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Research Paper

Short-Form Video App Dependency: The Role of Neuroticism, Lower Life Satisfaction, and Fear of Missing Out

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the popularity of short-form videos has not only changed our ways to get information, but also profoundly affected our daily lives. Despite its advantages, there is one social issue that drew our attention. Regardless of the growing body of literature, there have only been a few numbers of research articles that discussed complex relationships between psychological factors demographic factors and short-form video dependency. Therefore, the study aims to investigate the direct and indirect associations of neuroticism, lower life satisfaction, fear of missing out and education level with short-form video dependency. An online questionnaire survey was conducted among 260 college students. The path model was constructed from previous studies. The results showed that Chinese college students with neurotic traits predicted short-form video dependency via an indirect effect of FoMO, whereas their lower life satisfaction has both direct and indirect effects on short-form video dependency. This study may offer ideas on reducing the younger generation's problematic media usage. In addition, it also provides a practical reference for future studies of social media use behavior.

Keywords: Media dependency; psychological factor; cognitive factor; demographic; short-form video

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1. INTRODUCTION

In China, the popularity of short-form videos has not only changed people's ways of accessing information, but also profoundly affected their daily lives. Short-form videos are also one of the most popular and widely disseminated video products on the Internet and they are mainly based on the combination of music, images, and words. Furthermore, these short-form videos are convenient to create compared to traditional videos and they are not only easy to edit, but users can also create content anytime and anywhere. The creation process of these videos is as follows: users will choose a category (it can be a comedy, dancing, singing, cooking, fitness guidance, etc.). The next step is to record the video from 15 to 60 seconds. Once the video is recorded and edited, it will be uploaded on a short-form video application, and users will have the chance to share the video on the same platform or to other social media accounts. Compared to the traditional video format, short-form videos have the following two features: first, it can contain a larger amount of information, and the cost of content is lower. Second, short-form videos can fulfil needs for those users who have different entertainment preference habits, such as people who are busy in life and only have limited time for entertainment.

In 2016, the number of Chinese mobile users in China had reached nearly 500 million, and usage rate of mobile videos significantly increased. By March 2020, there were nearly 850 million online video users in China, 773 millions of which were short-form video users, and user usage rate reached 85.6% (China Newscasting Services Association, 2020). In the enormous user base, college students account for the majority, and they are most affected by short-form videos.

Short-form video has tremendously changed people's entertainment preference habits. Despite its advantages, their rapid development has also led to social problems. There is one social issue that drew our attention. Certain teenagers lack self-control and easily spend too much time on short-form videos, and some adults are having similar problems. During the 19th National People's Congress, a scholar strongly recommended strengthening the tracking monitoring system to prevent Internet addiction (Cheng, 2018). In recent years, scholars claimed that users' dependence on new media have rarely involved the following factors such as the relationship

between the anxiety of missing out, personality traits, life satisfaction (Ye et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2019; Kong et al., 2019).

Regardless of the growing body of literature, previous media dependency studies have only focused on the effects of social media dependency, whereas only a few numbers of research articles discussed the complex relationships between psychological factors, demographic factors and short-form video dependency. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the direct and indirect associations between neuroticism, lower life satisfaction, fear of missing out, education level and short-form video dependency.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Media dependence theory

In this study, the Media Dependence Theory (MDT) is used for conceptualizing the context of short-form video dependency. Ball-Rokeach et al. (1984) assert that audiences, mass media, and other social systems are in a structured dependency relationship. The MDT also explains that people tend to rely on mass media for obtaining information when they are faced with uncertainty and social disruptions. MDT proposes that the effect of media communication in a larger system result in media usually taking the audience's dependence into account and provides information through media, therefore it will fulfill audience's needs and their goals. In summary, MDT is explained from two different levels of perspective: they are the “macro-level” and “micro-level”. In the macro-level’s perspective, MDT mainly examines two different study fields which are media ecology and sociology.

Furthermore, the functional role of mass media has a positive relationship with the level of social complexity. In the context of the modern era, which has been developing continuously, social structure has been changing constantly, and it has become more complex than ever throughout the years. Meanwhile, interpersonal communication continues to decrease, thus, it is very important that mass media is required to associate with social functions and social roles. Controlling information resources has become necessary in modern society which has also made users more dependent on using media. For instance, Halpern (1994) has investigated some of factors that affect the degree of media dependence in Chile. His results show that Chileans, who were living in circumstances where the government controlled the media, were highly dependent on the media especially with regards to politics compared to other types of topics.

Scholars have also found that people's political standpoints are dependent on the type of media they use (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993). Therefore, MDT also claims that when society changes, specifically when conflicts increase, audiences will resort to using media excessively due to uncertainty.

At the micro-level, MDT is mostly used for explaining individuals' dependence on media. Scholars explained that psychological (e.g., motivation, life satisfaction, and personality traits), cognitive (FoMO and attitude), and demographic (e.g., gender, income, and education) factors are key factors to predict individuals' media dependency (Lowrey 2004; Patwardhan & Yang 2003; Mafe & Blas, 2006; Ho et al., 2015; Andreassen et al., 2017; Tosun & Lajunen 2009; Gowitzka 2019). Based on previous findings, most studies have explored social media and internet news media users' dependency from a micro-level perspective, whereas the factors that influence short-form video platform users' dependency remain unclear. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how psychological, cognitive, and demographic factors influence Chinese users' short-form video dependency. During the research process, this study will examine four factors: neuroticism, lower life satisfaction, FoMO, and education.

2.2 Neuroticism and short-form video dependency

The concept of neuroticism is referring to a type of personality trait. Neurotic individuals are likely to be emotionally unstable and suffer from some negative effects (Goldberg, 1993). They are also more likely to experience feelings of fear, jealousy, stress, and vulnerability (Amirazodi, 2011). Amirazodi also confirmed that neurotic people have low levels of well-being and often feel frustrated when dating and interacting with others. Moreover, they are more likely to have low self-esteem with high depression and anxiety than non-neurotic people. Personality not only affects individuals' emotional processes, but it also affects their cognition and behaviors as well. Some researchers believe that personality is one of the most effective variables to cause addiction issues (Samarein et al., 2013). In recent years, scholars have conducted studies with neurotic individuals and their excessive use of new media. For instance, Blackwell et al. (2017) found that neurotic personality predicts the intention to social media addiction, that is while individuals who are higher in neuroticism often have a higher degree of media dependency. A similar study also found that people with a high level of neuroticism are more likely to engage in social media. Female college students were more inclined to attach to Facebook than male students (Simoncic et al., 2014). Correa et al. (2010) also found that neurotic females were more

dependent on social media as they tended to participate more in social activities, including online chatting and joining discussion groups. A scholar attributes the neurotic individuals' social media addiction to their self-presentational behaviors, which are higher than the other personalities and motive them to express on social media and eventually led to a high dependence on social media in daily life (Seidman, 2013). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H1. College students with neurotic traits would be positively associated with their short-form video dependency.

2.3 Lower life satisfaction and short-form video dependency

Life satisfaction is a concept that is widely mentioned in the social psychology study field. Diener et al. (1985) pointed out that life satisfaction often refers to how people evaluate their own quality of life, and it is also considered as one of the most important indicators which measure the quality of living standards and mental health. In this study, lower life satisfaction refers to an individual's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her lower life. In recent years, scholars took this concept to conduct further studies on new media dependence. Özgüven and Mucan (2013) investigated the relationship between Turkish college students' social media usage and their personality traits and life satisfaction. The results showed that life satisfaction was one of the key factors that predict students' social media dependence. Kong et al. (2017) also investigated Chinese college students' relationship between the use of social media and life satisfaction. The results show that the use of social media was negatively associated with life satisfaction. Ferguson et al. (2014) conducted a survey with 237 Hispanic young women where he examines the relationship between their body satisfaction, life satisfaction and use of social media and TV. They found that neither body satisfaction nor life satisfaction predicted TV usage, but lower life satisfaction was one of the factors that positively correlated with excessive social media use.

To sum up, previous research has shown that the findings are contradict others. Based our knowledge, the lower life satisfaction on media dependence have more positive effect than negative. Therefore, we assumed that Chinese college students' lower life satisfaction will have positive influence on short-form video dependency.

H2. College students' lower life satisfaction would be positively associated with their short-form video dependency.

2.4 FoMO's direct and indirect effect on short-form video dependency

Several studies have investigated factors affecting new media dependency (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp) in various contexts. Results show that it is promising to explain dependent behavior from a cognitive perspective, and one of the key cognitive factors is Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Gemma (2012) defined FoMO as “a feeling of discomfort, sometimes intense, when you are missing out on things that your friends already knew about, or they have things that are better than yours”. In the context of this research, FoMO refers to the anxiety people experience when they miss out on trending information on short-video platforms, which will further trigger an obsession to know what others are doing.

A scholar has pointed out that FoMO is closely linked with all forms of media (e.g., newspapers, letters, pictures, emails), from which users are likely to learn about the daily lives of their friends, family, or even strangers (Abel et al., 2016). As social media become more powerful in recent years, the daily traffic to social media and other media platforms has increased drastically. The amount of time users spend on the platforms has also increased. On that account, FoMO leads to a deeper impact on media dependency, both directly and indirectly. Fabris et al. (2020) have investigated how Italian adolescents' FoMO has impacted their emotional well-being. The findings show that their FoMO positively predicts excessive use of social media. Barry et al. (2017) believe that FoMO is positively associated with teenagers' social media activities. Moreover, the higher one experiences FoMO, the higher dependence one has on smartphones and social media (Buglass et al., 2016). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H3. College students' fear of missing out would be positively associated with their Short-form Video Dependency.

Although previous studies consider the connection between psychological, cognitive, and media dependency is weak, they strongly suggest that those factors have been positively associated with FoMO, which further increases users' excessive use of social media. A recent study found that neuroticism is positively associated with FoMO, and FoMO has a positive indirect effect on individuals' susceptibility and pressure (Blackwell et al., 2017). Jood (2017) found that lower life satisfaction was positively associated with social media users' fear of missing out. On the other hand, neuroticism and lower life satisfaction respectively further encourage a higher level of Facebook dependency via an indirect effect of FoMO (Błachnio & Przepiórka, 2018).

Nevertheless, the potential indirect effect of FoMO on Chinese users' psychology, cognition, and short-form video dependency is relatively less researched. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H4. The neurotic traits of college students would be positively associated with students' fear of missing out.

H5. The lower life satisfaction of college students would be positively associated with students' fear of missing out.

2.5 Education level and short-form video dependency

The concept of demographic variables refers to independent variables in empirical studies. Demographic variables may be either categorical (e.g., gender, race, marital status, or psychiatric diagnosis) or continuous (e.g., age, years of education, income, or family size) (Salkind, 2010). The term "education" refers to the level of education attained by an individual and must be distinguished from concepts such as competencies, performance at school, and educational disciplines (Schneider, 2016). Literature shows that among demographic variables, education level is considered as an independent variable that has a strong relation with media dependency (Mafe & Blas 2006; Andreassen et al., 2017). For instance, Andreassen et al. (2017) conducted a cross-sectional study about Norwegian media users' excessive media use behavior. The study examines the relationship between demographic variables (e.g., income, gender, education level), narcissism, self-esteem, and excessive media use. Results show that education level is a critical variable that predicts excessive media use. In other words, Norwegian media users with lower educational levels are more likely to have strong media dependency. The following hypothesis is thus proposed:

H6. College students' level of education would be negatively associated with their short-form video dependency.

Based on the previous theoretical and empirical studies, the following hypotheses are formed to examine the relationship among Neuroticism, Lower life satisfaction, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and Short-form Video Dependency. Our conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

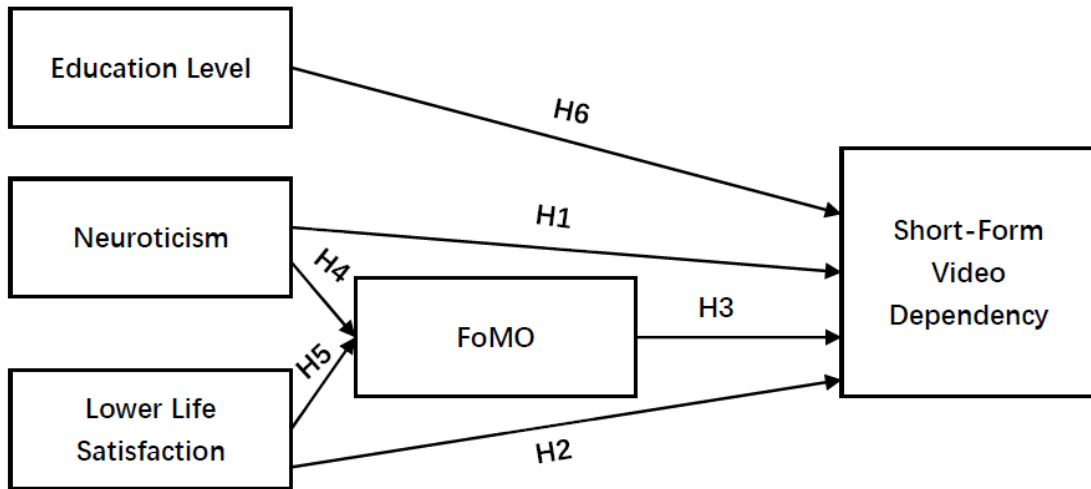


Figure 1. A Model of Predictors of Short-Form Video Dependency

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Procedure

The survey questionnaire was adapted from the previous literature, and it was pretested with 20 college students to ensure the reliability. The finalized instrument has 4 scales, each measuring one of the followed constructs: neuroticism (John, 2007), life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985), fear of missing out (Przybylski et al., 2013) out and short-form video dependency (Omar & Dequan, 2020). All variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale varying from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 5 “Strongly Agree”. With 17 questions in total, the questionnaire was implemented through QuestionnaireStar.com, Participants were recruited from two large public universities in Northeast China. Data collection started on November 20, 2020. Now we have collected 260 responses, for measurement scales and items are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Measurement Scale and Items

Variable	Items
Neuroticism (NEU)	NEU1: I consider myself a conservative person
	NEU2: I consider myself a trustworthy person
	NEU3: I consider myself a person who tends to be lazy
	NEU4: I think I am a very relaxed person and can handle pressure well
	NEU5: I consider myself a person with little interest in art
	NEU6: I consider myself an outgoing and sociable person
	NEU7 : I consider myself a person who likes to find fault with others
	NEU8 : I feel I am a complete work of the people
	NEU9 : I think I'm a nervous person
Lower Life Satisfaction (LLS)	LLS1: For the most part, I think life is close to ideal
	LLS2: I think my living condition is very good
	LLS3: I am satisfied with my life
	LLS4: So far, I have achieved goals that are important in my life
	LLS5: Even if I could start my life over again, I would not change anything
FoMO (FoM)	FoM1: I am worried that others have more rewarding experiences than me
	FoM2: I am worried that my friends have more rewarding experiences than me
	FoM3: I get worried when I find out my friends are having fun without me
	FoM4: I get anxious when I don't know what my friends are up to.

Variable	Items
	FoM5: It is important that I understand my friends' jokes.
	FoM6: Sometimes, I wonder if I spend too much time keeping up with what is going on.
	FoM7: It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to meet up with friends.
	FoM8: When I have a good time it is important for me to share the details online (e.g., updating status).
	FoM9: When I miss out on a planned get-together it bothers me.
	FoM10: When I go on vacation, I continue to keep tabs on what my friends are doing online.
Short-Form Video Dependency (SFVD)	SFVD1: I spend a lot of time on short-form video applications.
	SFVD2: I am always willing to use short-form video applications, and the temptation of such apps is getting stronger.
	SFVD3: I use short-form video apps to distract myself.
	SFVD4: I've been discouraged from using short-form video applications, but I don't care.
	SFVD5 : I've tried to cut down on the usage of short-form video applications, but it did not work.
	SFVD6 : If am not allowed to use short-form video applications, I will get anxious.
	SFVD7 : The overuse of short-form video applications has a negative effect on my work or study.

4.RESULTS

Key demographic characteristics of the survey participants were summarized in Table 1. Out of the 260 samples, 74.2% were female (N=193) and 25.8% male (N=67); their ages ranged between 18 and 24 for most participants (66.9%). Most of the participants are holding a bachelor's degree (69.6%), and most of the participants live in urban areas (69.2%). Key demographic characteristics of the survey participants were summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Key Demographic Characteristics of The Survey Participants

Demographic Variable	Variable	N	Percent
Gender	Female	193	74.2%
	Male	67	25.8%
	Total	260	100%
Education Level		13	5%
	Undergraduate	181	69.6%
	Master's	56	21.5%
	Ph.D.	10	3.8%
	Total	260	100%
Age	18 or younger	10	3.8%
	18-24 years old	174	66.9%
	25-34 years old	69	26.5%
	35-44 years old	7	2.7%
	Total	260	100%
Location	City	180	69.2%
	County	38	14.6%
	Village	12	4.6%
	Town	30	11.5%
	Total	260	100%

To test the hypothesized model, a path analysis is applied (Figure 2). The results firstly show that the neurotic traits of college students are not positively associated with students' short-form video dependency, $r(260) = -.135$, $p = .040$ (rejecting H1). College students' lower life satisfaction is positively associated with their short-form video dependency, $r(260) = .117$, $p < .048$ (supporting H2). College students' fear of missing out is positively associated with short-form video dependency, $r(260) = .211$, $p = .001$ (supporting H3). College students' neurotic traits and their FoMO are positively associated, $r(260) = .27$, $p < .001$ (supporting H4). College students' lower life satisfaction is positively associated with their fear of missing out, $r(260) = .206$, $p < .001$ (supporting H5). College students' level of education is not negatively associated with their short-form video dependency, $r(260) = -.039$, $p = .597$ (rejecting H6).

As a result, model indicated good fit to the data $\chi^2 = 2.300$, $p = 1.129$, GFI = .996, NFI = .966, RMSEA = .071.

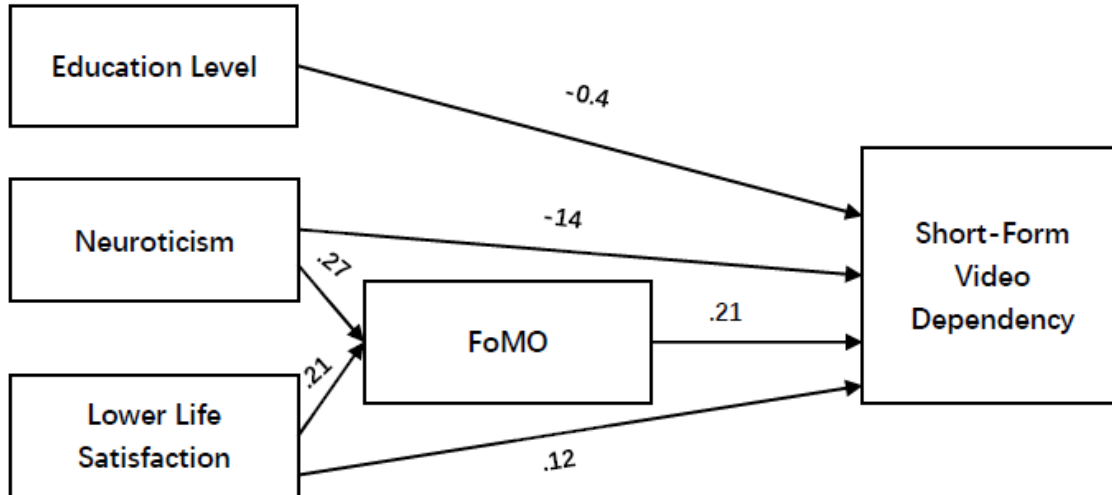


Figure 2. The Effects of Predictors of Short-Form Video Dependency

The testing results of the model provides a comprehensive understanding of how short-form video dependency is predicted by the psychological and cognitive factors. Out of the six hypotheses, although H1 with neuroticism and H6 with education level as predictors are rejected; H2, H3, H4 and H5, the hypotheses regarding cognitive and the other psychological factors, are all supported.

5. DISCUSSION

Integrated with Media Dependence Theory, this study explains individuals' dependence on short-form video platforms at a micro-level. Therefore, the aim of this study was to analyze the relationship between psychological (personality, lower life satisfaction), cognitive (FoMO), and demographic (education level) factors and short-form video dependency. The direct and indirect effects of these factors on Chinese college students' short-form video dependency are examined in depth.

In terms of direct effects, college students' lower life satisfaction has a significant positive association with short-form video dependency, which is compatible with previous findings (Jood, 2017; Kong et al., 2017). This finding can be explained by the fact that users who

perceived higher stress subsequently exhibited short-form video dependency. Globally, college students report stress from experiences of academic failure, high expectations from parents, and maintaining or making new friends in college (Borjalilu, 2015). Longstreet (2017) also explained that while users report that stress is more likely to decrease their level of life satisfaction, this will further encourage social media and internet addictions. One of the most interesting findings of this research is that college students' lower life satisfaction had a direct effect on short-form video dependency, whereas FoMO had an indirect effect on the relationship between lower life satisfaction and short-form video dependency. This finding is in line with previous studies (Barry et al. 2017; Buglass et al., 2016). Uram and Skalski (2020) also claims that as individuals have higher FoMo, they are more likely to use social media excessively (Facebook), but their level of well-being has decreased. In addition, a previous study also found that not only does FoMO have a direct effect on social media dependency, but also an indirect effect on the relationship between perceived online social support and social media dependency (Liu & Ma, 2020). Therefore, it could be asserted that as users receive increased online support on short-form video platforms, they are more likely to spend time on the platform, thereby leading to a deeper impact on individuals' dependence on short-form video platforms.

Neuroticism did not have a significantly positive effect on short-form video dependency, which is at odds with previous studies (Correa et al. 2010; Fabris, 2020;), users with higher neuroticism tend to have higher media dependency. This relationship could be explained by the fact that different personality traits have different effects on short-form video dependency. Specifically, users with Extrovert traits show a stronger effect than other personality traits. For instance, Marshall (2015) found that Extroverted users tend to spend more time updating their activities on social media compared to other personalities, which further encourages them to use social media excessively. The insignificant relationship between college students' level of education and their short-form video dependency contradicts the results of several studies (Mafe & Blas 2006; Andreassen et al., 2017). One recent study could be explained by Chinese university's curriculum management. Lower level Chinese college students have a more hectic college schedule than higher level students due to course overload in the first year of school. For instance, Tian et al (2020) investigated 536 freshmen students from 14 class and 4 majors in a medical university in Shandong, China. One of the results shows that their mobile phone addiction is relatively small, at only 9.7%. Moreover, participants stated that their time spent on

phone applications is controlled by their parents. Therefore, parents' involvement limits their time spent on mobile phones as well.

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, the current study's results fill the gap in understanding regarding the effect of psychological factors and demographic factors on short-form video dependency. Taken together, our findings have contributed in two aspects. Firstly, based on the theoretical perspective, this study explains the direct and indirect mechanisms that take neuroticism, lower life satisfaction, fear of missing out and education level towards short-form video dependency. Secondly, it is important to acknowledge that there is an indirect effect on life satisfaction to short-form video dependency via FoMo, whereas neuroticism would not lead to short-form video dependency, unless FoMo indirectly impacts the relationship between neuroticism and short-form video dependency.

6.1 Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. Firstly, the analysis was done by a cross-sectional study. In this regard, it is difficult to identify the direct and indirect effects of tested factors. Secondly, the survey participants are representative of two large public universities in Northeast China. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the larger group of college students in China. Lastly, the participants' short-form video applications usage activities are varied. Although most Chinese participants have admitted that they use the applications daily, their actual activities on each short-form video platform are still unclear.

6.2 Future Research

Future research should continue to look at other aspects of personality traits. For instance, extroverted users may have demonstrated a stronger direct effect on social media platforms. Therefore, it is recommended to investigate how their short-form video dependency, and indirect effects via FoMO, further encourage short-form video dependency. Furthermore, the moderated effect could be tested in future studies, as previous research shows that negative self-esteem has a moderated effect on excessive use of social media (Andreassen et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018). These potential future studies will fill the gap in understanding the moderating role of cognitive factors in media dependency studies.

Lastly, college student's phubbing behavior remains a common social issue and is considered to be a major academic concern. Phubbing behavior can have negative consequences. Specifically, it is harmful to students' mental health and communication capabilities. A recent study found that internet addiction was positively related to phubbing behavior (Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell, 2019). Regardless of the growing body of literature, there have only been a few research articles that discussed short-form video dependency. Therefore, future research is needed to provide better understanding of the problematic use of short-form video behavior.

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