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Distracted and monitored: *how* and *when* social media induced phubbing triggers supervisors' close monitoring

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Abstract

Purpose – Drawing on leader–member exchange theory, this study aims to explore how employees' social media addiction can trigger phubbing behaviors that, in turn, shape supervisors' monitoring responses. Furthermore, the moderating role of employee work passion is investigated.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from employees in the United States and analyzed using Hayes' PROCESS macro.

Findings – The findings reveal that phubbing, driven by social media addiction, compels supervisors to closely monitor their employees. Moreover, work passion significantly moderates this relationship.

Practical implications – This paper highlights the need for supportive policies, training and mentorship to regulate social media use, foster healthy communication and reduce phubbing at work.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the impact of employee social media addiction on supervisor close monitoring through phubbing behavior.

Keywords Social media addition (SMA), Phubbing, Work passion, Supervisor close monitoring (SCM), Leader-member exchange (LMX)

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

In recent years, the exponential growth of social media has revolutionized how individuals connect and communicate, extending its influence into professional settings (Masood *et al.*, 2021). While these platforms offer numerous benefits, their pervasive nature has also given rise to Social Media Addiction (SMA) that occurs when employees indulge in a disproportionate use of social media at work, often at the expense of other activities (Zivnuska *et al.*, 2019). SMA poses significant challenges in the workplace (Tandon *et al.*, 2022). As employees increasingly engage with social media during working hours, organizations face a range of negative outcomes, including decreased productivity, impaired job performance, and reduced organizational efficiency (Andreassen and Pallesen, 2014). Moreover, employees' SMA may disrupt workplace interpersonal dynamics when it results in specific behaviors such as phubbing, where individuals prioritize their smartphone devices over in-person interactions.

Phubbing in professional settings is a form of social exclusion caused by the overuse of smartphones to access social media instead of communicating with colleagues during workplace interactions (Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas, 2016). Thus, phubbing may disrupt communication and the expected behavioral norms, and foster feelings of neglect in the interaction partners (Yousaf *et al.*, 2022), leading to various negative psychological and relational outcomes both in those being phubbed (e.g. Huang and Bartels, 2025) as well as the

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phubbers themselves (e.g. Tandon *et al.*, 2022). Because of the recognized detrimental effects of phubbing, coupled with its increasing proliferation in the workplace (Yasin *et al.*, 2023), a comprehensive understanding of its consequences and range of responses is both theoretically and practically necessary.

Phubbing may occur at various levels and across various relationship groups in workplace contexts. Recent studies have made valuable contributions exploring extensively supervisors' phubbing behavior and its negative effects on employees, showing that "Boss Phubbing" is associated with employees' low trust in supervisors, low intrinsic motivation, low job engagement, and poor job performance (Hasan *et al.*, 2024; Roberts and David, 2017, 2020). Nevertheless, our comprehensive understanding of phubbing dynamics in the workplace is limited. For instance, we have a limited knowledge of the ways employees' phubbing may affect their supervisors and the range of responses they will activate. This is puzzling given the importance of the quality of supervisor-employees relationships for the overall effectiveness of people, teams and organizations. For instance, when employees engage in phubbing, it could be interpreted by supervisors as a sign of disengagement, lack of respect (Koçak, 2021), or neglect of work responsibilities (Busch and McCarthy, 2021). Such perceptions could prompt supervisors' reactions to tighten their control over employees to ensure that employees are carrying out tasks as instructed (Chiaburu and Baker, 2006). Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of how supervisors interpret such behaviors is therefore crucial to explaining why they may adopt stricter monitoring strategies.

Building on this, we draw on the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX, Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) to explain how supervisors interpret and respond to employees' phubbing behaviors. We propose that LMX provides a relationship-based perspective helpful in explaining the impact of employees' social media addiction on supervisor's close monitoring as mediated by the employees' increasing tendency to engage in phubbing behaviors. LMX model emphasizes that the quality of leader–member relationships depends on the employees' ability to demonstrate reliability, competence, and engagement in fulfilling their work roles (Graen and Scandura, 1987; Maslyn and Uhl-Bien, 2001). When employees become excessively attached to social media, they are more likely to engage in phubbing–ignoring colleagues or supervisors in favor of their devices during workplace interactions (Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas, 2016) - which signals disengagement and undermines the development of high-quality exchanges. Such counterproductive behaviors are negatively associated with LMX quality (Nahrgang *et al.*, 2009) and can erode leaders' perceptions of dependability and trust. In turn, we argue that supervisors may respond by intensifying monitoring to safeguard productivity and maintain team effectiveness (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002; Bhave, 2014).

We also theorize on the factors that may help mitigate the positive effect of employees' phubbing on supervisor close monitoring. We suggest that employees' work passion – a deep and intense enthusiasm or love for one's work (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003) - can act as an important boundary condition on the direct positive relationship between employees' phubbing and SCM, as well as the indirect relationship between their social media addiction and SCM. Drawing on LMX theory, we will theorize about how passionate workers may signal commitment and trustworthiness to supervisors, decreasing their tendency to intensify close monitoring when phubbing is observed.

Our study contributes to current knowledge in several ways. First our research extends the growing literature on phubbing and its consequences by theorizing *how* employee's phubbing alters the dynamics of leader–member relationships, prompting supervisors to adopt more controlling oversight strategies. By complementing prior research that looked mainly at the effects of Boss Phubbing on employees, we enrich the understanding of the processes through which smartphones and social media use at work can potentially translate into negative outcomes. We also contribute to the literature on supervisor close monitoring, that has largely attributed its increase to factors exogenous to the workforce, like managerial desires for control and the availability of cost-effective technologies (Hariharan and Noorda, 2024;

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König, 2025). Consistent with Anteby and Chan (2018), our study emphasizes the role of internal factors like the actual behaviors of employees (i.e. phubbing) in prompting managerial close supervision.

Finally, this study advances literature by investigating an important boundary condition, i.e. employee work passion, in the relationship between employee phubbing and supervisor monitoring.

2. Hypotheses development

2.1 SMA and phubbing

Addiction to social media has become a significant issue in both social and professional settings. Defined as the compulsive need to remain constantly connected to social networks, SMA undermines an individual's ability to focus on the present moment (Tandon *et al.*, 2022). As a result of the pervasive influence of social media (Cao and Yu, 2019) and increasing dependence on technology, employees find it challenging to avoid distractions. These distractions have become normalized, leading to habitual smartphone use even during workplace interactions (Yousaf *et al.*, 2022). This behavior, particularly in the workplace, has far-reaching implications as it disrupts not only interpersonal relationships but also professional responsibilities.

Phubbing, a combination of "phone" and "snubbing," refers to the act of ignoring others in favor of smartphones (Yasin *et al.*, 2023). Phubbing occurs when employees prioritize virtual interactions over real-life conversations, often without fully realizing the extent of their behavior. The ubiquitous presence of social media, which constantly demands attention through notifications and updates, makes it difficult for employees to disengage from their phones (Cao and Yu, 2019). Consequently, phubbing has become a prevalent practice in many workplaces, where the boundaries between personal and professional life are increasingly blurred (Dutta, 2010). This issue is exacerbated by the fact that many employees experience fear of missing out (FOMO), compelling them to stay connected even during critical work interactions (Hattingh *et al.*, 2022).

While situational factors explain part of this phenomenon, empirical research also emphasizes that susceptibility to phubbing varies across individuals. Evidence on gender and age reveals mixed patterns: while some studies report higher levels of phubbing among males (e.g. Chi *et al.*, 2022), others indicate that men engage in phubbing less than women (e.g. Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas, 2016). Older individuals phub significantly less frequently than younger individuals, likely because older people are less prone to smartphone use and addiction (Al-Saggaf *et al.*, 2019). Neuroticism, depression, and social anxiety are positively associated with phubbing through impaired impulse regulation and compensatory reliance on digital interactions (Chi *et al.*, 2022; Sun and Samp, 2022), whereas conscientiousness and agreeableness act as protective factors by fostering self-control and compliance with organizational norms (Chi *et al.*, 2022; Erzen *et al.*, 2021). Openness to experience is negatively associated with phubbing because face-to-face interaction is more satisfying than social interactions on smartphones for individuals with high level of openness (T'ng *et al.*, 2018). Beyond the Big Five personality traits, the dark triad – narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—exacerbates phubbing through entitlement, low empathy, and exploitative engagement styles (Akat *et al.*, 2023). In contrast, mindfulness functions as a psychological buffer, reducing the use of social media during social interactions (Morris and Mosley, 2023). While these individual differences provide important insights, they operate within a broader context in which the addictive design of social media technologies intensifies employees' reliance on smartphones.

Research indicates that phubbing is intrinsically linked to SMA, which is driven by advancements in technology (Al-Saggaf, 2021). The ease of access to platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter has significantly altered how individuals interact. Employees who engage excessively with social media during work hours often do so to maintain personal

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relationships and networks (Cao *et al.*, 2016). Accessing continually smartphones at work is a way to feel socially included. Consistently, Tandon and colleagues (2022) testify to a positive association between FOMO (Fear of missing out) and phubbing. It is also important to note that these distractions are not accidental; rather they exist because of employees' compulsions to be constantly connected to social media.

Therefore, we hypothesize:

H1. SMA has a positive relationship with phubbing at workplace.

2.2 Phubbing and SCM

We continue by proposing that employees' phubbing may affect their supervisors and trigger their reactions, likely compelling supervisors to adopt stricter control measures. Supervisor close monitoring (SCM) refers to the practice of closely overseeing employee behavior to ensure that work standards are met and that company policies are followed (Ball, 2010). Because of its informational advantage, close monitoring is often considered as a means to align employee behaviors and minimize unethical conducts (Mao *et al.*, 2019).

We employ the LMX Theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995), rooted in the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), to explain the association between employee phubbing and supervisor reactions. LMX proposes that leaders develop differentiated relationships with their subordinates based on the quality of mutual exchanges grounded on trust, respect, and obligation (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). These relationships evolve through a role-making process in which leaders assign tasks or expectations and assess whether employees fulfill them (Graen and Scandura, 1987). When employees appear disengaged or less attentive to work due to phubbing (e.g. Busch and McCarthy, 2021), leaders may interpret this behavior as a failure to meet role expectations. As a result, they may reduce relational investment and increase monitoring to ensure performance.

Phubbing, a behavior potentially perceived as a form of interpersonal deviance or counterproductive in work settings, disrupts this relational development. Counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) strongly influence managerial evaluations (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002), and are negatively associated with LMX quality (Nahrgang *et al.*, 2009). Such behaviors undermine perceptions of dependability and engagement, both of which are essential to developing high-quality LMX. In response, supervisors may intensify monitoring efforts to discipline the employee and to collect performance-related information. Phubbing, therefore, may be interpreted as a subtle CWB, producing similar negative effects on leader evaluations and intensifying SCM.

Additionally, an important tenet of LMX is that leaders do not treat all subordinates equally; rather, they differentiate based on perceived competence and work ethic (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Leaders are more likely to form high-quality relationships with those they see as high-performing employees, assigning them complex tasks and offering greater support (Maslyn and Uhl-Bien, 2001). Conversely, employees seen as low-ability or disengaged are often assigned simpler tasks and provided minimal support. In this way, performance and perceived reliability become key drivers of inclusion in the leader's "in-group" (Dansereau *et al.*, 1975). Phubbing, therefore, may serve as a behavioral signal that limits the employee's potential to move into the leader's trusted group, subjecting them to closer scrutiny and monitoring. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H2. Employee Phubbing has a positive relationship with SCM.

2.3 Phubbing as a mediator

Based on the hypotheses presented above, we propose a mediating role of phubbing on the association between SMA and SCM. As employees become more engrossed in social media, their engagement in phubbing increases, prompting supervisors to adopt stricter monitoring practices to ensure that work goals are met. Therefore, we hypothesize:

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H3. Phubbing mediates the positive relationship between SMA and SCM.

2.4 Moderating role of work passion

We have hypothesized that employee phubbing, driven by social media addiction, leads to increased supervisory control and monitoring. However, this relationship may not be uniform across all employees. Certain individual-level factors may buffer the negative consequences of phubbing by influencing how supervisors interpret such behavior. In this study, we investigate the moderating role of *work passion*–a personal resource that may shape supervisors' reactions to employee behavior perceived as deviant or distracting (Wang *et al.*, 2022). Work passion reflects a freely internalized drive for work that is enjoyable and meaningfully integrated into one's identity (Vallerand and Houlfort, 2003). Employees high in this form of passion display intrinsic motivation, balance across life domains, and the ability to regulate their engagement with work (Wan *et al.*, 2022). These factors may not only have a direct effect on performance but also signal control, commitment, and trustworthiness to supervisors—ultimately reducing the supervisory impulse to intensify monitoring when phubbing is observed.

The moderating role of passion can be explained through the lens of Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory. Passionate employees, by virtue of their proactive and self-initiated behaviors, are more likely to develop high-quality relationships with their leaders (Porath and Bateman, 2006). These employees are seen as reliable, valuable contributors who engage in positive social exchange dynamics, building mutual trust and reciprocity over time (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Passionate individuals are perceived not only as competent but also as committed to organizational goals, thereby satisfying supervisors' expectations of future performance (Liden *et al.*, 1993). Even when they engage in counter-normative behaviors like phubbing, supervisors within high-quality LMX relationships may attribute these behaviors to situational factors rather than deficiencies in motivation or ability (Wang *et al.*, 2022). These relational dynamics, grounded in the reciprocity norms of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), afford passionate employees a degree of latitude that protects them from intensified oversight. In this manner, passion serves as a form of relational capital that preserves the integrity of the leader–member bond despite behavioral inconsistencies.

Moreover, in such contexts, the employee's passion acts as a credibility signal—one that reassures supervisors of continued alignment with organizational goals even when behaviors deviate from normative expectations (Curran *et al.*, 2015). Past research also suggests that passionate employees are perceived as having better control over their work and are thus entrusted with greater autonomy (Wan *et al.*, 2022), which may reduce supervisors' need to closely monitor them.

Additionally, the LMX model highlights that liking and affect play a central role in sustaining high-quality leader–member relationships (Liden *et al.*, 1993; Graen and Scandura, 1987). Employees who display visible signs of enthusiasm, dedication, and capability tend to elicit more favorable impressions from their supervisors, reinforcing their in-group standing and reducing the likelihood of close monitoring (Dockery and Steiner, 1990). Work passion is an observable attribute manifested in visible cues such as facial expressions, vocal tone, and body language, making it readily detected by others (Chen *et al.*, 2009). This enduring positive impression can lead supervisors to apply more lenient interpretive standards, thereby reducing their tendency to respond to employees phubbing with close monitoring.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4. Work Passion negatively moderates the positive relationship between employee phubbing and SCM.

2.5 Moderated mediation

Based on the above-mentioned set of hypotheses, a moderated-mediation model is proposed (Figure 1), wherein we hypothesize as follows:

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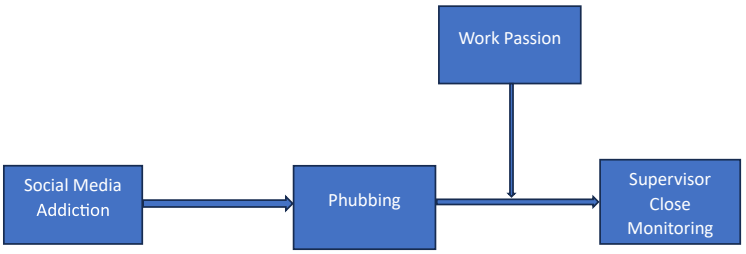


Figure 1. Theoretical model. **Source(s)**: Authors' own creation

H5. Work passion moderates the indirect effect of SMA on SCM via phubbing, such that this indirect effect is weak (vs. strong) when work passion is high (vs. low).

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample and procedure

We recruited 310 full-time U.S. employees from Prolific Academic, applying pre-screeners (≥95% approval rate, ≥100 prior surveys) and included attention checks to ensure data quality. Participants were paid £9/hour and assured confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. To reduce common method bias, we used a two-wave time-lagged survey (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012): at Time 1 participants reported demographics, SMA, and work passion, and four weeks later at Time 2 they rated phubbing and SCM. After removing inattentive responses and attrition cases, the final sample comprised 254 valid responses (81.94% response rate). Of these, 57.9% were female; 52.8% held a bachelor's degree and 23.2% a master's degree; 58.7% had more than 15 years of work experience. Participants represented diverse industries, with services comprising the largest share (45.5%), and most (66.5%) worked in middle management (see Supplementary Materials for a detailed demographic profile).

3.2 Survey and measures

The study scales were adopted from previous studies. Five-point Likert scale anchors ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree" were used, unless otherwise stated.

Social Media Addiction was measured using a six-item scale developed by Andreassen *et al.* (2017). Sample item includes: "I felt an urge to use social media more and more" (CR = 0.91).

Work passion was measured using a ten-item scale developed by Chen *et al.* (2020). Sample item includes: "How much would you say you love doing your work?" (1 = "Not at all", 5 = "Extremely") (CR = 0.96).

Phubbing was assessed using a four-item scale adopted from David and Roberts (2017). Sample item includes: "I often glance at my phone when I am talking to my coworkers". (CR = 0.87).

Supervisor Close Monitoring was measured using a six-item scale adopted from George and Zhou (2001). Sample item includes: "My supervisor keeps pretty close tabs on me." (CR = 0.88).

Control variables. We included gender, age, qualification, and work experience as control variables following the past research on SMA and phubbing (e.g. Tandon *et al.*, 2022; Yousaf *et al.*, 2022).

3.3 Data analysis

We conducted CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) in JASP (0.18.1) to assess discriminant validity among the constructs. To test the model, we used SPSS PROCESS macro 27.0 (Hayes,

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2017) with 5,000 bootstraps, which robustly estimates direct, indirect, and conditional effects under non-normal distributions. A four-factor model of SMA, work passion, phubbing, and SCM was used. Following Ho and Astakhova (2020), we parceled the 10-item work passion scale into five two-item parcels to maintain an appropriate sample size-to-indicator ratio (Coffman and MacCallum, 2005). Using the balanced parceling strategy (Little *et al.*, 2002), higher-loading items were paired with lower-loading items.

The hypothesized four-factor model (SMA, phubbing, SCM, and work passion) provided a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 443.93$, df = 183, χ^2/df = 2.42, SRMR = 0.07, RMSEA = 0.07, TLI = 0.92, CFI = 0.93). This model fit significantly better than alternative specifications in which constructs were combined into fewer factors (see Supplementary Material for detailed analyses). Discriminant validity was further supported as AVE and CR values met recommended thresholds, and the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion was satisfied, with the square root of AVE exceeding inter-construct correlations. In addition, all factor loadings were above 0.70, indicating adequate inter-item reliability.

4. Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics, square root of AVE and inter-item correlations for the constructs of the study.

Hypothesis testing. H1 proposed a positive relationship between SMA and phubbing. Regression results reported in Table 2, show that SMA has a significant positive impact on phubbing at workplace ($\beta = 0.27$, SE = 0.07, $p < 0.001$). Thus, H1 is supported. H2 suggested that phubbing has a positive relationship with SCM. According to Table 2, phubbing positively predicted SCM ($\beta = 0.22$, SE = 0.05, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H2 is supported. Further, we tested H3, which proposed that phubbing mediates the relationship between SMA and SCM ($\beta = 0.22$, SE = 0.06, 95% CI = 0.10, 0.33). Regression results, thus, provided evidence of partial mediation among variables and supported H3.

H4 stated that employees' work passion moderates the relationship between phubbing and SCM. Table 2 shows that work passion moderates the relationship between phubbing and SCM because the interaction (PHB × SCM) is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.12$, SE = 0.05, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H4 is supported. Finally, H5 posited that work passion moderates the indirect effect of SMA on SCM via phubbing. These effects are significant

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, and correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.SMA	2.09	0.92	(0.62)							
2.WP	3.51	1.03	−0.11	(0.84)						
3.PHB	2.57	1.03	0.26**	−0.00	(0.63)					
4.SCM	2.94	0.95	0.20**	0.05	0.27**	(0.56)				
5.Gender[a]	1.42	0.50	0.07	0.00	0.07	−0.00	–			
6.Age[b]	4.76	2.02	−0.19**	0.21**	−0.02	−0.02	0.06	–		
7.Qualification[c]	2.11	0.92	−0.02	0.15*	0.05	0.05	−0.10	−0.01	–	
8.Work Experience[d]	3.25	1.00	−0.26**	0.05	−0.12	−0.09	0.07	0.67**	−0.11	–

Note(s): N = 254. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$. Diagonal shows square roots of AVE,
SMA = Social Media Addiction, WP=Work passion, PHB=Phubbing, SCM=Supervisor Close Monitoring,
[a]01 = female, 2 = male, [b]Age was measured using an 8-point scale (where 1 = "<25 years", 2 = "25–30 years", 3 = "31–35 years", 4 = "36–40 years", 5 = "41–45 years", 6 = "46–50 years", 7 = "51–55 years", 8 = ">56 years"), [c]Qualification was measured on a 5-point scale (where 1 = "Vocational education", 2 = "High School", 3 = "Bachelors", 4 = "Masters", 5 = "Doctorate"), [d]Work experience was measured using a 4-point scale (1 = less than 5 years, 2 = 5–10 years, 3 = 11–15 years, 4 = more than 15 years)

Source(s): Authors' own creation

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Table 2. Regression results for overall model

Variables	Phubbing Model 1			SCM Model 2		
	B	SE	95% CI	B	SE	95% CI
Gender	0.13	0.12	[−0.12, 0.38]	−0.03	0.12	[−0.26, 0.20]
Age	0.05	0.04	[−0.03, 0.13]	0.01	0.04	[−0.06, 0.09]
Qualification	0.05	0.07	[−0.08, 0.19]	0.03	0.06	[−0.10, 0.15]
Work Experience	−0.12	0.09	[−0.29, 0.05]	−0.06	0.07	[−0.22, 0.10]
SMA	0.27**	0.07	[0.13, 0.41]	0.14*	0.07	[0.01,0.27]
Phubbing	–	–	–	0.22**	0.06	[0.10, 0.33]
Work Passion	-	–	–	0.05	0.06	[−0.06, 0.17]
Phubbing x Work Passion	-	–	–	−0.12*	0.05	[−0.22, −0.02]
R^2	0.08			0.12		
	F (5, 248) = 4.41, $p < 0.001$			F (8, 245) = 4.05, $p < 0.001$		

	Effect	SE	Boot *LL*CI	Boot *UL*CI
Work Passion: Conditional indirect effect at M ± SD				
−1 *SD* (−1.03)	0.09	0.03	0.04	0.16
M (0)	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.11
+1 *SD* (1.03)	0.02	0.02	−0.02	0.08

Note(s): N = 254. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$
SMA = Social Media Addiction, SCM=Supervisor Close Monitoring
Source(s): Authors' own creation

(no zero existing between CIs) when subordinates are low (−1 SD) in work passion [$\beta = 0.09$, SE = 0.03, 95% CI = 0.37, 0.11], become less significant at mean ($\beta = 0.06$, SE = 0.02, 95% CI = 0.02, 0.08) and insignificant at high work passion (+1 SD) (Table 2). Therefore, H5 is validated. Finally, the index of moderated mediation is significant (Index = −0.03, SE = 0.02, 95% CI = −0.07, −0.004), establishing a successful moderated mediation (see Supplementary Materials for the plot of interaction at ±SD of work passion).

The control variables were nonsignificant, and results remained consistent with or without them; we report findings with controls included.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the growing body of research on the organizational consequences of social media addiction by empirically establishing a moderated-mediation model. Our findings show that SMA is positively associated with employee phubbing, a counterproductive work behavior, resulting in increased supervisory control and monitoring. These findings offer important contributions to existing theoretical perspectives, as follows.

First, prior research has consistently positioned SMA as a core antecedent of phubbing (Chi *et al.*, 2022) that represents a behavioral response to compulsive social media use facilitated by constant digital access (Al-Saggaf, 2021). Consistent with this field of inquiry, we confirm this association in workplace contexts. Thus, our study broadens the scope of phubbing beyond social or interpersonal spaces, like parental relationships (Xie *et al.*, 2019) and friends (Abeele *et al.*, 2019). Our research corroborates the view of phubbing as a workplace dysfunction rooted in digital overdependence, with detrimental implications for workplace relationships, trust, and productivity. Moreover, we extend our current knowledge of the ways phubbing

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triggers people's responses by theorizing on the negative effects it generates in the worker-supervisor relationship. Till now, research has focused mostly on how boss phubbing affects subordinates negatively by decreasing their trust in leaders as well as their motivation and engagement toward the job (Roberts and David, 2017; Hasan *et al.*, 2024). Despite its invaluable importance, this *unilateral* examination leaves us with an incomplete picture of the consequences of phubbing and the range of responses of those being phubbed in the workplace. We shift focus to the employees' phubbing proposing that it can undermine specific aspects of the relationship with supervisors so to push them to increase their close monitoring. By integrating supervisor close monitoring into the phenomena of social media addiction and employee phubbing, this research opens an interesting and significant line of inquiry.

Second, our finding that phubbing leads to increased SCM offers a significant theoretical contribution by identifying phubbing as a behavioral signal that supervisors may interpret as a lack of involvement or reliability, which can be disruptive and potentially harmful to individual, team, and organizational performance (Huang and Bartels, 2025; Roberts and David, 2020). This interpretation aligns with the propositions of LMX theory, which asserts that leaders differentiate among employees based on their perceived work ethic, competence, activities, and performance (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). When employees engage in phubbing, they may unintentionally communicate disengagement, which can limit their access to the leader's in-group and invite more frequent monitoring as managers intensify oversight to control this counterproductive behavior (Koçak, 2021). Consistent with LMX theory, leader-members relations characterized by high quality depend on the beliefs of both parties that they will benefit from the relationship and the resources that are exchanged. Yet, phubbing behaviors may be perceived as disrupting the transfer of key benefits from the employees to coworkers, the leader and the team.

Moreover, our study makes a valuable contribution by highlighting the moderating role of work passion in the link between employee phubbing and supervisory monitoring. Prior studies have shown that passion yields positive outcomes such as higher engagement, creativity, and self-efficacy (Astakhova and Porter, 2015; Pollack *et al.*, 2020; Vallerand *et al.*, 2010). Beyond these positive direct effects of work passion on employees, our findings extend this scholarly conversation by showing that passion shapes how supervisors evaluate counter-normative behaviors. Passion can act as a credibility signal (Curran *et al.*, 2015), reassuring supervisors that employees remain aligned with organizational goals, thereby reducing the likelihood of increased monitoring. Under this perspective, work passion can strengthen leader–member relationships, building a relational capital that shields employees from strict oversight. In line with research showing that passion is visible through behavioral cues (Chen *et al.*, 2009), our results indicate that supervisors' favorable impressions lead them to interpret phubbing behaviors more leniently. Hence, these insights build on the literature on passion showing that it buffers employees from the negative consequences of minor behavioral lapses such as phubbing.

Finally, our research provides a novel perspective to the literature on workplace surveillance (e.g. Bhave, 2014; Hariharan and Noorda, 2024). Prior studies have mainly focused on external factors, such as managerial control and technological advancements (König, 2025), which may lead to increased SCM. However, the current investigation turns the lens towards endogenous triggers (i.e. SMA and phubbing) responsible for intensified surveillance by supervisors. This strengthens the argument by Anteby and Chan (2018), who emphasize that workplace monitoring may be driven more by employees' behavior than by external forces. Accordingly, our model suggests that supervisors may withdraw from the leader-member relationship engaging in more closely monitoring even if the organization has not in place a full monitoring system. We argue that certain forms of monitoring have origins in the actual behaviors of employees that present potentially negative relational consequences.

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5.2 Practical implications

Our findings offer several managerial implications in reducing the negative consequences of SMA. First, we imply the implementation of supportive policies by managers to manage communication among employees for personal and professional use. These policies may help employees to regulate the problematic use of social media and exposure to phubbing. Managers can educate employees about the damaging consequences of cyber-addiction and online communication etiquette through training workshops.

Moreover, as SMA is found to accelerate phubbing at workplace by continuous involvement with social networks to maintain relationships, mentors and supervisors may play an active role in addressing their need of belonging. This can be done by wisely developing a work environment which encourages open communication, fosters team collaboration, and creates a comfortable workspace.

5.3 Limitations and future research directions

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. At the same time, we believe the following future additions would be highly valuable.

First, the context was limited to US based employees only. This issue limits the generalizability and transferability of our results to other demographic settings. Second, although we have utilized time lagged design, its cross-sectional nature provides evidence of tested relationships at only one point of time and cannot uncover overtime variance. We suggest that future studies should consider this issue by using experimental and longitudinal designs.

Third, we collected data using self-report measures, which may introduce social desirability bias. This can lead to overestimation, underestimation, or bias, potentially obstructing accurate reporting. While we employed several techniques to minimize these effects, we acknowledge the need for future studies to replicate our findings on larger populations.

In addition, we recognize that some jobs may require the use of smartphones. Therefore, the phubber could be using the phone for job-related activities, even if the boundary between work and personal phone use can be ambiguous, particularly in jobs requiring constant connectivity. This represents a limitation of our study. Future studies would benefit from more granular categorization of phone-use contexts, occupation-specific analyses, or additional controls to isolate these effects. Nonetheless, even work-related phone use–such as glancing at a phone during conversations or checking it in meetings–may still be seen as inappropriate and qualify as phubbing behavior, regardless of its professional purpose.

Finally, in our paper, we based our theorizing on the LMX theory, because of its relational nature. However, we recognize that supervisors' close monitoring could also be influenced by her/his leadership orientation. For instance, a task-oriented leader may be driven by employees' results or performance much more than a welfare-oriented leader. In turn, such orientation may partly determine the leader's perception and reaction to phubbing behavior and the chosen methods to foster positive and more productive work behavior. We leave the exploration of these relationships and implications to future research.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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