



DO SELF-PRESENTATION TACTICS MEDIATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-REGULATORY ORIENTATIONS AND PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE?

DÜZENLEYİCİ ODAK YÖNELİMLERİ İLE PROBLEMLİ İNTERNET KULLANIMI
ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİDE KENDİNİ SUNUM TAKTİKLERİNİN ARACI ROLÜ

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Abstract

Problematic Internet use has been an important topic for researchers. Though, (problematic) Internet use is a motivated action, underlying motivations are largely unexamined. Therefore, in the current study, effects of self-regulatory orientations (i.e., promotion and prevention self-regulatory foci) with the mediating role of self-presentation tactics on problematic Internet use was examined on 225 university students who use the Internet mostly for social network sites (SNSs). Portrait Values Questionnaire was used to determine participants' self-regulatory orientations (prevention focus and promotion focus). Self-Presentation Tactics Scale was used to determine the type of mainly used tactics (defensive and assertive) on SNSs. Problematic Internet Use Scale was used to determine the consequences of their Internet use. Results revealed that neither prevention focus, nor promotion focus orientations directly predict problematic Internet use. As expected, defensive self-presentation tactics mediate the relationship between promotion focus and problematic Internet use. Therefore, focusing on gains –rather than a loss- on the SNSs leads to more defensive self-presentation tactics which in turn leads to problematic Internet use.

Keywords: Problematic Internet Use, Regulatory Focus Theory, Self-Presentation Tactics

Öz

Problemlerli internet kullanımı arařtırmacılar için önemli bir konu olagelmiştir. Ancak, (problemlerli) internet kullanımı motivasyonel bir davranıř türü olmasına rağmen, altında yatan motivasyonel süreçler genel olarak incelenmemiştir. Bu sebeple, bu çalışmada, interneti çoğunlukla sosyal medya siteleri için kullanan 225 üniversite öğrencisinin problemlerli internet kullanımları, benlik düzenleme odaklarının (yaklaşmacı ve kaçınmacı odak) kendini sunumlama taktikleri (savunucu ve girişken) üzerinden aracı etkisiyle incelenmiştir. Benlik düzenleme odağını ölçmek için Portrait Değerler Anketi, kendini sunumlama taktikleri için Öz-Sunum Taktikleri Ölçeği ve internet kullanımı için Problemlerli İnternet Kullanımı Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, ne yaklaşmacı ne de kaçınmacı odağının problemlerli internet kullanımı üzerinde doğrudan bir etkisinin olmadığını göstermiştir. Ayrıca, beklendiği üzere, savunucu kendini sunumlama taktiklerinin yaklaşmacı odak ile problemlerli internet kullanımı arasında aracı etkisi olduğu gözlenmiştir. Buna göre, sosyal medya sitelerinde kayıplardan çok kazanımlara odaklanmanın daha savunucu taktikler kullanılmasına yol açtığı, bunun da internetin daha problemlerli kullanılmasına neden olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Problemlerli İnternet Kullanımı, Düzenleyici Odak Teorisi, Kendini Sunumlama Taktikleri

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Problematic Internet Use (PIU)

Today, the Internet is the major tool for obtaining information, communication, and entertainment (Chun, 2016). Three billion of active Internet users worldwide are reported (Laconi, Vigouroux, Lafuente, & Chabrol, 2017). However, excessive Internet use is seen as a problematic behavior by professionals (Lam & Lam, 2016).

Excessive Internet use has various labels in the literature such as “psychological dependency of the Internet”, “pathological Internet use”, “problematic Internet use”, “compulsive Internet use”, and “cyber addiction”. The terminology is still being discussed (Ceyhan, 2011; Tokunaga & Rains, 2016; Shokri, Potenza, & Sanaeepour, 2017). Furthermore, identifying the criteria of excessive Internet use is still an issue. Review of Tokunaga and Rains (2016), revealed three traditions of conceptual and operational definitions: Problematic Internet Use as a dependency, Problematic Internet Use as an impulse control disorder and Problematic Internet Use as an artifact of relational and relationship-building resource deficit. Young (1996) explained the features of the impulsive use of the Internet with three features: preoccupation, loss of control and negative consequences. Meerkerk, Van Den Eijnden, Franken and Garretsen (2010) mentioned the similar three features of Problematic Internet Use (PIU) and compulsive behaviors: difficulties in resisting, obsessions and withdrawals.

Though problematic Internet use attracts attention from researchers, it is also important to note that the Internet itself is not the reason behind problematic use. Rather, goals and/or motivations are predictive of problems related to Internet use (Gunuc & Kayri, 2010; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2000). Young (1998) also proposed that the Internet itself was not a reason for PIU. Satisfying the needs, such as belonging and self-actualization, maintaining interpersonal relationships, and social support via the mediation of the Internet may cause PIU. Though PIU is closely related to motivations, as far as our knowledge, there is no study adopted a motivational perspective to understand PIU. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to explore the motivational underpinnings of the PIU. Specifically, we tested the mediating role of self-presentation tactics as specific strategies on the effect of self-regulatory orientations (i.e., promotion and prevention foci) as rich and meta-context behind more specific motives as self-presentation tactics. By doing so, we propose a hierarchical model in which higher-order orientations are executed by lower-order motives as formulated in various motivation-goal theories (e.g., Carver, 2004; Higgins, 1997; Kruglanski, Shah, Fishbach, Friedman, Chun, & Sleeth-Keppler, 2002). Furthermore, we claim that self-regulatory orientations are not predictive of PIU since they are broader regulatory mechanisms held by each individual, rather we expect that (non)fit between orientations and self-presentation is predictive of the PIU.

Motivational Underpinnings of PIU

Although people have similar goals in some situations, their ways to achieve those goals might be different (Johnson, Smith, Wallace, Hill & Baron, 2015). Higgins (1998) defined basic motivations of human beings to approach to pleasure and avoid pain with the Regulatory Focus Theory. According to the theory, there are two types of self-guided or self-directive standards on the way to attaining goals; Promotion Focus and Prevention Focus. Promotion-focused and prevention-focused orientations determine behaviors, emotions, cognitions, and preferences of individuals during the whole goal-pursuit process. On the one hand, Promotion-focused individuals are motivated for hopes and accomplishments. They view their goals as ideals and they are concerned with gains and non-gains. They are eager to attain goals and seek to maximize gains, and they are sensitive to the presence or absence of positive outcomes (Higgins, 1997; Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998). Prevention-focused

individuals, on the other hand, are concerned about safety, protection and responsibility. They view the goals as obligations and they focus on the possibility of losses (Higgins, 1997; Shah et al., 1998; Higgins, 1998). Promotion-focused individuals' strategies are based on development and nourishment needs; whereas, prevention-focused individuals' strategies are based on security needs and avoidance from loss (Chen, Wen, & Ye, 2017).

Self-regulatory orientations are also closely related to interpersonal relationships both in real-life and computer-mediated interactions. Considering the interpersonal relationships, Righetti, Finkenauer, and Rusbult (2011) showed that promotion-focused individuals are found to be more motivated to interact with others than prevention-focused individuals. Similarly, Leikas, Lönnqvist, Verkasalo, and Lindeman (2009) revealed that promotion-focused individuals show more willingness to meet people from outside of their own group as compared to prevention-focused individuals. Therefore, promotion-focused individuals have more willingness to engage in intergroup interaction.

Motivations of self-deceptive enhancement and impression management are also different for promotion and prevention focus. Promotion-focused individuals are more likely to pursue information that boosts self-image, rather than threaten self-image as a result of their inclination for self-enhancement. In contrast, prevention-focused individuals tend to avoid undesired outcomes and focus on the norms and expectations set up by significant others. (Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000). Therefore, different self-regulatory orientations are expected to have an inclination for distinct self-presentation tactics on social network sites which have the potential to shed light on problematic Internet use behaviors.

The Present Study

Spending time on the Internet, especially on social network sites is almost typified by the employment of self-presentation tactics. The functions of those self-presentation tactics are: (1) facilitating social interaction; (2) providing individuals to attain material and social rewards; and (3) constructing the desired identity of self. Rosenberg (2009), also defined motivations of self-presentation as (1) to influence others to respond in desirable ways, (2) to establish and maintain one's private self-identity and self-esteem, and (3) to regulate their emotional experiences.

Mainly, there are two dimensions of the self-presentation tactics: assertive/acquisitive self-presentation tactics and defensive/protective self-presentation tactics (Arkin, 1981; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985; Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett, & Tedeschi, 1999). These two tactics have different aims. The basic purpose of the assertive/acquisitive self-presentation tactics is developing or creating an identity to "be liked" and/or receive social approval as a reward. Besides, the basic purpose of the defensive tactics is repairing or restoring an identity after it has been "spoiled" to avoid from losses in social approval (Lee et al., 1999; Arkin, 1981; Schutz, 1998; Overup, Brunson, & Acitelli, 2015).

Kacmar and Tucker (2016) studied the effect of regulatory focus on the impression management in the workplace. Results revealed that prevention-focused individuals use exemplification impression management tactics as a specific type defensive self-presentation tactics; they behave in a way to be perceived as moral and ethical. Besides, promotion-focused individuals use supplication and exemplification tactics as a specific type of assertive self-presentation tactics.

For individuals who tend to use assertive self-presentation tactics preferably (i.e., promotion-focused individuals), Walther (1996) proposed that the online communication provides a chance to emphasize their attractive characteristics and hide unattractive characteristics. Similarly, Rosenberg (2009) reported that the chance of performing self-

presentation tactics motivates the promotion-focused individuals to use Facebook where they can obtain social rewards.

In sum, promotion-focused individuals have an inclination to use assertive self-presentation tactics, while prevention-focused individuals have a preference to use defensive self-presentation tactics. Research on the relationship between regulatory foci and their preferred strategies to reach goals provided that matching strategies creates a ‘feeling right experience’ and ‘control effectiveness’ (Higgins, 2000). However, when a mismatching strategy is used, individuals feel that they are doing it in an improper way. For instance, the goal-pursuit process is experienced as more enjoyable and evaluated more positively when a matching strategy is used (Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Hennecke, 2018). Similarly, individuals performed better on task performance (Idson & Higgins, 2000), and resist better to temptations (e.g., spending more time on the Internet) when a matching strategy is used as compared to a mismatching strategy (Hong & Lee, 2008). Thus, we expect that defensive self-presentation tactics in the service of promotion focus and assertive self-presentation tactics in the service of prevention focus -as mismatching strategies- would lead to problematic Internet use.

Method

Participants

Participants were 291 students from Akdeniz University in Antalya, Turkey. Among the participants, only who reported social network sites as main activity were kept for further analyses. As a result, 225 participants retained. The number of the male participants was 125 (55.6%) and the number of the female students was 100 (44.4%). The mean age was 20.25 years ($SD = 2.3$) with the range of 17 to 31 years.

Measures

Problematic Internet Use Scale (PIUS)

The Turkish Problematic Internet Use Scale was developed by Ceyhan, Ceyhan, and Gurcan (2007). It was designed to show the intensity of the Internet use with 33 items on a five-point Likert-type scale. The scale was composed of three factors; negative consequences of the Internet use (e.g., When my responsibilities increase, my desire for using Internet equally increase), social benefit/social comfort (e.g., I share my loneliness with Internet) and excessive Internet use (e.g., I don't understand how much time passed while I am using Internet). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for the negative consequences of Internet use was .92; social benefit/social comfort was .76 and excessive Internet use was .69.

Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ)

Chronic self-regulatory orientations are measured via the Portrait Values Questionnaire (Schwartz, Melech, Lehmann, Burgess, Harris, & Owens, 2001). Originally, PVQ includes 40 items measuring 10 different value domains. Kluger, Yaniv, and Kühberger (2001) used the PVQ to assess the chronic promotion and prevention focus. Researchers used security, conformity, and tradition subscales to compose prevention focus and stimulation, self-direction, and hedonism subscales to compose promotion focus. Overall, 22 of the items were used on a six-point Likert-type scale. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha for promotion focus was .75, and prevention focus was .74.

Self-Presentation Tactics Scale

The scale was developed by Lee and colleagues (1999) to assess the tactics people use to impress others. The scale was composed of 63 items on a 7-point Likert-type scale.

Twenty-five items were designed to measure defensive self-presentation tactics (e.g., I offer socially acceptable reasons to justify behavior that others might not like), and 38 items were designed to measure assertive self-presentation tactics (e.g., When I want something, I try to look good). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for the subscale of assertive self-presentation tactics was .90, and the defensive self-presentation tactics were .89.

Results

Data Analytic Strategy

In the light of the aim of the study, first the data screening procedure was performed and assumptions were tested. As the second step, descriptive statistics and correlational relationships of the study variables were presented. Finally, three separate bootstrapped multivariate extension of the MEDIATE test of mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) were applied. Dimensions of problematic Internet use were used as dependent variables, self-regulatory orientations were used as independent variables and self-presentation tactics as mediators.

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and ranges of measures for problematic Internet use, regulatory focus orientations and self-presentation tactics were displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

Variables	<i>Total (N= 225)</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
RF Promotion	4.49	.87	1	6
RF Prevention	4.41	.81	1	6
SP Assertive	3.70	1.26	1.08	8.31
SP Defensive	4.59	1.34	1.12	8.56
PIUS Negative	2.06	.84	1	4.76
PIUS Social	2.16	.82	1	4.50
PIUS Excessive	3.21	.87	1	5

Note: PIUS Negative: Negative consequences of Internet use, PIUS Social: Social benefit/social comfort of Internet use, PIUS Excessive: Excessive use of the Internet, RF Promotion: Promotion Focus, RF Prevention: Prevention Focus, SP Assertive: Assertive self-presentation tactics, SP Defensive: Defensive self-presentation tactics.

Correlations among negative consequences of Internet use, social benefit/social comfort of Internet use, excessive use of the Internet, promotion focused orientation, prevention-focused orientation, assertive self-presentation tactics, and defensive self-presentation tactics were shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation between Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. PIUS Total	1							
2. PIUS Negative	.96**	1						
3. PIUS Social	.86**	.73**	1					

4. PIUS Excessive	.71**	.60**	.43**	1			
5. RF Promotion	.15*	.12	.04	.15*	1		
6. RF Prevention	.06	.05	.13*	.12	.54**	1	
7. SP Assertive	.31**	.30	.30**	.15**	.15*	.01	1
8. SP Defensive	.36**	.32	.33**	.28**	.37**	.15*	.69**

Note: PIUS Total: Problematic Internet Use Total Score, PIUS Negative: Negative consequences of Internet use, PIUS Social: Social benefit/social comfort of Internet use, PIUS Excessive: Excessive use of Internet, RF Promotion: Promotion Focus, RF Prevention: Prevention Focus, SP Assertive: Assertive self-presentation tactics, SP Defensive: Defensive self-presentation tactics.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

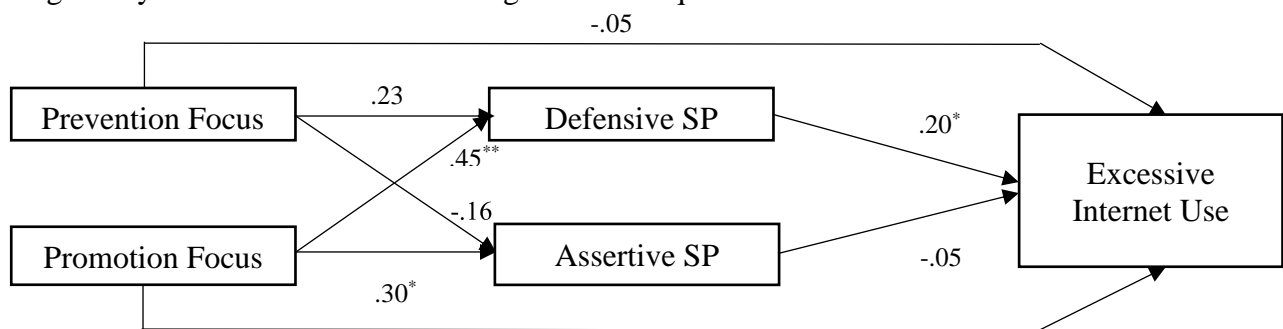
Mediation Analysis

Three separate mediation analyses were conducted on problematic Internet use dimensions. The first analysis was conducted on the excessive use of the Internet. Accordingly, direct effect of the regulatory focus orientations (IVs) on the negative consequences of Internet use was nonsignificant ($F(2,220) = 2.83, p > .05$).

Regulatory focus orientations (IVs) significantly predicted defensive self-presentation tactics (M1) ($F(2,286) = 19.18, p < .001$; Adjusted $R^2 = .15$). Among regulatory foci, only promotion focus orientation (IV2) was significant on defensive self-presentation tactics (M1) ($\beta = .45, SE = .11, p < .001$). Regressing regulatory focus orientations (IVs) on the assertive self-presentation tactics (M2) yielded significant results ($F(2,220) = 3.42, p < .05$). Accordingly, higher levels of promotion focus predicted higher levels assertive self-presentation tactics ($\beta = .30, SE = .12, p < .05$).

Among the indirect effects, as depicted in Figure 1, only promotion focus through defensive self-presentation tactics revealed significant results ($\beta = .09, SE = .04, 95\% CI = .0333, .1930$).

Figure 1. The Mediator Role of Self-Presentation Tactics on the Relationship Between Regulatory Focus Orientations and Negative Consequences of Internet Use

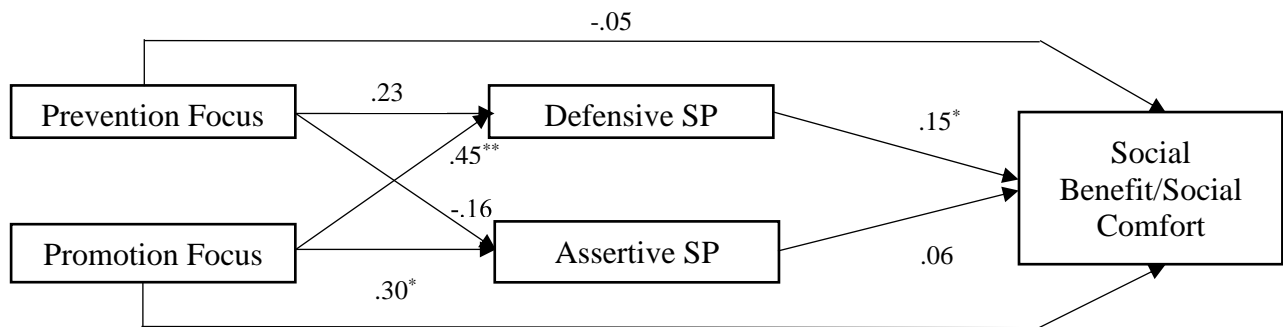


Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.30* (.05) CI [.0333, .1930] via defensive SP

Second analyses were conducted on the social benefit/social comfort of Internet use. Accordingly, direct effect of the regulatory focus orientations (IVs) on the social benefit/social comfort of Internet use was nonsignificant ($F(2,220) = 2.19, p > .05$). Analyses on indirect effects revealed a similar pattern with the excessive use that only promotion focus

predicted social benefit/social comfort via defensive self-presentation tactics ($\beta = .07$, $SE = .04$, $95\% \text{ CI} = .0136, .1549$). Results are depicted in Figure 2.

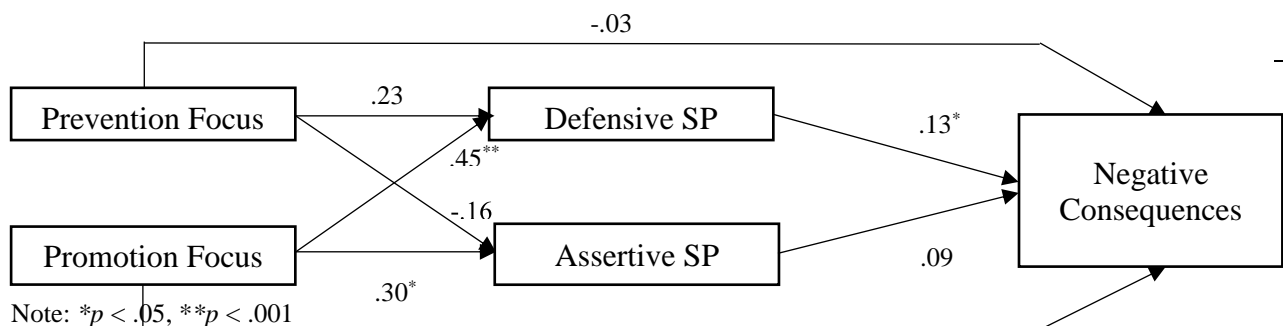
Figure 2. The Mediator Role of Self-Presentation Tactics on the Relationship Between Regulatory Focus Orientations and Social benefit / Social comfort of Internet Use



Note: $*p < .05$, $**p < .001$.15* (.06) CI [.0136, .1549] via defensive SP

Last mediation analyses were conducted on the negative consequences dimension. Similar to previous analyses, direct effects of regulatory orientations on negative consequences was nonsignificant ($F(2,220) = 1.72$, $p > .05$). Results of bootstrapping to explore the mediation effects revealed that only defensive self-presentation tactics significantly mediated the relationship between promotion focus and negative consequences ($\beta = .06$, $SE = .04$, $95\% \text{ CI} = .0076, .1473$). Results are displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The Mediator Role of Self-Presentation Tactics on the Relationship Between Regulatory Focus Orientations and Excessive of Internet Use



Note: $*p < .05$, $**p < .001$

.14 (.05) CI [.0076, .1473] via defensive SP

Overall, only promotion focus via defensive self-presentation tactics yielded significant mediation effects. Furthermore, since direct effects were nonsignificant, all significant mediation effects represent full mediation or indirect effect only mediation.

Discussion

Overall, findings partially supported our hypotheses. A mismatch created by promotion focus and defensive self-presentation tactics emerged as a strong mediating variable on problematic Internet use dimensions while other links revealed nonsignificant results. Specifically, defensive self-presentation tactics mediated the relationship between promotion focus and dimensions of problematic Internet use.

Leikas, Lönnqvist, Verkasalo, and Lindeman (2009) found that promotion-focused individuals are willing to meet people from outside their own group. Similarly, Pollack and colleagues (2015) reported that extensiveness of the network is important for promotion-focused individuals because of the potential gains. Therefore, promotion-focused individuals are eager to engage in intergroup interactions. Social network sites provide that opportunity,

in which there are numerous ways to get acceptance and gain prestige (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher; 2000). For instance, Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, and Tong (2008) reported that having more friends on Facebook means being more socially attractive and more credible. Thus, social network sites in general seems to be more attractive for promotion focus and dynamics of those sites seems to fit better with promotion focused inclinations. However, according to the results of the current study, deploying defensive self-presentation tactics leads them to use Internet problematically, instead of effectively. One possible explanation for this relationship is the mismatch between promotion focus and defensive self-presentation tactics.

Beard (2005) reported that “craving” for Internet use is characterized by a lack of social rewards. Accordingly, individuals who crave for the Internet are motivated to use social network sites to reach social rewards. Seeking rewards and/or sensitivity to rewards and gains is also one of the typical characteristics of promotion focus (Higgins, 1997; Higgins et al., 2001). Therefore, using defensive self-presentation tactics as a result of negative consequences or lack of reward mismatches with the promotion focus orientation. Consequently, this mismatch seems to push them to use the Internet more problematically. Indeed, a study conducted by Scholer, Stroessner, and Higgins (2010) revealed that as failure accumulates as a mismatching event, promotion-focused individuals showed increased motivation. Increased motivation, in the current study, might be expressed as excessive use of the Internet through the deployment of defensive self-presentation tactics to restore those failures or losses.

Another possible explanation for the effects of promotion focus and defensive self-presentation tactics on the problematic Internet use might be the distinct self-regulatory characteristics on decision-making. According to Förster and Higgins (2005), promotion-focused individuals let their emotions to shape their decisions and when they experience negative feelings, and as a result, they increase their effort in their social interactions. Defensive self-presentation tactics, by definition, are efforts to restore or repair sources of those negative experiences resulting from social interactions (Lee et al., 1999; Arkin, 1981; Schutz, 1998; Overup et al., 2015). Therefore, any negative event on social network sites which led promotion-focused individuals to use defensive self-presentation tactics might create a strong motivational pull resulting in excessive and problematic Internet use.

A similar explanation is provided by promotion focus’ preference for attraction effect. Mourali, Bockenolt, and Laroche (2007) stated that promotion-focused individuals are more sensitive to the attraction effect and prevention-focused individuals are more sensitive to the compromise effect (avoiding extreme options to minimize negative outcomes) while using the Internet. Since, Internet gives clues about what is popular and trendy (Fabiansson, 2007), it might be expected that social network sites might create a stronger motivational pull for promotion focus as compared to prevention focus. Therefore, the negative consequences of problematic Internet use seem to occur as a result of attempts to restore those needs.

Langens (2007) reported that the promotion-focused individuals are more eager to feel control of their performance and focus on potential gains as an attempt to control the consequences. Moreover, as failure increase the desire to control become more important. In terms of control, social network sites provide rich opportunities as compared to face-to-face interpersonal relationships. As Kandell (1998) reported, the user decides when, where, and with whom to communicate, and how to proceed on the Internet. The sense of control that the Internet provides, might stimulate promotion-focused individuals more than prevention-focused individuals. Therefore, mediation link through promotion focus and defensive self-presentation tactics on problematic Internet use might be the result of the efforts to establish control over Internet use. In general, employment of defensive self-presentation tactics in the

service of promotion focus results in problematic Internet use. It is important to note that neither promotion focus, nor prevention focus is predictive of PIU. Rather, it seems that combination of specific self-regulatory orientations and manner/strategy of goal-pursuit leads to problematic behaviors during the goal-pursuit process.

Future research focusing on the mechanism behind the link between promotion focus and defensive self-presentation tactics might further our understanding on problematic Internet use. Factors as a sense of control, maximizing gains, and gaining popularity might underlie the results of the current study since they are closely related to promotion focus and social network sites. Thus, exploring the mechanisms that make individuals use Internet problematically might be helpful to create interventions for those problems.

Regarding the nonsignificant results related to prevention focus, the perception of insecurity should be considered as a potential factor. Yi and Baumgartner (2009)'s study showed that prevention-focused individuals were concerned with safety and vigilance. Since the Internet is perceived as unsafe (Jones, 2012), prevention-focused individuals might behave in a more cautious way considering the disadvantages and safety of the Internet. Therefore, as a result of focusing on security needs, prevention focus might lead to avoiding extreme behaviors such as excessive Internet use. However, results only revealed that prevention focus through self-presentation tactics is not predictive of problematic behavior. Therefore, various strategies and tactics used on social network sites might lead prevention-focused individuals to use Internet problematically which awaits further attention.

In general, extending our knowledge on the motivational underpinnings of problematic Internet use as a self-regulation failure would take our understanding much further on the effects of the (mis)match between broad regulatory orientations and specific strategies on successful self-regulation. Besides, this line of research has potential to shed light on not only problematic behaviors on the Internet, more specifically social network sites, but also on self-regulation problems on other segments of goal-pursuit.

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