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PROBLEMATIC SMARTPHONE USE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO PERSONALITY ORIENTATION, MACHIAVELLIANISM, AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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Abstract. The associations found in studies between smartphone addiction and numerous manifestations of subjective unhappiness (anxiety, depression, stress, procrastination, decreased self-control and self-esteem, dissatisfaction with life, and family problems) have led to the introduction of the construct "problematic smartphone use" and the study of its content. The study aims to test the hypothesis that there are associations between problematic smartphone use and personality orientation, Machiavellianism, and communication skills in Russian-speaking society. Data for the empirical study were collected through online testing with 713 respondents in Belarus and Russia, including 361 women aged 15–77 ($M = 26.6$, $SD = 10.9$) and 350 men aged 12–82. The working hypothesis was confirmed: The study showed that men's and women's problematic smartphone use is positively correlated with self-orientation, Machiavellianism, dependent and aggressive behavior, and dependence on social networks, and negatively correlated with task orientation, assertive behavior, and age. At the same time, Machiavellianism is positively related to self-orientation, negatively related to interaction with others, and unrelated to the person's task orientation.

The results on the associations between problematic smartphone use and Machiavellianism and behaviors complement similar international findings. The relationship between problematic smartphone use and personality orientation has not been studied.

The practical significance of the obtained results includes their possible use in prevention work to prevent students from becoming addicted to smartphones.

Keywords: *problematic smartphone use, subjective stress, personality orientation, Machiavellianism, communication skills, women, men*

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Introduction

Smartphones greatly impact people's daily lives, changing their habits and behavior. The capabilities of smartphones are constantly expanding, and today, a smartphone is a portable computer that fits in your pocket. Smartphones have

many obvious advantages: easy accessibility of communication in personal and business situations, convenient access to the Internet and social networks, and watching videos.

Therefore, in recent years, public interest in the possible negative consequences of smartphone addiction has increased, as smartphone abuse can lead to a serious problem.

Excessive smartphone use often leads to addiction, but this addiction has been associated with many negative personality traits. To date, positive associations have been found between smartphone addiction and the following manifestations of subjective unhappiness: Anxiety, depression, stress, decreased self-control and self-esteem, dissatisfaction with life, family, health, and sleep problems, risk of being a victim of cyberbullying, deterioration of academic performance, decreased productivity, alcohol dependence, and smoking dependence. Young smartphone users and women are more prone to smartphone addiction [1].

Associations have been found between smartphone addiction and mental and physical health disorders (negative emotions, poor sleep, insomnia, low physical activity). Excessive smartphone communication causes active users to lose sensitivity in their relationships with others and the ability to empathize with others. Smartphone addiction is directly related to shyness, loneliness, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, procrastination, compulsive, addictive, and unruly behavior. Unmarried users are more prone to smartphone addiction [2].

A negative correlation was found between problematic smartphone use and self-control, perseverance, self-regulation, health status, healthy lifestyle, and a positive correlation with loneliness [3].

Smartphone addiction correlates negatively with self-esteem and positively with neuroticism, impulsivity, Internet addiction, the habit of using the smartphone before going to bed, and social networking activity [4], with procrastination, shyness, susceptibility to cyberbullying, and negatively with good mood and assertiveness [5].

The association between smartphone addiction and many manifestations of subjective unhappiness among the most active users led to the introduction of the term “problematic smartphone use” In a special study, the question of whether smartphone addiction (non-medical, psychological) is a disorder was investigated, whether this disorder meets the recognized criteria for addiction (similar to “medical” addictions to drugs, alcohol, tobacco), it was concluded that it is still better to use the term “problematic smartphone use” because the behavior of people who are “addicted to smartphones” is not comparable to chemical and other medical addictions. People do not become addicted to smartphones but to the opportunities that a smartphone offers: Participating in social networking, gambling, and viewing adult content [6].

Links between problematic smartphone use and Machiavellianism

An analysis of the publications of O.Yu. Filippou has shown that in the last ten years, there has been a significant increase in the interest of the scientific

community in the study of the concept of “Machiavellianism” In six years (2013–2019), the same number of articles on Machiavellianism was published as in the previous 42-year period (1970–2012) [7].

Machiavellianism is a personality trait that describes cunning, the ability to manipulate, and the drive to gain power by any means necessary. [8].

K.J. Mejia-Suazo (C.J. Mejía-Suazo) et al. found that Machiavellianism contributes to conflicts related to cell phone use in a sample of 450 Hondurans, 55.33% female and 44.67% male, with a mean age of 25.52 years ($SD = 6.79$) [9].

In a study conducted by S. Hidalgo-Fuentes with 202 respondents (52.48% males) aged 18 to 58 years, a correlation analysis showed that problematic smartphone use was significantly associated with all Dark Triad characteristics (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy) [10].

An online survey conducted by R. Servidio et al. (R. Servidio, M.D. Griffiths, Z. Demetrovics) included 457 respondents. Machiavellianism and narcissism were directly associated with FOMO (fear of missing out), and FOMO was associated with problematic smartphone use. The preliminary results of the present study suggest that Machiavellianism and narcissism may be antecedents of FOMO, and both may be involved in the development of problematic smartphone use [11].

The findings of S. Balta and co-authors (S. Balta, P. Jonason, A. Denes, E. Emirtekin) suggest that dark personality traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, narcissism, sadism, spitefulness) may play a role in higher rates of problematic smartphone use (with different traits affecting males and females differently) and that stylistic ties partially explain the association between dark traits and problematic smartphone use [12].

Relationships between problematic smartphone use and communication skills

In a study by B. Serit, N. Çıtak Bilgi, and B. Ak (B. Cerit, N. Çıtak Bilgi & B. Ak), 214 nursing students were shown that smartphone addiction negatively affected their communication skills [13].

Meta-analysis of a series of studies on smartphone addiction conducted by C. Osorio-Molina and M.B. Martos-Cabrera (C. Osorio-Molina & M.B. Martos-Cabrera) showed that excessive smartphone use was directly related to poor communication skills, poorer sleep quality, low self-esteem, and high social stress [14].

A cross-sectional study of medical students (502 participants, 70.9% women) conducted by U. Celikkalp and co-authors found that respondents used smartphones for an average of 5.07 ± 3.32 hours per day, primarily for messaging and that duration of daily smartphone use was the most important predictor of smartphone addiction. A weak to moderate positive association was found between mean smartphone addiction scores and duration of daily smartphone use and years of smartphone use, while a weak negative association was found between mean smartphone addiction scores and communication skills scores [15].

In the work of D. Ayar and K.P. Gürkan, it was shown that there was a significant negative relationship between nursing students' communication skills and their smartphone addiction scores. [16]. The results of R. Khasana and N. Daulay's study of 155 student smartphone users showed that there was a significant negative correlation between smartphone addiction and the ability to communicate with peers: the higher the smartphone use, the lower the ability to communicate with peers, and conversely, the lower the smartphone use, the higher the ability to communicate with peers [17].

The correlations found by foreign researchers between problematic smartphone use and Machiavellianism and communication skills are of great theoretical and practical importance and raise the question of whether such correlations also exist in the Russian-speaking environment.

Also of great theoretical and practical importance is the correlation between problematic smartphone use and the orientation of the individual – to interaction, to self, to the task – however, we could not find any publications on this topic.

The study aims to test the hypothesis that there is a correlation between problematic smartphone use and Machiavellianism, personality orientation, and communication skills in Russian-speaking society.

The relevance of this study is increased by the fact that online manipulations (especially cyberbullying as one of the most common manipulations) are recently carried out via smartphones and social networks. Therefore, it is not surprising that studies have found a positive relationship between Machiavellianism and smartphone addiction [9–12] and social network addiction [18–19].

Materials and research methods

Data for the empirical study were collected via an online survey from 713 respondents in Belarus and Russia, including 361 women aged 15-77 ($M = 26.6$, $SD = 10.9$) and 350 men aged 12-82 ($M = 28.2$, $SD = 11.5$). Two respondents did not answer the question about their gender.

Methods. Smartphone addiction was diagnosed using the author's SAS-16 questionnaire [20], the Russian version we had previously adapted and validated [21]. Addiction was also measured using the author's ZSS-15 questionnaire [22], Machiavellianism was assessed using the short version [23] of the author's version of V.V. Znakov's questionnaire [24], communicative competence – L. Mikhelson's test of communication skills, translated and adapted by Yu.Z. Gilbukh [25], personality focus (on interaction, on oneself, per task) – by the Smekal-Kucher test [26, pp. 28–31].

Results and discussion

Examination of the responses showed that they all have a distribution that deviates from the norm. On this basis, we determine the required relationships between the variables using the Kendall nonparametric correlation.

The correlations found for problematic smartphone use are presented in Tables 1–6.

Table 1

*Kendall correlations of problematic smartphone use with social media addiction, Machiavellianism, and communication skills
(Total sample, N = 713)*

	Social media addiction	Machiavellianism	Communication skills		
			dependent	confident	aggressive
Coefficient	0.522**	0.166**	0.069**	-0.125**	0.099**
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.009	0.000	0.000

Note. * – $p \leq 0.05$; ** – $p \leq 0.01$.

Table 1 shows that problematic smartphone use in the general sample correlates positively with social media addiction, Machiavellianism, dependent and aggressive communication skills, and negatively with assertive communication skills.

Relationships discovered in the combined sample may prove to be statistically insignificant (or significant new relationships may emerge) in the samples of women and men comprising the combined sample. Therefore, examining the relationships between problematic smartphone use in men and women is necessary.

Table 2

Correlations between problematic smartphone use and dependence on social media, Machiavellianism, and communication skills (women, N = 361)

	Social media addiction	Machiavellianism	Communication skills		
			dependent	confident	aggressive
Coefficient	0.515**	0.229**	0.107**	-0.160**	0.175**
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.000	0.000

Table 2 shows that the problematic smartphone use of women in the sample mirrors the associations found in the general sample.

Table 3

Kendall's correlations of problematic smartphone use with social media addiction, Machiavellianism, and communication skills (men, N = 350)

	Social media addiction	Machiavellianism	Communication skills		
			dependent	confident	aggressive
Coefficient	0.514**	0.145**	0.078*	-0.127**	.084*
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.048	0.001	.044

Table 3 shows that problematic smartphone use in men also reflects the ratios in the general and female samples.

Thus, problematic smartphone use in females and males correlates positively with network addiction, Machiavellianism, dependent and aggressive communication skills, and negatively with assertive communication skills.

The positive association between problematic smartphone use and Machiavellianism is generally consistent with results previously obtained by

foreign researchers [9–12]. However, most of these foreign publications show an indirect relationship with Machiavellianism, whereas a direct positive relationship was found in the present study.

Smartphone addiction is a form of dependent behavior, so the resulting positive association with dependent communication seems quite natural. Dependent and aggressive behavior are two negative alternatives to assertive behavior. Therefore, the observed positive associations between smartphone addiction and dependent and aggressive communication and the negative associations with assertive communication are quite natural and support each other and the conclusions in general.

The correlation between problematic smartphone use and social media addiction is consistent with previous findings [20–22]. The high value of this correlation is explained by the fact that (as shown in our previous study [27]) the relationship between dependence on a smartphone and social networks takes place at the level of the factors that realize these dependencies.

Table 4

Correlations Kendall's problematic smartphone use with age and personality orientation (total sample, N=713)

	Focus personality on yourself	Personality orientation toward interaction	Personality focus on the task	Age
Coefficient	0.073**	0.003	-0.071*	-0.213**
Significance	0.005	0.920	0.019	0.000

The data in Table 4 show that in the general sample, there is a positive correlation between problematic smartphone use and focusing on oneself and a negative correlation between focusing on a task and age.

Table 5

Kendall's correlations of problematic smartphone use with age and personality orientation (females, N = 361)

	Focus personality on yourself	Personality orientation of interaction	Personality focus on the task	Age
Coefficient	0.076*	0.018	-0.079*	-0.232**
Significance	0.039	0.632	0.042	0.000

Table 6

Kendall's correlations of problematic smartphone use with age and personality orientation (male, N = 350)

	Focus personality on yourself	Personality orientation toward interaction	Personality focus on the task	Age
Coefficient	0.085*	-0.012	-0.066*	-0.185**
Significance	0.023	0.749	0.049	0.000

The data from Tables 5 and 6 show a positive association between problematic smartphone use in men and women with self-determination and a negative association with task orientation and age.

These findings are consistent with the fact that a significant portion of the time addicted users spend using smartphones is oriented toward self-direction, which prevents them from learning and working. The latter is supported by studies showing a deterioration in students' academic performance and a decline in work productivity [1].

Searching for all (possible) correlations between the studied variables, Machiavellianism was found to be positively related to self-direction (Kendall correlation equal to 0.069, $p \leq 0.001$), negatively related to interaction with others (correlation equal to -0.070 , $p \leq 0.001$), and not related to individual focus on the task.

These results are fully consistent with the nature of Machiavellianism. A Machiavellian is, first and foremost, an egoist who puts his interests above those of other people, i.e., he focuses maximally on himself. Hence, the negative attitude towards interaction with others.

The lack of correlation between Machiavellianism and the individual's concentration on the task is explained by the fact that the Machiavellian approaches participation in work from the position of his egoistic interests: if the work contributes to his goal, he will show eagerness; if not, he will pretend that it works. Because of this uncertainty, the result was not statistically significant. The link between Machiavellianism and self-direction proposed here was already established by V.P. Sheinov [28].

The direct links we have established between problematic smartphone use and Machiavellianism, dependent and aggressive communication skills, and negative links with self-aware communication skills create conditions for the victimization of smartphone users [29–30]. And at the same time, they do not contribute to self-confident behavior [31–33].

The comparison of quantitative indicators of problematic smartphone use in men and women gives the following result: the average indicator for men, which is 14.29, is significantly lower ($p \leq 0.001$) than the same indicator for women, which is 17.91. This fact is consistent with the relationship we found in other studies [1; 3].

Conclusions

The research hypothesis was fully confirmed: A positive relationship was found between problematic smartphone use and aggressive and dependent communication skills, Machiavellianism, and social network addiction, and a negative relationship was found with assertive communication skills.

Problematic smartphone use was positively related to self-direction and negatively related to task orientation and age in both women and men.

The positive correlation between problematic smartphone use and Machiavellianism is generally consistent with results previously obtained by international researchers. However, in most foreign publications, only an indirect correlation with Machiavellianism was found, whereas a direct positive correlation was found in the present study.

The present study found a positive correlation between Machiavellianism and self-direction and a negative correlation with interaction with others but not with task orientation.

The practical significance of the obtained results is that they can be used in efforts to prevent students from becoming addicted to smartphones.

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ПРОБЛЕМНОЕ ПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ СМАРТФОНОМ И ЕГО ВЗАИМОСВЯЗИ С НАПРАВЛЕННОСТЬЮ ЛИЧНОСТИ, МАКИАВЕЛЛИЗМОМ И КОММУНИКАТИВНЫМИ УМЕНИЯМИ

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Аннотация. Установленные в исследованиях связи зависимости от смартфонов с многочисленными проявлениями субъективного неблагополучия (тревожностью, депрессией, стрессом, прокрастинацией, снижением самоконтроля и самооценки, неудовлетворенностью жизнью, проблемами в семье и др.) побудили ввести конструкт «проблемное пользование смартфоном» и изучать его содержание. Целью данного исследования является проверка гипотезы о том, что в русскоязычном социуме имеют место связи проблемного пользования смартфоном с направленностью личности, макиавеллизмом и коммуникативными умениями. Данные для эмпирического исследования собраны посредством онлайн-тестирования 713 респондентов в Беларуси и России, в числе которых 361 женщина в возрасте 15–77 лет ($M = 26,6$, $SD = 10,9$) и 350 мужчин в возрасте 12–82 лет. Рабочая гипотеза подтвердилась: исследование показало, что проблемное пользование смартфонами и женщинами смартфоном положительно коррелирует с направленностью на себя, макиавеллизмом, умениями зависимого и агрессивного поведения, зависимостью от социальных сетей и отрицательно – с направленностью на задачу, с навыками уверенного поведения и с возрастом. При этом макиавеллизм положительно связан с направленностью на себя, отрицательно – с взаимодействием с другими и никак не связан с направленностью личности на задачу.

Полученные выводы о связях проблемного пользования смартфоном с макиавеллизмом и типами поведения дополняют аналогичные зарубежные результаты. Связи проблемного пользования смартфоном с направленностью личности ранее не изучались.

Практическое значение полученных результатов включает их возможное использование в профилактической работе с целью предотвращения попадания учащихся в зависимость от смартфона.

Ключевые слова: *проблемное пользование смартфоном, субъективное неблагополучие, направленность личности, макиавеллизм, коммуникативные умения, женщины, мужчины*

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