



Journal for Social
Science Archives

Journal for Social Science Archives

Online ISSN: 3006-3310

Print ISSN: 3006-3302

Volume 3, Number 4, 2025, Pages 222 – 230

Journal Home Page

<https://jssarchives.com/index.php/Journal/about>



Understanding the Prevalence of Nomophobia: A Perspective of University Students

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: August 23, 2025
Revised: September 18, 2025
Accepted: October 05, 2025
Available Online: October 20, 2025

Keywords:

Prevalence, Nomophobia, Mobile Phone Dependence, University Students, Smartphone Use.

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ABSTRACT

This cross-sectional study examined the prevalence of nomophobia among students at the University of Gujrat Pakistan. Nomophobia, which is "the fear of being unable to use or be without one's mobile device," is a major mental health concern in the current digital age, especially for university students who are heavy mobile device users. A non-probability convenience sample of 700 university students (ages 18-25, smartphone users) participated in the study and data were collected through a demographic form and the Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q). NMP-Q scores were analyzed with descriptive statistics and percentiles to examine prevalence levels (low, moderate, high/severe). The findings revealed a high prevalence of nomophobia in the student sample, with 75% of participants experiencing some level of nomophobia. The findings indicate that, specifically, 24.71% of students had low nomophobia, 50.29% of students had moderate nomophobia, and 25.00% of students had high/severe nomophobia. The total moderate to high prevalence of nomophobia (75%) is strongly corroborated by international empirical studies, which highlight it as a major public health problem among college students. The study showed that female, younger (ages 18-21), undergraduates (BS), and students who use an Android device and/or use multiple social media sites were the majority sample of prevalence of nomophobia. These results suggest possible connections to socio-emotional communication challenges, life transition, socio-economic status, and fear of missing out (FoMO).

Introduction

Nomophobia (no-mobile-phone-phobia), characterized as the fear or anxiety of not being able to use, or being without, one's mobile device, (King et al., 2010; Yildirim & Correia, 2015) is a notable psychological development in the digital era. Nomophobia has developed with the rise in smartphone use, further demonstrating that technology has deep implications on mental health, communication, and self-identity. University students in particular are a demographic heavily impacted by Nomophobia due to their heavy reliance on smartphones for educational, social and recreational purposes.

Psychological Understanding of Nomophobia

Nomophobia is best understood from two types of correlates, behavioral and cognitive-emotional.

Behavioral Correlates: Nomophobia manifests as compulsive behaviors like repeatedly checking the phone unnecessarily throughout the day, feeling anxious or upset when apart from the phone, and having trouble concentrating on activities/assignments without the ability to reach for the phone (Yildirim & Correia, 2015).

Cognitive- Emotional Correlates: Nomophobia is consistently correlated with other underlying psychological issues such as anxiety, low self-esteem, impulsivity, and a primary fear of missing out (FoMO), in which the person fears that others are engaging in rewarding experiences while he/she is not present (King et al., 2010; Arpaci et al., 2017).

Social Implications: It mirrors changing social dynamics, where some emotional dependence is increasingly placed on a device that mediates and authenticates one's social identity and communication in a virtual context.

Review of Empirical Literature

Empirical studies show consistently higher rates of nomophobia among university students, and significant demographic and cultural considerations are essential as well. A systematic review uncovered that nomophobia in university students around the world is prevalent, with a pooled prevalence of moderate nomophobia at 56% and severe nomophobia at 17% (Tucó et al., 2023). Earlier studies show some initial higher rates in men (Ozdemir et al., 2018), however, more recent and exhaustive studies also show that college women were more impacted by nomophobia and anxiety (Ozdemir et al., 2018; Tucó et al., 2023). Some studies, however, show no significant differences between men and women (Tucó et al., 2023). The highest rates were sometimes attributed to the younger age group of 18-24 year-olds (Ozdemir et al., 2018). Nomophobia is globally recognized, with studies throughout Asia (e.g., India, Pakistan), Europe (e.g., Turkey, Cyprus) and the Middle East demonstrating nomophobia exists. Cross-cultural studies demonstrate that the degrees of nomophobia across cultures possibly stem to their associated cultural dimensions. For instance, studies have established a solid positive bond between Vertical Collectivism, or the cultural value of defining relationships in terms of hierarchy and duty, and nomophobia. This connection suggests that people who feel culturally obligated to uphold social status and to fulfil duty are more likely to be dependent on their mobile devices (Arpaci, 2017).

Theoretical Frameworks

Numerous psychological and communication theories address Frameworks that provide a theoretical backdrop for understanding how Nomophobia thrives.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) theorizes the possible means by which mobile phone serves as a transitional object or secure base; that helps curb anxiety in facilitating connection by being constantly in touch with one's social network. This circumvention of anxiety in phones is distinguished by humans attachment figures; typically, early development attachment figures in uncertain moments provided security and stability (e.g., your mom would be there to help you). In dated mobile phones, research indicates that insecure attachment styles, predominantly anxious ones identify as significant positive predictors of Nomophobia. Anxious style individuals tend to compulsively check their devices as a form of digital reassurance and connection (Gohar & Munir, 2022).

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and gratifications theory is a communication theory that describes how individuals monitor and select what media they wish to use, based on particular psychological needs. In relation to Nomophobia, the mobile device is often used to satisfy:

Communication/Social Connectivity: or just staying in touch helps to facilitating relationships and maintaining social connections reduces loneliness and desire to belong (Pérez-Torres, 2024).

Information Seeking: Immediate access to data and news of uncertainty (Pérez-Torres, 2024).

Entertainment and Habitual Use: For pleasure, escape, and alleviating boredom. Nomophobia could be defined as the fear of losing or being diminished by the gratifications provided by the device; this factor could, in fact, mediate problematic social media use (Pérez-Torres, 2024).

Existential and Humanistic Theory (Wong, 2006)

This perspective addresses the paradox of hyper-connectivity. Technology has the promise of freedom and connection; however, the dependency created by hyper-connectivity contributes to existential worries, especially fear of separation and dispersion of one's digitally composed identity. Engagement with the device may demonstrate a feeling of dependence from an existential basis, where the driving need is to create meaning in life through the use of technology, although it is addictive and temporary (Wong, 2006).

Rationale of the Study

In current era shows a widespread of use of smartphones and digital devices. This use clearly and significantly changed the daily living pattern of students. While the use of smartphone provide a significant educational information and entertainment opportunities for students. It led to an extreme and unregulated use of smartphone that become an emerging concern not only to parents but for educators, and mental health professionals. This excessive smartphone use lead to nomophobia among university students. This problem directly hinder the cognitive, social and emotional development and increase the problem in attention span, academic routine, sleep deficiency, and psychological well-being. The issue of smartphone use also indicating a significant rise in screen time among young populations hence promoting nomophobia.

Despite increasing attentiveness, local empirical researches regarding the prevalence of nomophobia among university students remains limited. Without truthful data, legislators, educational institutions, and guardians cannot develop an integrated interventions or precautionary measures to promote healthy digital use smartphone and effectively deal the nomophobia habit. Therefore, measuring the prevalence nomophobia among university students is vital to recognize

the extent of the matter, decide about the at-risk groups, and guide forthcoming programs to deal with it. This current study purposes to fill this gap by scientifically investigative the prevalence of nomophobia among university smartphone users.

Objectives of the Study

To determine the prevalence of nomophobia among university students.

Methods

Research Design

The present research used a cross-sectional research design, which includes participants at a single point in time for the collection of data. This design was selected to study the prevalence of nomophobia among university students.

Setting of the study

The study was led at the public sector institution of University of Gujrat that is in Punjab Pakistan. The university offers a varied educational setting with students registered in numerous disciplines, thus offer an appropriate position for exploring the psychological construct of nomophobia among young adults studying in higher education.

Target Population

The target population of the research was the enrolled undergraduate and graduate university students. The reason behind the selection of university students was their dynamic group experience the issue of nomophobia that can directly affect their psychological integrity.

Sampling technique

A convenient non-probability sampling technique was employed to choose students for the current study. Despite of availability of sampling frame of students the non-probability sampling approach was selected as it allows the researcher to get readily available and willing participate to gather data. 700 students throughout the university different departments and academic programs participated in the study.

Inclusion standards

- Both undergraduate and graduate students that were willing to participate and were enrolled at the University of Gujrat were included.
- Participant must be a user of smartphones.
- Participants age range in between 18 to 25.

Exclusion Criteria

- Both undergraduate and graduate students who are unwilling to provide their consent for study or who are unavailable when data collection is taking place and students that didn't belong to University of Gujrat was excluded.
- If participants were experiencing any physical disabilities and mental health problem was also excluded.

Sample Size

The prevalence of nomophobia among university students was estimated from the sample of 700 participants.

Measures

The data was collected using a demographic form and a scale of nomophobia. The demographics include gender, age, degree program, area of residence, family system average internet usage time, type of smartphone, number of social media and platforms uses.

The Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q) (Yildirim, & Correia, 2015). The scale contained 20 item on 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The NMP-Q score interpretation suggests the degree of xenophobia. A score of 20 indicate absence, 21-59 corresponding to a mild level, 60-99 corresponding to a moderate level, and above 100-140 corresponding to a severe level .The reliability coefficient that is Cronbach's alpha was .95.

Procedure

A convenient sampling technique that is a non-probability sampling technique was used to recruit student for the current study. The sample of the study was students, both undergraduate and graduate that have smartphones and had no physical and mental health problems. Study also include students whose age were 18-25 years were taken to participate.

Participants at the start were briefed about goals and processes of the study. Oral and written informed consent was attained from all the students and were ensured about the privacy and secrecy of their responses. Participation in the research was completely voluntary, and right to withdraw from the research was given to respondents.

To establish a friendly environment, the researcher familiarized with the participants and described the objectives of the study before the administration of the scale. Students were then given the Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q) along with a demographic form. The proper permission to use the NMP-Q was taken via email from the authors. After completion of the scale the participants were thanked for their collaboration and involvement to the research.

Analysis of data

Formal data analysis was performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 25. Descriptive statistics were used for demographic analysis. Percentiles were used to create the low, medium and high levels of nomophobia.

Results

This section illustrate the results of the investigation in order to identify the demographic characteristics and prevalence of nomophobia in students of University of Gujart. The data were scrutinized using descriptive statistics as frequency and percentiles according to the study goals.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of students

Variables	<i>F</i>	%
Gender		
Female	395	56.4
Male	305	43.6
Age of participants		
18-21	353	50.42
22-25	347	49.57
Education		
BS	539	77

M.Phil	161	23
Semester system		
1-4	423	60.43
5-8	277	39.57
Area		
Rural	348	49.71
Urban	352	50.29
Family System		
Nuclear	381	54.43
Joint	319	45.57
Average Internet Usage		
1-8	474	67.71
9-16	165	23.57
17-24	42	6
Phone usage		
Iphone	180	25.71
Android	520	74.29
Social media platforms		
1-4	447	63.86
5-8	253	36.14
Family Income		
25000-50000k	391	55.86
51000-75000k	125	17.86
76000-100,000	166	23.71
Father's Education		
Matric	250	35.71
Intermediate	178	25.43
Graduation	160	22.86
Masters	112	16
Mother's Education		
Matric	328	46.86
Intermediate	191	27.29
Graduation	124	17.71
Masters	57	8.14

Table 1 reveals that greater number of female students participated in the study compared to male students. Further, results shows that majority of the students were of age 18-21years and studying in BS program. Almost same number of students reside in urban areas and rural setting. More of the students lived in nuclear family system. Among 700 student majority internet usage time was between 1-8 hours daily. Maximum of the students used android mobile compared to iPhone. Majority used 1-4 social media platforms with a monthly family income of 25000 to 50000. Majority of student's parent's education was matric.

Table 2: Prevalence of Nomophobia among University Students

Percentile	Levels	Frequency	Percentage
25	less than 75 scores	173	24.71
25-75	75-110 scores	352	50.29
75	Above 110 scores	175	25

Table 2 shows that out of 700 majority of the student had moderate level of nomophobia. Whereas as only 25% of the student had low level of nomophobia. Same 25% students reported high prevalence of nomophobia.

Discussion

The present study examined the prevalence of nomophobia among college students and associated it with a number of socio-demographic and smartphone-related factors. The findings demonstrated considerable nomophobia, as expected in accordance with international research, and also revealed a few characteristics of the population experiencing nomophobia, accompanied by discussions in light of empirical research in the field. The finding that 75% of the total sample reported experiencing in some facet nomophobia (to some degree, it with 50% at moderate level and 25% at high/severe level) was extremely compelling support of the claim that this is a regular public health issue that is seen a relatively high prevalence among college students. This high prevalence aligns with systematic reviews and meta-analytically based evidence that report that the overall prevalence of moderating to severe nomophobia in college students is regularly higher than 50% (Tuco et al, 2023; Yildirim & Correia, 2015). The moderate prevalence (50%) indicates that the majority of students experience some clinically significant anxiety or distress when separated from their phone, which fits nicely with the definition of nomophobia being a fear, or anxiety, of being out of cellular contact (King et al., 2010). The observation that a larger proportion of participants were female (56%) and thus also likely included in the sample of people affected (although a severity-based breakdown is not offered by gender in Table 1) is consistent with some empirical literature reviewing mobile separation and dependency that states that females frequently report higher levels of anxiety (Ozdemir et al., 2018). This is purportedly due to females' greater use of mobile phones through socio-emotional communication, leading to higher distress values of mobile phone disconnection from their social support networks (Tárrega-Piquer et al. 2023). Further supporting the general line of thought about age and nomophobia, it was found that students aged 18–21 years (50%) were high on nomophobia, which seems to align with the popular view that younger students demonstrate more dependence on their devices, perhaps due to having been immersed in smartphone culture longer or because of greater reliance on their device for identity formation and social life (Schwaiger & Tahir, 2020). The finding that BS student had a significantly higher experience of the symptoms of nomophobia as compared with M.Phil students may have been related to age and life stage. Younger undergraduate students generally rely more on mobile phones for social networking and entertainment, while older M.Phil Students are generally focused on academic or professional use of mobile phones. This may also be related in part to greater self-regulation within the M.Phil cohort or perhaps being better established in their coping mechanisms that employ fewer digital strategies (Channa et al., 2023). It is noteworthy that Android users (74%) tend to experience more than iPhone users (25%) nomophobia, as this may reflect the socio-economic status of the sample. Generally, Android phones are widely used in developing markets due to the low cost and availability of Android phones; therefore Android phones tend to be the primary modality for access to the mobile internet for much of the population (Ozdemir et al., 2018). Students who reported using more than four social media platforms (64%) were also more at risk, which supports the link between FoMO and nomophobia (King et al.,

2010). By using multiple platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and so forth, a relationship exists between fear of missing out and the increased needs to check in on one's multiple platforms, as users are concerned about missing important social information, or status updates or communications from one of their separate digital domains, thus increasing dependency and the psychological distress experienced when users are disconnected. This current research confirms what is already known, that nomophobia continues to be widespread and is a serious psychological problem for university students, as more than half of the sample experienced moderate to high nomophobia (Pérez-Torres, 2024).

Conclusion

The aim of the current research was to estimate the prevalence of nomophobia among university students and exploring the evidence based data found that 25% of the students experience low nomophobia and 25% experience high nomophobia, when separated from their smartphones or unable to access them. This prevalence indicates the far-reaching impact of technology and increasing dependence on smartphones among younger generation.

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