality.



Limitations

This research has some limitations. First, data were collected using self-report measures, which may introduce common method biases such as memory recall and social desirability biases. Although measures were taken to reduce these biases during the research process (e.g., informed consent, protection of participant anonymity, emphasis on honest responses, use of validated measurement tools), response biases may still have influenced the results. Second, because this study used a cross-sectional approach, it is difficult to determine causal links. It is recommended to use experimental and longitudinal study approaches to further investigate the links between these variables. Additionally, only quantitative data were used to assess the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality. Studies using mixed methods that examine qualitative and quantitative data together can provide more comprehensive findings for subsequent research.

Conclusion

This study supports previous findings by showing a relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality. By revealing that phubbing behaviors are an independent mediator in this relationship, we have provided a better understanding of this relationship. Additionally, this research has shown that social media addiction may lead to an increased frequency of phubbing behaviors, which may reduce subjective vitality. These findings demonstrate the importance of protecting and improving the mental health of individuals in order to better cope with social media addiction and reduce the psychological problems that this situation may cause. In addition, this study contributes to both academic literature and mental health professionals by identifying the variables that mediate the relationship between social media addiction and subjective vitality.



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