

A Study on the Relationship between Adolescent SNS Overdependence and Adolescent Ego Identity

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ABSTRACT: Adolescents' SNS (Social Networking Service) usage greatly affects their relationships, mental health, and physical well-being. According to this study, adolescents tend to prefer their cyber identities (within SNS, video games, or other internet communities) to their "real" identity as a family member or student. This preference leads to smartphone immersion. This review article aims to examine the research surrounding adolescents' SNS usage, SNS overdependence, and the relationship between SNS overdependence and adolescents' ego identity. 2024 Statista demonstrates that the rate of smartphone ownership and usage among teenagers is higher than in other age groups, and is steadily increasing. The study also showed that female teenagers spend more time on social media than their male counterparts. The main purpose of SNS usage in teenagers was to communicate with friends or family (with TikTok and Instagram being the most popular mediums). Through analysis of preceding research papers, this literature review will demonstrate how adolescents' SNS overdependence is a central factor in ego identity formation. Developing self-control ability is the main factor in reducing SNS overdependence. This literature review will illuminate how to prevent adolescents' SNS overdependence and form an optimistic ego identity.

KEYWORDS: SNS (Social Networking Service), SNS Overdependence, Ego Identity, Adolescence, Smart Media.

■ Introduction

Recently, a new neologism, Phono sapiens, has emerged. This compound word of 'smartphone' and 'homo sapiens' refers to a new generation that conceptualizes smartphones as a part of their body, an extension of self.¹ Smartphones have become a widespread, deep-rooted element of adolescents' cultures.

According to the 2022 Pew Research Center,² nearly half of U.S. teens self-proclaim to use the internet "almost constantly." In 2014 to 2015, 95 percent of adolescents used the internet; however, in 2019, 97 percent of adolescents used the internet. The percentage (56%) of adolescents who use the internet several times a day and the percentage (46%) of adolescents who utilize the internet almost constantly both increased. This SNS overdependence has negative mental, physical, and relational effects.^{4,9}

In adolescence, because of rapid changes in social, cognitive, and physical development, teenagers are often confused and threatened by a constantly shifting self-awareness. Therefore, the establishment of ego identity emerges as an important issue in adolescence.¹⁰ With the development of Information and Communication Technologies, digital media techniques such as SNS expand opportunities to express one's identity beyond the familial or academic realm (whether that be through a virtual character or anonymous chat forum).

However, since SNS overdependence is a fairly recent development, research into the field is inadequate. Further, there is a dearth of research exploring the relationship between adolescents' SNS overdependence and their ego identity.

This review article aims to find characteristics of overdependence through articles about SNS usage and other research.

Moreover, it aims to analyze the relationship between adolescents' ego identity and SNS overdependence and provide the basic data for prevention programs that will encourage positive ego identity formation.

Key Words:

1. SNS (Social Networking Service)

SNS can be defined as a web-based online service where people reveal personal information publicly or privately to form relationships in the virtual space.¹⁸

2. SNS Overdependence

Smartphone overdependence refers to "a state in which excessive smartphone use increases the salience of smartphones and decreases self-control, resulting in serious consequences."^{19,22}

Central to the definition of addiction is a dependence on a substance or activity. Smartphone addiction is generally conceptualized as a behavioral addiction. Literature suggests that mood tolerance, salience, withdrawal, and cravings have been associated with excessive smartphone use.²³

In addition, in this study,²⁴ smartphone addiction means "a state of severe anxiety and loss of control due to excessive use and immersion in various functions of a smartphone, causing obstacles to his or her daily life." As described above, there is no significant difference in meaning between smartphone addiction and smartphone overdependence.

According to the Korea National Information Society Agency (NIA),²⁵ the tendency of SNS overdependence is similar to smartphone addiction or internet addiction. Also, SNS

overdependence means continually using SNS even though one experiences serious psychological and social consequences because of increased salience and self-control failure.

Within the scope of this paper, SNS overdependence can be seen as similar to smartphone addiction or internet addiction. In addition, the paper will consider both the positive and negative aspects of internet usage, instead of treating adolescents as pathological diagnostic subjects. This study will utilize a unified word: SNS overdependence.

To sum up, this study defines SNS overdependence as using SNS constantly despite serious consequences, as well as experiencing withdrawal and tolerance by over-communicating and over-concentrating on SNS.

3. Ego Identity

Ego identity is the perception of selfhood: personality, future outcomes, and societal belonging. According to Erikson, the main developmental obstacle that adolescents face is ego identity confusion. In other words, the developmental task of an adolescent is to form a firm perception of who they are, where they are headed, and where they fit in.²⁶

Sub-elements in ego identity can be divided into six categories: Independence, Self-Receptiveness, Future Certainty, Goal Orientation, Proactive Personality, and Intimacy.²⁷ First is independence, the degree to which one feels able to actively influence one's role and environment, also known as ability. Second is self-receptiveness, which is the self-perceived ability and talent level. Third is future certainty, the degree of hope one has for the future, the confidence to actualize one's dreams. Fourth is goal orientation, the will to fulfill tasks and realize conceptions of one's long-term identity.²⁷ Fifth is a proactive personality, the ability to recognize one's role and do tasks proactively.²⁹ The last category is intimacy, the level of group membership, degree of self-exposure, social flexibility (inhabiting various private and public selves), and the ability to maintain close relationships.

■ Methods

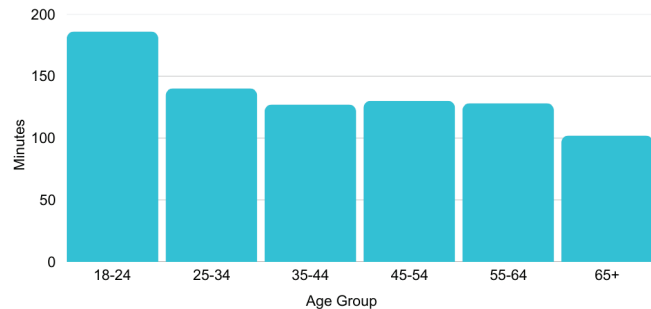
1. SNS usage status of Korean youth:

South Korea's rate of social media usage is second in the world. 92 percent of South Koreans use social media.³⁰ Especially among teenagers and young adults, smartphone retention rates were 100 percent and 99.4 percent, respectively, the highest among the age groups. The first and second most highly ranked purposes for smartphone usage are 'communication'.³¹

In the U.S., according to the February 2024 Statista (**Figure 1, Figure 2**),³⁰ among several age groups: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+, ages 18-24 showed the highest average time spent using social media. While users aged 18 to 24 spent 186 minutes a day on social media, respondents aged 65 and older utilized social media for 102 minutes daily. Preferred platforms also differ. TikTok was most used by teenagers aged 18-24. Their daily use averaged 76 minutes on the platform. Respondents aged 25-34, aged 35-44, and aged 45-54 spent most time on TikTok with an average of 50 minutes, 47 minutes, and 45 minutes, respectively. However, for respondents

aged 55 to 65, Facebook dominated with approximately 45 minutes of daily usage.

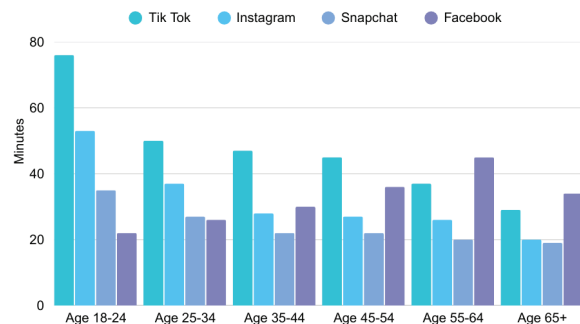
In South Korea, the 2022 Teenager Media Use Survey Report in Korea records that Korean teenagers' average daily internet usage is approximately 8 hours, more than their daily average of 7.2 hours of sleep. Today, the internet has consumed teenagers' daily lives, especially KakaoTalk and Instagram.



United States; February 2024; 18 years and older; Internet users who use a social network via any device at least once per month; includes all time spent on social network platforms; includes usage via any device

Total average time spent on social media daily by age group in the United States in February 2024

Figure 1: Average time spent on selected social media platforms daily among adults in the United States in February 2024, by age group (in minutes). Among all the age groupings, age 18-24 showed the highest average time spent using social media. (Created in Canva).



United States; February 2024; 18 years and older; Internet users who use a social network via any device at least once per month; includes all time spent on social network platforms; includes usage via any device

Average time spent on selected social media platforms daily among adults in the United States in February 2024

Figure 2: This table illustrates the favored social media platforms of various age groups. TikTok was most popular among teenagers and young adults aged 18-24. (Created in Canva).

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP),³² teens frequently say that social media helps keep them connected to friends and family. This paper also found that teenage females tend to consider communication as more important than their male counterparts. Perhaps because of this, there are more female social media users than males. Therefore, this review article suggests that the government and other companies should devise programs to improve female students' relationships.

This study⁵⁵ showed that gender is a large factor in smartphone overdependence, game addiction, and SNS addiction.

The male students showed a higher tendency towards game addiction than their female counterparts. However, female students were more vulnerable to smartphone overdependence and SNS addiction than their male peers. In addition, this study showed that females with depression are more likely to become addicted to SNS than males struggling with depression.

2. The condition of adolescents' SNS overdependence:

This article³ covers the condition of adolescents' SNS overdependence through the Korea Ministry of Science and ICT and statistical data of the Korea National Information Society Agency (NIA), from September to November of 2023.

The Korea Ministry of Science and ICT and the Korea National Information Society Agency (NIA) collected data to prevent smartphone overdependence and find effective policy solutions. In 2023, researchers conducted 1000 South Korean household visits, surveying smartphone users aged 3-69. The collected data results are in **Table 1**. Table 1 shows the percentage of smartphone over-dependence risk groups in children aged 3 to 9, adolescents aged 10 to 19, adults aged 20 to 59, and older adults aged 60 to 69 from 2019 to 2023.

In 2019, the percentage of over-dependence risk groups was 22.9%. A 30.2% risk for smartphone over-dependence was shown in adolescents. In adulthood, the risk decreased to 18.8%, and shrunk further to 14.9% for those aged 60 to 69.

In 2023, the percentage of over-dependence risk groups in childhood was 25.0%. Adolescence was 40.1%, adulthood was 22.7%, and for those over 60, 13.5%. Adolescents' smartphone over-dependence was the highest among the age groups. In the last 5 years (2019-2023), the percentage of adolescents' smartphone over-dependence has increased by 32.7%.³ 4 of 10 Korean adolescents are in danger of over-dependence.

Table 1: 2019-2023 Recent 5 Years Smartphone Over-dependence Risk Ratio.

Resource: The Report of 2023 The Condition of Smartphone Over-dependence from Korea National Information Society Agency (NIA). Within the years 2019 to 2023, adolescents aged 10-19 showed the highest smartphone over-dependence among the age groups in each year 2019 to 2023. (Created in Canva).

Unit: %

Index	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Smartphone Overdependence Risk Group	20.0	23.3	24.2	23.6	23.1
Childhood (age 3-9)	22.9	27.3	28.4	26.7	25.0
Adolescence (age 10-19)	30.2	35.8	37.0	40.1	40.1
Adulthood (age 20-59)	18.8	22.2	23.3	22.8	22.7
Age 60 (age 60-69)	14.9	16.8	17.5	15.3	13.5

The three factors of smartphone over-dependence are self-control failure, resilience, and serious consequences. The result and scale of smartphone over-dependence are extracted from these three factors.³

First, self-control failure. Self-control failure means the users' control ability decreases due to smartphone usage compared to users' subjective goals.

Second is salience. Salience means that within one's life, using smartphones becomes one's most important and prominent activity.

The last is serious consequences. This refers to consistent smartphone usage despite the user's experience of negative physical, psychological, and social consequences.³

Each factor was rated on a scale of 4 points for prevalence in the adolescent over-dependence risk group. Self-control failure scored highest with 3.03, while salience was the second most prevalent (score 2.84), and serious consequences were lowest (score 2.44).

On the other hand, the general adolescent user group experienced self-control failure (score 2.10), salience (score 1.87), and serious consequences (score 1.72). Both groups showed that self-control failure was high for smartphone usage.

This NIA research concluded that excessive smartphone usage increases salience and decreases self-control ability, leading to serious consequences. This study³⁵ showed that social gratification and social media self-control failure (SMSCF) are two important mechanisms through which SNS use affects emotional health. Users may also experience negative emotions due to their internal failure to utilize self-control in regards to social media. The study illustrated that insufficient self-control in SNS use is closely associated with Facebook addiction and smartphone addiction. Another study found that users with low self-control tend to be attracted to friend-networking SNS, but not SNS with an entertainment and information sharing focus.³³ Other studies have shown that using SNS late at night is positively associated with sleep depletion, indicating a failure of self-control in using SNS during rest time.³³

This study showed that self-control ability is the most impactful factor in adolescents' SNS overdependence.

3. The relationship between SNS overdependence and ego identity:

Adolescents are in the process of forming an ego identity, in other words, a concept of who they are and their place in society. This individuality is often found through a crisis of role confusion.³⁶

Erikson³⁷ viewed ego identity as a continually improving sense of oneself, rather than a calcified social reality. Ego identity is not changed by external status, but through a gradual development of confidence in one's abilities to eventually arrive at internal homogeneity and continuity.

Waterman³⁸ defined ego identity as a clear concept of oneself, decisions about life goals, values, and beliefs, practical actions to carry out those decisions, degree of self-acceptance, a sense of one's own uniqueness, the exploration of several potential identities, and confidence in one's future. Weinreich³⁹

defined it as a self-understanding reached through reflection about one's past, present, and future.

The concept of ego identity by Erikson³⁶ suggests that it's the answer to the question 'Who am I?'. This constant self-evaluation is an essential component of maintaining a healthy personality.²⁷ If this ego identity cannot form, life development will be delayed, and negative symptoms such as low self-esteem and addiction will develop.⁴⁰ Studies have demonstrated a negative relationship between SNS addiction (similar to internet addiction or smartphone addiction) and ego identity.⁴¹⁻⁴³

- ***SNS activity has a positive effect on ego identity:***

Early adolescents require psychological time and space to face the task of identity formation. The smartphone space offers numerous possibilities to try out various selves.

Through SNS, adolescents can express themselves and communicate actively, utilizing texts, pictures, emoticons, and avatar nicknames. This paper showed that teenagers' immersion in smart devices has a positive effect on online communication. Within the virtual space, adolescents are able to engage in debates and emotional communication that they would not be comfortable with in "reality." This study⁵² revealed a positive effect of online communication on one's ego identity.

This study⁵³ also showed that social media platforms can allow the sharing of one's interests and activities, through text, videos, and images. This type of personal sharing on social media, especially as an authentic form of self-expression, can help teenagers better understand who they are. It concludes that social media can help to build Identity, Self-Expression, and Self-Affirmation.

- ***SNS overdependence has a negative effect on ego identity:***

Middle school students plagued by internet addiction do not fully form an ego identity.⁴⁴ The communication addiction group possesses a low ego identity compared to the normal group.⁴²

This study⁴⁵ shows that South Korean students' internet addiction has a significant impact on ego identity. There is a negative relationship between internet addiction and sub-factors of ego identity, such as Self Receptiveness, Future Certainty, Goal Orientation, Proactive Personality, and Intimacy. According to preceding research from the U.S.,¹⁷ the past experiences and behavior of users, and their ego-identities are important prediction factors in SNS usage. Also, ego identity and belongingness are highly impactful on the tendency towards SNS addiction.

This study⁴⁶ shows the degree of ego identity followed by excessive immersion in smart media. This study found that adolescents with excessive immersion in smart media show low ego identity.

This study⁴⁷ aims to examine the relationship between self-identity confusion and Internet addiction (IA) and the mediating effects of psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance (PI/EA) indicators in college students. The researcher included that the severity of self-identity confu-

sion was positively associated with the severity of PI/EA and IA. The results demonstrated that the severity of self-identity confusion was related to the severity of IA, either directly or indirectly. The indirect relationship was mediated by the severity of PI/EA. This research suggests that early detection and intervention of self-identity confusion and PI/EA should be the objectives for programs aiming to lower the risk of IA.

- ***The mediating effect of ego identity in the relationship between depression and aggression due to SNS overdependence:***

Adolescents' smartphone dependence has a high positive relationship with depression and other behavioral issues such as aggression. This study⁴⁸⁻⁵⁰ also demonstrated a negative relationship between depression and aggression.

In this study,⁵¹ adolescents' smartphone dependence affects depression, aggression, and ego identity was a mediating effect. The degree of depression and aggression in Korean adolescents who have high ego identity has been analyzed to be low depression and aggression so which shows a positive factor for adolescents.

Summarizing preceding research, **Figure 3** shows the relationship between SNS overdependence and adolescents' ego identity.

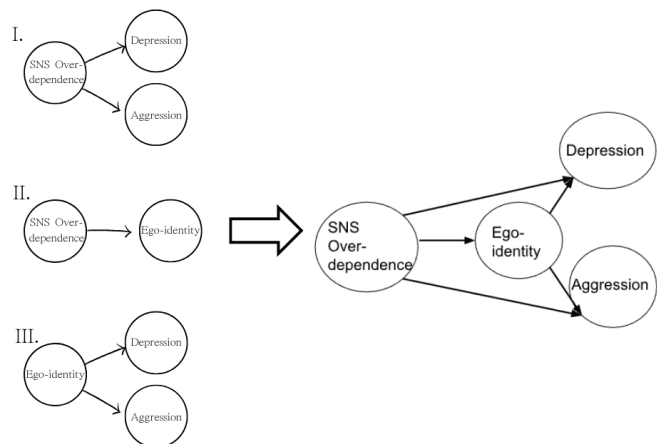


Figure 3: Summarizing preceding research, Figure 3 shows 'The Relationship Between SNS Overdependence and Adolescents' Ego Identity'. SNS Overdependence has a high positive relationship with depression and aggression. In turn, this depression and aggression can have a mediating effect on ego identity. (Created in Canva).

■ Conclusion

Through preceding research on the media usage of teenagers, studies conclude that the purpose of using SNS is to communicate with loved ones. In other words, teenagers highly prioritize communication in the digital world.

Also, SNS overdependence status reports show that teenagers' SNS overdependence is increasing, especially among teenage girls. Today, governments and other organizations are seeking several solutions to the issue of SNS overdependence. Governmental approaches to mitigating the digital addiction of minors have drastically different. For example, Australia's Kennedys law,⁵² new legislation passed in 2024, prohibits children under 16 from using social media without verified parental consent. In the UK, 'The Online Safety Act,' set to

be fully implemented in 2025, enhances the protective framework by imposing a duty of care on online platforms to shield children from harmful content and interactions. Within the U.S., in 2024, California passed legislation to impose robust requirements on businesses offering online services likely to be accessed by children under 18.

But as these papers have shown, adolescents utilize SNS not only as a tool for communication, but also as an important way of performing and developing an identity. Put altogether, applying the benefits of using SNS, such as self-expression on SNS, forming a healthy culture among adolescents, and belongingness from communicating well, SNS overdependence prevention programs should be developed. This study⁵³ analyzed 13 research papers about the intervention methods of smartphone addiction. The results show that art therapy was found in 6 research papers (37.5%), exercise therapy in four research papers (25.0%), and cognitive behavior therapy in three research papers (18.6%). Future SNS overdependence prevention programs should include art therapy, as it has been demonstrated to mitigate SNS overdependence in adolescents. To maximize the function of communication, not only the government, but also companies should develop some programs or campaigns that can prevent SNS overdependence and reinforce belongingness and communication among friends.

The hypothetical research model proposed in this study—formulated to explain the causal relationships among adolescents' SNS overdependence, ego identity, aggression, and depression based on prior research and theoretical considerations—requires evaluation of its statistical adequacy through future empirical data collection.

Given that all variables within the model represent latent constructs and considering the importance of measurement validity and reliability, it is essential to employ statistical analysis methods based on structural equation modeling (SEM), which has been increasingly adopted in contemporary social science research.

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