



ÖZGÜN ARAŞTIRMA / ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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The Mediating Role of Social Loneliness Level in the Effect of Fear of Missing Out on Digital Addiction: A Study for Academicians

Gündemi Kaçırma Korkusunun Dijital Bağımlılığa Etkisinde Sosyal Yalnızlık Düzeyinin Aracılık Rolü: Akademisyenlere Yönelik Bir Çalışma

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Abstract

Aim: To determine the interaction between fear of missing out (FoMO), digital addiction, and social loneliness level, the question “does social loneliness mediate the effect of fear of missing out on digital addiction?” is sought.

Method: Within the scope of the research, a survey was conducted with 614 academics working at universities in Türkiye using the quantitative research method. The obtained data were analyzed using AMOS 24 and SPSS 26 programs. Confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation model analysis, correlation analysis, and frequency analysis were performed during the analysis process.

Findings: It was determined that fear of missing out (FoMO) increased digital addiction and social loneliness. In addition, it was observed that increasing social loneliness levels strengthened digital addiction. During the research process, it was determined that social loneliness played a mediating role in the effect of FoMO on digital addiction.

Conclusion: When the literature was examined, no other study was found that examined the interactions of fear of missing out (FoMO), digital addiction, and social loneliness level in the same research model. It can be said that this study is original by verifying a research model that has not been tried before. Based on the findings, practical and theoretical suggestions are given in the conclusion section.

Keywords

FoMO, digital addiction, social loneliness, quantitative research, academics.

ETHICAL STATEMENT: For the collection of research data, Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee permission was obtained with the decision number 2024/05 dated 04.06.2024.

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Öz

Amaç: Gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusu (FoMO), dijital bağımlılık ve sosyal yalnızlık düzeyi arasındaki etkileşimi belirlemesi amacıyla “gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusunun dijital bağımlılığa etkisinde sosyal yalnızlık düzeyi aracılık ediyor mu?” sorusuna cevap aranmaktadır.

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Yöntem: Araştırma kapsamında nicel araştırma yöntemiyle Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde görev yapmakta olan 614 akademisyenle anket yürütülmüştür. Elde edilen veriler AMOS 24 ve SPSS 26 programlarıyla analiz edilmiştir. Analiz sürecinde doğrulayıcı faktör analizi, yapısal eşitlik modeli analizi, korelasyon analizi ve frekans analizi yapılmıştır.

Bulgular: Gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusunun (FoMO), dijital bağımlılığı ve sosyal yalnızlığı artırdığı belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca, sosyal yalnızlık düzeylerinin yükselmesi dijital bağımlılığı güçlendirdiği görülmüştür. Araştırma sürecinde, sosyal yalnızlığın FoMO'nun dijital bağımlılık üzerindeki etkisinde aracılık rolü oynadığı belirlenmiştir.

Sonuç: Literatür incelendiğinde araştırmada ele alınan Gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusu (FoMO), dijital bağımlılık ve sosyal yalnızlık düzeyinin aynı araştırma modelinde etkileşimlerini inceleyen başka bir çalışmaya rastlanılamamıştır. Daha önce denenmemiş bir araştırma modelinin doğrulanması ile bu çalışmanın özgün olduğu söylenebilir. Bulgulara dayanarak, sonuç bölümünde pratik ve teorik önerilere yer verilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

FoMO, dijital bağımlılık, sosyal yalnızlık, nicel araştırma, akademisyenler

Introduction

Technological developments have caused transformations in human life. These transformations have also taken their place on digital platforms through various applications and updates. Today, the technological transformations and developments mentioned allow people to meet their information needs, spend their free time, and benefit from online conveniences. Considering that these opportunities have had a great impact, especially in the field of communication between the past and the present, they can cause an increase in interaction as well as the diversity of communication compared to past communication methods. It can be said that this interaction has turned into addiction in individuals with the intensification of digital environments. The increasing use of social media in particular has led to the change of many areas of life and the emergence of new concepts such as FoMO. According to the concept known as Fear of missing out, individuals may experience unhappiness as well as a sense of curiosity as a result of their desire to be informed about the events happening around them turning into anxiety over time.

Today, due to the increasing levels of loneliness of individuals and its effects on human life, the concept of loneliness has become an important topic that attracts the attention of researchers (Cacioppo and Cacioppo 2018). In daily life, loneliness, the feeling of emptiness experienced with the lack of social relationships; can sometimes be seen as the emotional intensity experienced as a result of the combination of the feelings of shame, helplessness, sadness, melancholy, and sadness that individuals perceive towards themselves with loneliness and as negative perceptions that include individuals' subjective evaluations of the quality and quantity of their social relationships (Yanguas, Pinazo-Henandis, and Tarazona-Santabalbina 2018). Individuals who feel lonely will feel more dependent on digital platforms in terms of socializing and eliminating their loneliness, and their digital addiction will increase with the widespread use of these platforms (Peper and Harvey 2018; Masur 2021; Sun 2023). On the other hand, individuals who meet their socialization needs with digital tools will not be able to eliminate their loneliness without digital tools over time. On the other hand, as a result of digital socialization, individuals will become curious about the events taking place around them, and over time, this curiosity may turn into anxiety about missing the agenda.

Within the scope of the research, the social loneliness of individuals in society was addressed within the scope of FoMO and digital addiction perceptions. In this research, analyses were made regarding the negative effects of fear of missing out, digital addiction, and social loneliness on individuals. In this context, the main problem of the research is that individuals in society sometimes experience loneliness due to their negative thoughts and behaviors, and individuals who try to reduce these perceptions with digital addiction will become more isolated and isolated from society by not communicating with their surroundings due to the fear of missing out feeling. The research aims to determine whether fear of missing out perceptions occurs due to social loneliness in individuals and whether this situation causes digital addiction. In this direction, the main question of the research was determined as "Does social loneliness play a mediating role in the effect of fear of missing out on digital addiction?" An application was conducted with a sample of academics working at a university (Turkey) to answer the research question. The main reason for selecting research data from academics is that academics have a habit of following the agenda due to their profession, and this habit can turn into digital addiction over time, and the social loneliness levels of these individuals can also cause digital addiction. The idea is that by determining these negative perceptions of academics who educate young individuals in society and offering solution suggestions, academics can provide better education and raise more qualified individuals.

Conceptual Framework

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

Fear of missing out (FoMO), in other words, the fear of missing out on current developments, is expressed as the perception of missing out on something and is seen especially in people who actively use the internet and social media and is considered as the result of anxiety that occurs when they are away from the information-giving/receiving cycle (Eşitti 2015). In another definition, FoMO is defined as the individual seeing photos of their friends on social media platforms, not seeing themselves in the photos, and feeling negative emotions because of this. FoMO has been explained as the feeling of missing out on the lives that others share on social media and are worth seeing, and it has been stated that FoMO is associated with unhealthy social media use (Riordan et al. 2021). FoMO syndrome is a fear that others are participating in exciting experiences at different times, and it highlights the feeling of exclusion. This situation is related to having the belief that others live a more satisfying life (Abu-Shanab et al. 2024; Brailovskaia and Margraf 2024; Jabeen et al. 2023; Yin et al. 2024). Therefore, FoMO, one of the disorders brought about by problematic internet use, is a phenomenon mostly limited to social media and is characterized by the desire to stay in constant connection with what others are doing. When individuals share about their lives in virtual environments, it creates the impression that others are living better, causing anxiety and worry (Alutaybi et al. 2020; Koc et al. 2023; Servidio et al. 2024). Thus, the individual can enter a depressive mood by comparing himself with others. This can cause psychological problems such as fatigue, unhappiness, and sleep disorders (Tanhan et al. 2022).

Social networks are particularly attractive to young individuals to provide high levels of social participation. Young people can satisfy their need to belong by using social networking sites. However, when they feel like they do not belong and miss out on shared experiences, they are also at a high risk of experiencing anxiety (Oberst et al. 2017). The way applications operate, young people's communication styles, their understanding and experience of living in the moment, their desire to follow others, and excessive use of the internet cause addiction and anxiety. FoMO, which occurs with the increase in smartphone use, is an anxiety state that occurs with addiction and develops when content from others is not seen and is related to the thought of being deprived of experiences. It is a common disorder, especially among young people who are too busy with social media and smartphones (Alutaybi et al. 2020; Barry and Wong 2020; Hattingh et al. 2022; Roberts and David 2020). This discomfort associated with social media and smartphone use causes people to actively feel a sense of addiction (Alshakhsi et al. 2023; Hetz et al. 2015).

Digital Addiction

Addiction is defined as "the inability of a person to control himself or herself and his or her impulses in quitting a habit or action to a substance that causes serious emotional, mental or physiological reactions" (Byun et al. 2009, 204). The factors that cause addiction may initially make the person feel a sense of happiness, but over time, when the situation goes out of the person's control and especially when the person becomes aware of this addiction, the initial feeling of happiness can be replaced by restlessness, physical and psychological discomfort. There are various types of addiction today (Bazrafshan and Yarbakhsh 2024; Gonçalves et al. 2023; Singh and Singh, 2019). Digital addiction, which is one of the types of addiction, is an addiction that has the potential to increase day by day. "Digital addiction; refers to the psychological fear that people experience when they are separated from their digital devices, expressed as nomophobia or No Mobile Phone Phobia" (Bhattacharya et al. 2019).

The concept of digital addiction is a very broad concept such as addiction to the internet, social media, technology, and video games (Vaghela 2016, 3). Digital addiction is defined as a result of constant interaction with developing technology and at the same time starting to suffer from the negative aspects of this interaction (Al-Mamun et al. 2024; Gao et al. 2023; Han et al. 2023). Digital addiction has begun to take center stage in the lives of many individuals in the time we are in and is accepted to have a direct impact on the dynamics of daily life in this direction. Types of digital addiction are internet addiction, social media addiction, digital game addiction, and smartphone addiction (Bazrafshan and Yarbakhsh 2024; Han, Nagduar, and Yu 2023; Singh and Singh 2019; Vaghela 2016).

Social Loneliness Level

While loneliness, when viewed as a concept, means the individual's aloneness, it is also a fact that technology pushes people to loneliness today. In the past, the concept of loneliness meant not having friends, but today this concept can be expressed as a person playing with technological devices in their world. Loneliness is a concept defined by researchers as the cognitive awareness of the individual's lack of close and social relationships, hopelessness, longing, and emotional emptiness reactions that accompany awareness (Asher and Paquette 2003). According to Peplau and Perlman (1982), loneliness is perceived based on human relationships and is defined as an emotion resulting from the person's actual relationships not meeting their expectations in this regard. Loneliness is not simply an emotional state arising from a state of physical loneliness, a person can also experience loneliness when

they are with others (Uruk and Demir 2003; Dykstra 2009; Barjaková, Garnero, and d’Hombres 2023). Loneliness is experienced in two ways: social and emotional loneliness (Erevik et al. 2023; Penning, Wu, and Hou 2024). According to de Jong Gierveld, Van Tilburg, and Dykstra (2006), loneliness is a negative and subjective experience that develops as a result of the individual’s quantitative and qualitative evaluations of their existing and standard relationships. In addition, the concept of loneliness is defined as a feeling of lack or emptiness (Leigh-Hunt et al. 2017), which includes the individual’s perceptions of not having social relationships at the expected level and their inadequacy in personal relationships (Heinrich and Gullone, 2006).

Social loneliness is caused by a lack of a social network or not being a member of a group where common interests and activities are shared. This problem can be solved by reaching a satisfying social network. However, emotional loneliness is caused by the absence or loss of a close attachment relationship, and in this type of loneliness, close and sincere relationships with other people cannot be established. Adolescence, which is one of the developmental periods of the individual, is passed comfortably for some individuals, while it is experienced with great problems for others. Adolescence is defined as a period when loneliness is experienced intensely (Erevik et al. 2023; Penning, Wu, and Hou 2024; Scott et al. 2024; Labrague, JAAD, and Falguera 2021). The reasons for this intense and widespread loneliness in adolescence are classified in three ways. Tendencies defined as the characteristic features of the lonely young person (shyness, low self-esteem, poor social skills) are one of the causes of loneliness. Another reason is developmental changes and the impact of these changes on needs and relationships. The third reason is social structures and cultural processes, in short, the social position of the individual at his/her age (Rook 1985; Russell et al. 1984; Rokach and Brock 1997). Loneliness is expressed as a situation that occurs as a result of the “identity crisis” experienced by adolescents. According to Ericson’s (1963) theory of developmental periods, adolescents experience a period of identity-gaining role confusion and intimacy-gaining isolation. Ericson stated that individuals are ready to establish close relationships and attachments with other people after identity acquisition. If a successful identity is not acquired, individuals experience isolation and loneliness (Munley 1975; Brown and Lowis 2003; Knight 2017; Kropf and Greene 2017).

In recent years, mobile devices have begun to primarily shape our lives. These devices, which at first only included functions such as phone calls and sending text messages, have now entered a major transformation process. The most widely used information and communication technologies are laptops, tablet computers, and smartphones (Özbek et al. 2014). Among mobile devices, smartphones have now become no different from computers (Ada and Tatlı 2012). Naturally, smartphones are becoming increasingly widespread due to reasons such as new features added to smartphones and easy portability. In addition to operations that can be done with normal phones such as phone calls and text messages, many applications such as image and sound recording, data transmission, internet access, e-mail, instant message transmission, viewing of digital content, mobile applications, social media tools and games can be used with smartphones (Busch et al. 2021; Ellis et al. 2019; LiKamWa et al. 2013).

Relationships Between FoMO, Digital Addiction and Social Loneliness Level

The intense penetration of social media into people’s lives has had a very serious impact on people’s lives. With increasing sharing, social media addiction has caused users to worry about missing out on sharing and information. This situation has led to the formation of FoMO, especially in users of the post-90s generation (Wang et al. 2022). Depending on the idea that other people live more fulfilling lives, causes the person to become more dependent on online virtual environments. In contrast, it can be defined as a person’s strong desire to closely follow people in their virtual environment. FoMO is more common in individuals who use social media extensively. The reason for this situation is that these individuals constantly follow what others are doing and sharing through social media. While individuals receive thousands of likes on social media, these people receive much fewer likes. Therefore, what others are doing is very important for individuals experiencing FoMO (Brailovskaia and Margraf 2024; Wu et al. 2024; Jabeen et al. 2023). Similarly, Erciş, Deligoz, and Mutlu (2021) described FoMO as the anxiety felt by a person to be aware of the magnificent experiences that another person may have.

Individuals who are constantly curious about what people are doing can also be sensitive to the warnings of technological devices. Hodkinson (2019) stated that FoMO can be experienced if the individual feels obliged to answer the phone when the phone rings. The longer the phone rings, the longer the individual’s FoMO experience can be experienced. The word fear in the expression FoMO refers to the anxiety that causes an individual who does not have to do something to feel obliged to do that thing. Therefore, when an individual is invited to a place that may be important on social media, despite having a very important job, they may feel obliged to accept the invitation because their loneliness level is high. On the other hand, an individual who is curious about what people are doing will both experience digital addiction and FoMO behavior may increase as their loneliness level is also high. This feeling of “I shouldn’t miss the developments” causes the individual to make irrational decisions. In this respect, FoMO plays an

important role in the source of many disorders. According to (Skierkowski and Wood 2012), which focuses on social media use, which is seen as the cause of digital addiction, there are two reasons why adolescents and young people use social media and especially their messaging behaviors: The first of these is that social media can be accessed easily and quickly and can be independent of parental control, in other words, it allows individuals to act autonomously. Similarly, it can be considered as another reason that it provides easy access to the lives of others using social media and serves as an emotional support tool for its users (Hetz, Dawson, and Cullen 2015). In this context, it can be said that digital addiction increases in individuals experiencing emotional loneliness.

Hypotheses were developed by considering the existential theory underlying the concept of social loneliness, which is the subject of the research. In existential theory, which emphasizes what a person is, that is, his existence, theorists have addressed the meaning and paradoxical structure of loneliness for individuals in a deeper way and evaluated loneliness as a painful, inevitable, negative, but also necessary situation for individual maturity and development (Paula, Zengin, and Kizilgeçit 2011). Loneliness is a part of human existence and human existence cannot be thought of beyond loneliness. Loneliness is a common potential feature of humans. What is important is to use loneliness positively to get to know and develop ourselves (Ettema, Derksen, and van Leeuwen 2010; Van Tilburg 2021; Yalom 1999). A person's failure to accept their loneliness and feelings negatively affects individuals by causing pathology. Loneliness anxiety is a negative experience that leads to human alienation (Akopov 2024; Alshehri et al. 2024). Lonely individuals struggling with existence due to loneliness anxiety tend to socialize with digital tools to relieve their loneliness. At this point, individuals may become addicted to digital tools and platforms during the socialization phase (Ime, Akyıl, and Caglar 2024; Wang and Zeng 2024). On the other hand, while individuals experience digital addiction due to the need to socialize in their struggle for existence, they also want to learn about the environment they are in. This desire may turn into a FoMO perception in individuals over time. In this direction, research models and hypotheses have been developed by considering the existential theory (Figure 1).

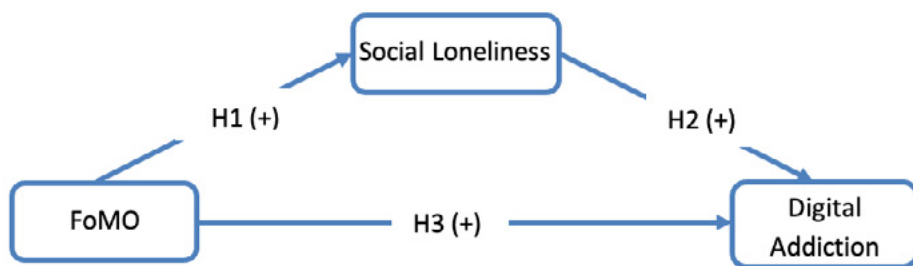


Figure 1. Research Model

The hypotheses created according to the purpose of the study and the proposed research model are as follows:

H1: Fear of missing out has a positive effect on the level of social loneliness.

H2: The level of social loneliness has a positive effect on digital addiction.

H3: Fear of missing out has a positive effect on digital addiction.

H4: The level of social loneliness has a mediating effect on the effect of fear of missing out on digital addiction.

Method

In scientific research, a research model should be systematically designed after determining a research problem and hypotheses should be developed within the framework of the research model (Tutar and Erdem 2020, 71). Within the scope of the research, the quantitative research method, which was designed with the relational screening method under the guidance of the general screening model, was applied.

Data Collection Tool and Analysis Methods

To obtain data within the scope of the research, online survey techniques and Google Form survey applications were used. The survey form was applied in four stages. The first section included 6 questions regarding demographic variables. In the following sections, the 9-item "FoMO" scale developed by Zhang, Jiménez, and Cicala (2020) and adapted to Turkish by Çelik and Özkara (2022) was applied to measure the participants' Fear of Missing Out perceptions. In the following section, the 10-item scale developed by Seema et al. (2022) and adapted to Turkish by Türk, Batmaz, and Keleş (2024) was used to measure the perception of digital addiction. Finally, the 15-item scale developed by DiTommaso and Spinner (1993) and adapted to Turkish by Akgül (2020) was used to measure the perception of social loneliness. Scales were asked to the participants in the 5-point Likert type format: 1= "Strongly Disagree", 2= "Disagree", 3= "Neither Agree Nor Disagree", 4= "Agree", 5= "Strongly Agree".

The Universe and Sample of the Study

The universe of study consists of academicians working at the university. Due to the lack of access to everyone in the universe and time and cost constraints, a non-random convenience sampling method was applied. With convenience sampling, the researcher tries to collect data from everyone he can reach by including everyone he can reach in the sample (Tutar and Erdem 2022). According to the information received from a university on 20.06.2024, the universe of the study consists of 1499 academicians working at the university. Within the scope of the study, data could be collected from 647 people through online survey and face-to-face survey forms.

The sample size within the scope of the study was determined with the $n/N \times 100$ formula (Tutar and Erdem, 2022, 267). According to this formula, $647/1499 \times 100$ was performed and as a result, 43.1% was obtained. This ratio shows that it is sufficient to represent the universe (Altunışık et al. 2007; Tutar and Erdem 2022). The research data were obtained from the relevant university between 01.04.2024 and 02.07.2024. For the collection of research data, Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee permission was obtained with the decision number 2024/05 dated 04.06.2024.

Findings

Demographic Findings

The demographic information of the participants in the study is explained in the table below (Table 1).

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage Value (%)	Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage Value (%)
Gender			Marital Status		
Female	325	52,9	Married	403	65,6
Male	289	47,1	Single	211	34,4
TOTAL	614		TOTAL	614	
Education			Age		
Bachelor's Degree	129	21,0	18-25 years	157	25,6
Master's Degree	262	42,7	26-35 years	142	23,1
PhD	223	36,3	36-45 years	173	28,3
			46-55 years	101	16,4
			56 and above	41	6,6
TOTAL	614		TOTAL	614	
Title			Seniority		
Professor	72	11,7	1-10 years	112	18,2
Associate Prof.	165	26,9	11-20 years	131	21,3
PhD	194	31,6	21-30 years	159	25,9
Res. Assoc.	160	26,1	31-40 years	172	28,0
Lecturer	23	3,7	41 years and above	40	6,6
TOTAL	614		TOTAL	614	

As can be seen in Table 1, 52.9% of the participants are female and 47.1% are male. According to marital status, 65.6% of the participants are married and 34.4% are single. According to education level, 21% of the participants have a bachelor's degree, 43.7% have a master's degree, and 36.3% have a doctorate. According to the age variable, 25.6% of the participants are 18-25 years old, 23.1% are 26-35 years old, 28.3% are 36-45 years old, 16.4% are 46-55 years old, and 6.6% are 56 years old and over. According to their titles, 11.7% of the participants are professors, 26.9% are associate professors, 31.6% are doctors, 26.1% are research assistants, and 3.7% work as lecturers. Finally, when the professional seniority of the participants was examined, it was determined that 18.2% had 1-10 years of seniority, 21.3% had 11-20 years of seniority, 25.9% had 21-30 years of seniority, 28% had 31-40 years of seniority, and 6.6% had 41 years or more of seniority.

Reliability and Validity

The Alpha coefficient was determined to determine the structural reliability of the scales used in the research. The alpha value of the FoMO scale was determined as 0,94, the coefficient of the social loneliness scale as 0,91, and the digital addiction scale as 0.92. According to these results, the scales were shown to be reliable. Confirmatory factor

analysis (CFA) was performed on the scale expressions to determine the validity of the research scales. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that the loading of the 9th expression in the fear of missing scale was lower than 0,5, so these expressions were removed from the analysis. The index values were found by re-analysis and then a single factor analysis was applied. A comparison was made between the two single-factor analyses with confirmatory factor analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Model-Data Fit Values

	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$	df	χ^2/df	GFI	NFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Single factor model	5259,81	-	527	9,98	,398	,591	,615	,591	,149
Research model p<0.01	1023,21	4236,60	487	2,10	,872	,915	,954	,950	,052

***RMSEA (Root mean square error of approximation);** A value below 0.08 indicates a good model. (Browne and Cudeck 1992)

χ^2/df (Relative Ki-Kare); The value must be between 1 and 5. (Marsh and Hocevar 1985)

GFI (Goodness of fit index); A value close to 1 indicates a strong model. (Tanaka and Huba, 1985)

NFI (Normated fit index); A value close to 1 indicates a strong model. (Bentler and Bonett 1980)

CFI (Comperative fit index); A value close to 1 indicates a strong model. (McDonald and Marsh 1990)

TLI (Tucker-Lewis indeksi); A value close to 1 indicates a strong model. (Bentler and Bonett 1980)

The confirmatory factor analysis results indicate that the research model, which includes three scale models, demonstrates good fit validity as shown by several key metrics: χ^2/SD , RMSEA, NFI, TLI, GFI, and CFI. The χ^2 value for the research model was significant ($p<0.01$), and the χ^2/df value was 2.10, which is below the acceptable threshold of 5. The fit values for the models were as follows: GFI = 0.872, TLI = 0.950, NFI = 0.915, RMSEA = 0.052, and CFI = 0.954. These results indicate that the research model is valid. Furthermore, a Chi-Square Test was conducted to compare the single-factor model with the three-factor model. This analysis revealed a significant difference between the two structures, confirming that there was no common method bias present in the research model and analysis results (MacKenzie and Podsakoff 2012).

Table 3. Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Values of Variables

	Mean	S.D.	CR(t)	AVE	1	2	3
Fear of Missing Out	3,23	1,367	0,943	0,814	-		
Social Loneliness	2,54	1,365	0,951	0,766	0,380**	-	
Digital Addiction	3,49	1,316	0,920	0,735	0,723**	0,435**	-

Note: Significance level (two-sided) *0.05 **0.01 ***0.001

To assess how well the research model aligns with the various dimensions of the scale, two distinct methods were employed in this analysis. These methods specifically focused on examining convergent validity, which evaluates the degree to which the model shares a strong correlation with other measures of the same construct, and discriminator validity, which investigates the extent to which the model remains distinct and separate from other constructs. This dual approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the model's compatibility with the defined scale dimensions. Fornell and Larcker (1981) explained that confirmatory factor analysis is used to assess convergent validity in research. They noted that the average explained variance (AVE) values should be checked, with a recommended threshold of above 0.5. In this study, the AVE values for the three dimensions of the research model exceeded 0.5 (see Table 3). To assess discriminant validity, the correlation values between the research scales should be below 0.80, and the construct reliability (CR) should be over 0.70 (Kline, 2014). The analysis indicated that the CR for the three dimensions was greater than 0.70, while the correlation values between the scales were below 0.80, confirming the reliability of the measurements (Fornell and Larcker 1981; Herr and Cramer 1988). Table 4 and Figure 2 present the factor loadings and parametric t values for the scale indicators.

Table 4. Standardized Factor Loadings and CR (t) Values for Scale Expressions

	Scale Expressions	Standardized Factor Loadings	CR(t)
FM3	I know that being active on social media is important and enjoyable, so I feel anxious when I can't use it.	0,903	14,766
FM2	When I'm not online, I feel inferior to other users.	0,887	10,841
FM5	This lack of access makes me feel regretful.	0,873	11,235
FM6	I also worry that my social circle views me as insignificant when I'm not engaged on social media.	0,864	11,778
FM1	When I am not active on social media, I feel anxious.	0,860	11,977
FM4	When I am not able to log in to social media, I feel sad.	0,856	11,811
FM8	When I am not active on social media, I feel excluded by my social group.	0,634	12,127
FM7	When I am not active on social media, I feel like I am not worthy of the social group I am in.	0,624	15,152
DA8	I can't take my eyes off my digital device during classes.	0,920	13,021
DA10	Before I fall asleep, I'm busy with my device while I'm in bed (playing games, chatting, browsing social media, etc.).	0,918	13,234
DA7	While eating something, I'm busy with a digital device (playing games, chatting, browsing social media, etc.).	0,908	12,821
DA5	When I put my digital device aside, I felt the urge to use it again.	0,907	12,729
DA6	I keep my eyes on my digital device even when talking to someone.	0,901	12,623
DA4	I use my digital device for more time than I originally planned.	0,895	12,590
DA9	I keep my device busy while walking (playing games, chatting, browsing social media, etc.).	0,892	13,424
DA3	If I can't use my digital devices, I get cranky.	0,880	12,321
DA1	If I can't use my digital devices, I feel bored.	0,859	12,363
DA2	If I can't see what my friends are posting on social media, I feel restless.	0,832	12,860
SL1	I often feel lonely even when I'm with my family.	0,673	13,142
SL6	I have a partner who offers me the support and encouragement I need.	0,736	12,696
SL9	I can rely on my friends for assistance.	0,690	13,038
SL5	They understand my thoughts and the reasons behind my actions.	0,689	13,044
SL11	I feel like a part of my family.	0,677	13,117
SL7	I don't have any friends with whom I share my views, but I wish I did.	0,675	13,131
SL2	I feel like a part of a group of friends.	0,643	13,273
SL14	I have a lover/spouse to whose happiness I contribute.	0,642	13,299
SL13	I wish I had friends who truly understood me.	0,641	13,303
SL12	My family cares about me, and I feel close to them.	0,635	13,331
SL15	However, I long for a deeper emotional connection to fulfill my emotional needs.	0,632	13,326
SL10	I do have a partner with whom I share my deepest thoughts and feelings.	0,631	13,350
SL8	Despite this, I still wish I had a family member to rely on for support and encouragement.	0,627	13,367
SL3	I wish I had friends who truly understood me.	0,626	13,344
SL4	My family cares about me, and I feel close to them.	0,589	13,514

When the factor loadings for the scale expressions are found to be higher than 0.5, it is expressed that the scale measures the relevant concepts. Within the scope of this research, it is seen that the standardized factor loadings of the scale expressions are higher than 0.5. In addition, the fact that the parametric t values of the factor loadings vary between 10.84 and 15.15 shows that the validity of the research model is ensured (Hair Jnr et al. 2010).

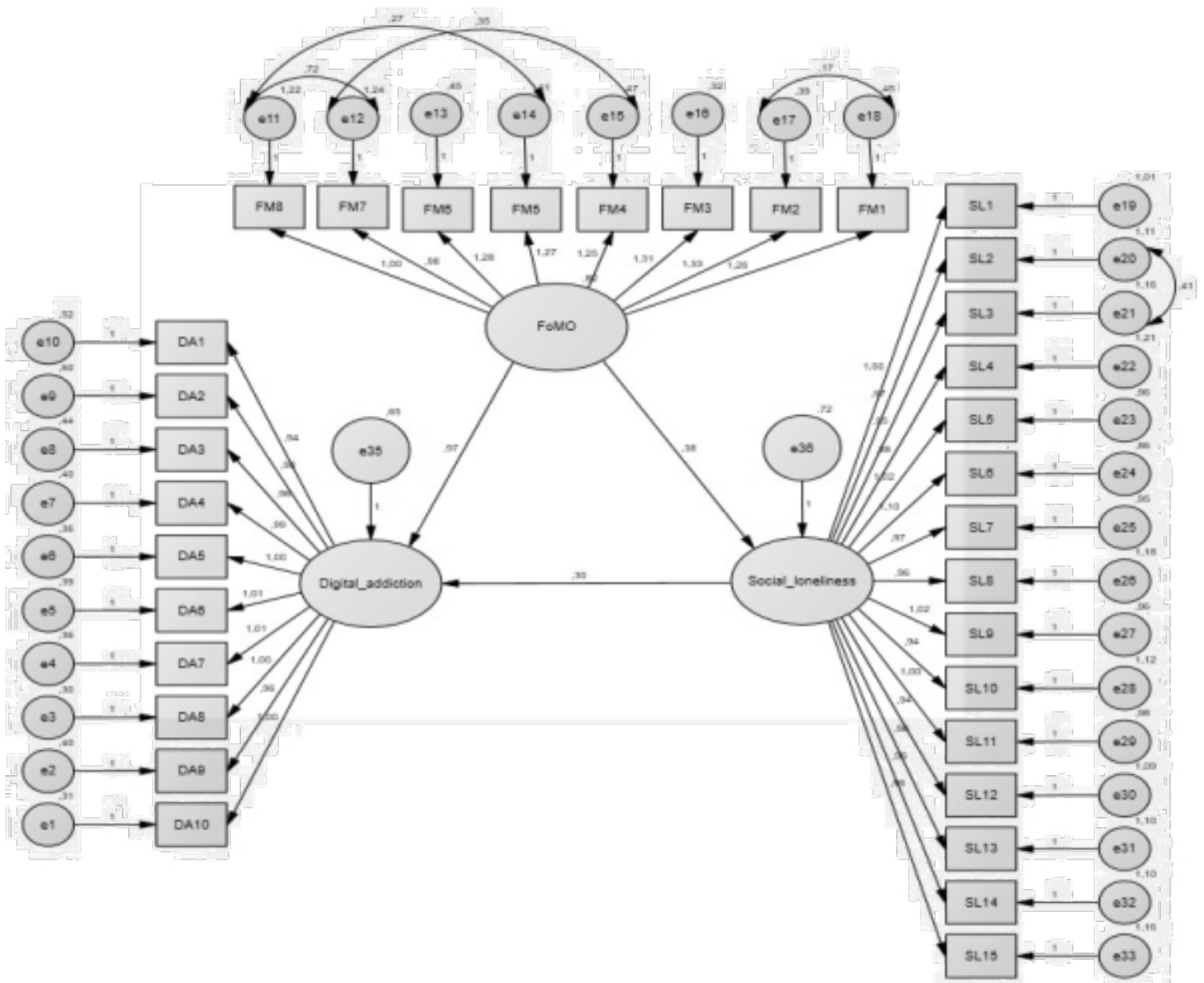


Figure 2. Research Model CFA Path Diagram

Testing Research Hypotheses

In order to test the hypotheses constructed within the scope of the research, structural equation model analysis was conducted, and the findings are given in the table below (Table 5).

Table 5. Structural Equation Model Findings

Variables	β	CR	SE	p
FoMO – Social Loneliness	0,380	8,233	0,038	***
FoMO – Digital Addiction	0,723	18,066	0,040	***
Social Loneliness – Digital Addiction	0,188	5,202	0,049	***

Note: SH, standard error; *0.05 **0.01 ***Significant at the 0.001 level (two-sided)

As shown in Table 5 and Figure 3, according to the research findings, fear of missing out has a positive and significant effect on social loneliness ($\beta=0.380$, $t=8.233$, $p<0.001$). Hypothesis H1 is supported. According to the second hypothesis of the research, fear of missing out has a positive and significant effect on digital addiction ($\beta=0.723$, $t=18.066$, $p<0.001$). H2 is supported. According to the third hypothesis of the research, it was determined that social loneliness has a positive and significant effect on digital addiction ($\beta =0.188$, $t=5.202$, $p<0.001$). Hypothesis H3 is supported.

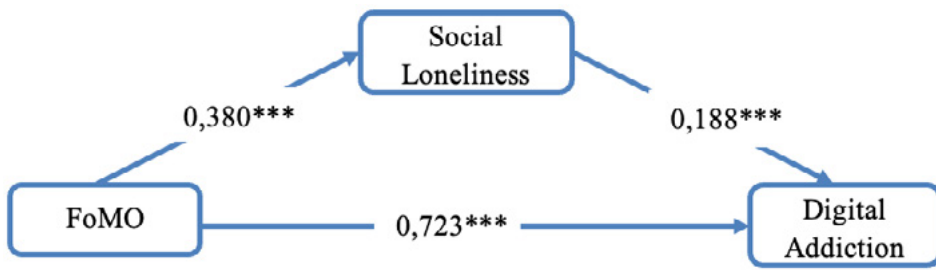


Figure 3. Research Model Effect Values

The mediating role of intrinsic motivation, the last hypothesis of this research, is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Structural Equation Model Findings

Variables	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Mediator Effect	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	p	Result
FoMO – Social Loneliness	0,380	-	-	-	-	-	-
FoMO – Digital Addiction	0,723	0,652	0,071	0,04	0,11	***	Partial mediation effect TVE: %24,4
Social Loneliness – Digital Addiction	0,188	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: SE, standard error; *0.05 **0.01 ***Significant at the 0.001 level (two-sided)

As can be seen from the findings in Table 6, it was determined that social loneliness played a mediating role in the effect of fear of missing out on digital addiction ($p < 0.001$). The H4 hypothesis was supported. At the same time, it was seen that there was a partial mediating role with the variance explanation ratio of the model being determined as 0.24. After determining the mediating role of social loneliness, Bootstrap analysis was applied to the mediating variable. According to Byrne (2001), after the mediator role determined within the scope of the research, Bootstrap analysis should be applied. According to the bootstrap analysis result, if the research had been administered to 6140 people instead of 614 people, the same scale expressions would have played the mediator role, which is the same result, social loneliness, and this effect would have been found to be at least 4% and at most 11%.

Discussion

In the literature, it is seen that there is a consensus that variables are negative behaviors in studies conducted on topics such as fear of missing out, digital addiction, and social loneliness. In this context, the first hypothesis found that fear of missing out has a positive effect on the level of social loneliness ($p < 0,001$). Hadlington and Scase (2018) determined in their research that digital technology addiction strengthens the perception of fear of missing out. Metin-Orta (2020) determined in their research with a sample of university students that FoMO positively affects the perception of digital addiction. Anastasya et al. (2022) determined in their research with a sample of students that a significant positive relationship was found between the fear of missing out (FoMO) variable and internet addiction. In the second hypothesis of the research, the positive effect of the level of social loneliness on digital addiction was determined ($p < 0,001$). Turan, Uzun, and Alemdar (2023) determined in their research with a sample of adolescents that the perception of digital addiction strengthens the perception of loneliness. Peper and Harvey (2018) determined in their study conducted with a student sample that students' perceptions of digital addiction increased their loneliness levels. Ekinçi, Yalcin, and Ayhan (2019) determined in their study conducted with a young student sample that digital game addiction increased their loneliness levels. The third hypothesis of the study determined that fear of missing out had a positive effect on digital addiction ($p < 0,001$). Bernard (2020) determined in his study conducted with students that fear of missing out had a positive effect on digital addiction. Van Huynh et al. (2022) determined in their study conducted with university students that fear of missing out had a positive relationship with loneliness levels. The last hypothesis of the study determined that social loneliness level had mediating effects on the effect of fear of missing out on digital addiction ($p < 0,05$). Safdar Bajwa et al. (2023) determined in their study conducted with university students that loneliness level played a mediating role in the relationship between smartphone addiction and FoMO, and in this study, participants' perceptions of smartphone addiction were addressed. All these findings show that the research results are consistent with the literature.

The research is limited to a specific group of participants, namely academicians working at universities in Türkiye. This narrow focus may affect the generalizability of the findings to other populations or settings, as the experiences of academicians may differ significantly from those of other demographic groups. The study employs a quantitative research method, which may not capture the full complexity of the relationships between fear of missing out (FoMO), digital addiction, and social loneliness. Qualitative or mixed-method approaches could provide deeper insights into these phenomena. The research specifically examines the mediating role of social loneliness, which may overlook other potential mediators or moderators that could influence the relationship between FoMO and digital addiction. This limitation suggests that the model could be expanded to include additional variables for a more comprehensive understanding.

Conclusion

In this study, where the “mediating” role of social loneliness level in the effect of fear of missing out on digital addiction was examined in a sample of academicians who are university employees, it was tried to determine that there would be an increase in the perceptions of “digital addiction” due to the increase in the fear of missing out perceptions of academicians and that the level of social loneliness would strengthen the perceptions of digital addiction in individuals. In the study, it is argued that these three negative behaviors will negatively affect both individuals and societies, and this situation will especially negatively affect the communication behaviors of academicians. Although studies in the literature support these findings (Hadlington and Scase, 2018; Metin-Orta, 2020; Ekinçi et al., 2019; Van Huynh et al., 2022; Safdar Bajwa et al., 2023; Anastasya et al., 2022), there is a common view in all of these studies that the concepts of digital addiction, fear of missing out, and social loneliness lead individuals to negative emotions.

In the research findings, it is seen that fear of missing out strengthens the perceptions of digital addiction and also positively affects the level of social loneliness. On the other hand, it was determined within the scope of the research findings that digital addiction perceptions are high in individuals with high levels of social loneliness. In addition, it was determined that this variable has a mediating function by determining the level of social loneliness as a mediator variable in the effect of fear of missing out on digital addiction. The research results are important in showing that negative situations such as fear of missing out, digital addiction, social loneliness, social media addiction, digital anxiety, reluctance to communicate, perception of privacy, and all other negative psychological perceptions related to social psychology have negative effects on both the private and business lives of individuals.

Theoretical Implications

The paper illustrates that fear of missing out (FoMO) is not just a simple feeling but a trigger that can lead individuals to engage more with digital platforms. This constant checking and connectivity can lead to digital addiction. The findings show that academics experience increased digital addiction when they feel anxious about missing out on events or updates. In everyday terms, think of it like being at a party and constantly worrying that you might miss the best part. This worry pushes you to keep looking around, making you feel even more isolated when you can't connect. The model suggested here can help us understand why people might get hooked on their phones or social media even when it clearly causes problems in their daily lives. When people feel lonely, this feeling amplifies the effect that FoMO has on their digital use, potentially worsening their digital addiction. Imagine someone who not only fears missing out but also feels a lack of meaningful social connections. These feelings work together, making the individual even more vulnerable to digital distractions. This insight is crucial for developing more comprehensive theories that incorporate emotional and social aspects, explaining how digital addiction is not only about the attraction of technology but also about compensating for social deficits.

The paper argues for a more integrated approach to understanding digital addiction. Instead of studying digital behavior by itself, it is important to include emotional elements such as FoMO and social loneliness when building theoretical models. This means future models could be similar to multifaceted maps, where different emotional drivers are connected to behaviors. Researchers, for example, might create models that predict digital addiction not just based on how often someone is online but also based on how lonely they feel in their offline relationships. The findings suggest that any intervention aimed at reducing digital addiction should also address the emotional roots, such as fear of missing out and loneliness. In practical everyday settings, like universities or workplaces, helping individuals build stronger, more supportive social networks could reduce the need for constant digital engagement. For example, organizing group activities or workshops focused on mental well-being can help reduce the loneliness that underpins digital addiction.

Finally, the implications extend beyond psychology into areas such as sociology, education, and technology studies. By combining insights from these fields, researchers can better understand the interplay of digital habits and emotional states in different populations. The conversation between these disciplines encourages the development of well-rounded theories that not only explain the problem of digital addiction but also propose actionable solutions.

Practical Implications

The paper suggests that feelings of loneliness can drive digital addiction. In practical terms, organizations and academic institutions can focus on reducing loneliness by organizing social events, team-building exercises, and regular meetings. These activities help strengthen real-life interactions, making individuals feel more connected and less tempted to turn to digital platforms for comfort. For example, universities might host seminars or workshops where faculty members and students discuss mental well-being, share experiences, and participate in group projects. This can lead to a more supportive community that counters the sense of isolation. The research underscores that digital addiction has negative effects on performance and interaction. Therefore, training programs that address digital wellness can be introduced. These sessions would teach effective time management and strategies to reduce digital dependency by encouraging breaks and promoting face-to-face communication. In a practical setting, this might include short courses in digital detox or stress management, which help participants understand the impact of excessive digital use and give them tools to manage their online habits.

The paper shows that fear of missing out (FoMO) can lead to digital addiction, which implies that better understanding and managing online behaviors are crucial. Institutions can implement initiatives that focus on digital responsibility, such as setting boundaries for technology use during work hours or class lectures. Programs could involve creating awareness campaigns that encourage people to allocate specific times for checking emails or social media, reducing the constant urge to stay connected around the clock. With the evidence that social loneliness mediates the effect of FoMO on digital addiction, counseling services can be tailored to help individuals tackle both emotional loneliness and the anxiety of missing out. Mental health professionals can offer one-on-one sessions focusing on building self-confidence and social skills, which directly combat the roots of FoMO. Institutions may establish support groups where people share their experiences of digital addiction and learn coping strategies from their peers, promoting recovery in a supportive environment. The practical implications also suggest a broader approach, where educators, psychologists, and IT professionals work together. This collaborative effort can lead to the development of better digital tools that encourage healthy use patterns rather than constant engagement. For instance, developers could work on apps that remind users to take breaks or limit usage during certain hours, supporting the overall goal of balancing digital engagement with real-life social interactions.

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Özet

Araştırma kapsamında bireylerin toplumdaki sosyal yalnızlık düzeyleri, gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusu (FoMO) ve dijital bağımlılık algıları kapsamında ele alınmıştır. Bu çalışmada, gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusu, dijital bağımlılık ve sosyal yalnızlığın bireyler üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerine ilişkin analizler yapılmıştır. Bu bağlamda araştırmanın temel problemi, toplumdaki bireylerin zaman zaman olumsuz düşünce ve davranışları nedeniyle yalnızlık yaşadıkları, dijital bağımlılıkla bu algıları azaltmaya çalışan bireylerin, gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusu duygusunun da etkisiyle çevreleriyle iletişim kurmayarak toplumdan daha fazla izole ve soyutlanmış hale gelebilecekleridir. Araştırma, bireylerde gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusu algılarının sosyal yalnızlık nedeniyle oluşup oluşmadığını ve bu durumun dijital bağımlılığa neden olup olmadığını belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda araştırmanın temel sorusu "dönüşümleri kaçırma korkusunun dijital bağımlılık üzerindeki etkisinde sosyal yalnızlık aracılık rolü oynuyor mu?" olarak belirlenmiştir. Araştırma sorusuna cevap bulmak için Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde görev yapmakta olan (n=614) akademisyenler örnekleminde anket uygulaması yapılmıştır. Araştırma verilerinin akademisyenlerden seçilmesinin temel nedeni, akademisyenlerin meslekleri gereği gündem gelişmelerini takip etme alışkanlığına sahip olmaları ve bu alışkanlığın zamanla dijital bağımlılığa dönüşebilmesi, ayrıca bu bireylerin sosyal yalnızlık düzeylerinin de dijital bağımlılığa neden olabilmesidir. Toplumda genç bireylere eğitim veren akademisyenlerin bu olumsuz algılarının öncül ve ardıllarının bu çalışma konuları sınırlılığında belirlenerek çözüm önerileri sunulması ile akademisyenlerin daha iyi eğitim vermeleri, etkili iletişim kurmaları ve daha nitelikli bireyler yetiştirmeleri sağlanabilecektir. Bu kapsamda gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusu (FoMO), sosyal yalnızlık düzeyi ve dijital bağımlılık algılarını ölçen ölçekler kullanılmıştır. Nicel araştırma yöntemi ile kurgulanan çalışmada dört adet hipotez belirlenmiştir. Araştırma verilerine doğrulayıcı faktör analizi, korelasyon analizi, frekans analizi ve yapısal eşitlik modeli uygulanmıştır. Araştırmada bulgularında; gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusunun sosyal yalnızlığı arttırdığı, sosyal yalnızlığın ise dijital bağımlılığı güçlendirdiği belirlenmiştir. Diğer yandan gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusunun dijital bağımlılığı yine aynı yönde arttırdığı sonucunda ulaşılmıştır. Son olarak gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusunun dijital bağımlılığa etkisinde sosyal yalnızlık düzeyinin aracılık rolü üstlendiği belirlenmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda gelişmeleri kaçırma korkusunun artması ile dijital bağımlılığın arttığı sosyal yalnızlık düzeyinin ise bu artışta gizil bir değişken olduğu belirlenerek literatüre özgün bir katkı sağlandığı düşünülmektedir.