Nomophobia Explained: A Comparative Analysis of Attachment Theory, Social Cognitive Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory

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Abstract: In today's world, no one can imagine their life without a mobile device. However, when someone depends on a single gadget all the time, there is a high chance they will become emotionally attached to it. When mobile phones begin its transition from electronic devices to emotional gadgets, psychological phenomena like "Nomophobia" emerge. In the present time, it is essential to shed light on nomophobia its factors, causes, effects, and remedies—to mitigate its impact and maintain mental well-being. To better comprehend the psychological complexities involved in explaining nomophobia, this paper utilizesa unique conceptual contribution by juxtaposing the three most well-known psychological and media theories: Attachment Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Uses and Gratifications Theory. All three theories describe distinct elements of behavior or mental processes: Attachment Theory reflects the psychological connection to smartphones;Social Cognitive Theory describes how people model their behavior and develop self-efficacy when using technology; and Uses and Gratifications Theory describes how actively motivated humans use mobile technologies to seek needs.The paper highlights the overlaps and distinctions among these frameworks, ultimately proposing an integrative model that combines emotional, cognitive, and motivational dimensions for a comprehensive understanding of nomophobia. The study concludes with practical strategies for educational settings aimed at promoting digital well-being and reducing nomophobic behavior.

Keywords: Nomophobia, Attachment Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Emotion, Anxiety, Social Modeling, Need, Digital well-being.

1. Introduction:

Keeping pace with the passage of time, the world's technological achievements are continuously increasing. The mobile phone is a revolutionary achievement of this technology that has brought the world into the palm of our hands. India is not lagging the global wave of technological advancement. India is also becoming a digital country using technology. In today's world, people cannot think of their lives without mobile phones because mobile phones are necessary. People use their phones to make calls, make payments, digitally keep up with peers, conduct office work, shop, and relieve from stress caused by their jobs.The growth of internet connectivity has added fuel to the fire of mobile phone usage, amplifying society's dependence on these devices. In early 2025, 1.12 billion cellular mobile connections were activated in India, which is equal to 76.6 percent of the nation's entire population, as per a study conducted by Data Reportal (2025). As of the beginning of 2025, 55.3% of Indians were online, with 806 million internet users. As of January 2025, India had 491 million social media user accounts, which is 33.7% of India's total population.Thesefigures confirm that access to mobile phones and the internet is widespread. Excessive dependency or use of mobile phone has risen a new psychological dread named "Nomophobia" which stands for "No Mobile Phone Phobia."Nomophobia could stem from an over reliance on mobile phones. Constant phone checks are linked to nomophobia.When disconnected from their devices, People with nomophobia often suffer from a range of emotional distresses, including anxiety, nervousness, trembling, increased heart rate and panic attacks.The development of nomophobia is also highly associated with demographic factors such as age, gender, and the frequency of smartphone usage. It tends to be more prevalent among younger populations and individuals who check their phones frequently (Daei et al.,2019;Ali and Matarneh, 2024).From existing literature, the widespread nature of nomophobia is evident. It has far-reaching effects on individuals' mental and physical health, as well as their social lives. A recent study shows that the prevalence of nomophobia was 76.7% among adolescents, with a higher incidence among females (Maghaireh et al., 2025). Another study notes that younger people, particularly first-year university students, are especially susceptible due to their extensive use of smartphones (Al-Mamun et al., 2023).Notably, A meta-analysis and systematic literature review revealed that the extent of moderate symptoms of nomophobia had been registered in almost 50% of respondents, which confirms the high prevalence of the disorder in smartphone users (Jahrami et al., 2022). From these existing studies, it can be understood that nomophobia is quite widespread and can affect more than 50 percent of the populations, often affecting more than half of the studied populations.

Nomophobia causes social issues, including less in-person communication and even social isolation because it makes people worry about the loss of connection in digital space, which is why they communicate online more than in real life (Bhattacharya et al., 2019).

Although nomophobia is a widely discussed psychological phenomenon in the present era, its theoretical aspects have yet to be adequately explored. To draw out a multidimensional phenomenon of nomophobia, it is essential to understand its underlying psychological mechanisms. People should understand the psychological process of nomophobia to lessen phobias that pose a risk to people's health. It is important to know that the emotional cause of driving nomophobia because cellphones will continue to be even more integrated in daily life and this is important to develop preventive and psychological therapies to treat the problem. The consideration of nomophobia at an individual level involves looking at this issue using a psychological and behavioral approach due to the underlying interaction between emotional dependency, behavioral reinforcement, and cognitive processing. The purpose of the present study is to eliminate that conceptual gap by giving a comparative theoretical explanation of nomophobia based on three commonly known psychological and media theories, named Attachment Theory (AT), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). Each of the given theories proposes a distinct outlook:AT aims at explaining the emotional dependence on the cell phone use, SCT refers to the learned behavior and self-efficacy; the UGT positions the usage of mobile phones as the active process of fulfilling the social and personal needs. Consequently, psychological theories may provide a formal framework upon which the causes, maintenance, and impact of nomophobia to individual functioning can be assessed.

In this paper, it is intended to theorize on the concept of nomophobia more comprehensively and to unify various perspectives on it as well as mention connections between the emotional, behavioral, and motivational sides of this phenomenon. The purpose of this paper is to introduce a further detailed theoretical insight into nomophobia, revealing the interaction of emotional, behavioral, and motivational aspects. Such a comparison is not only extending theoretical understanding but can guide the construction of more tailored psychological interventions as well as education strategies.
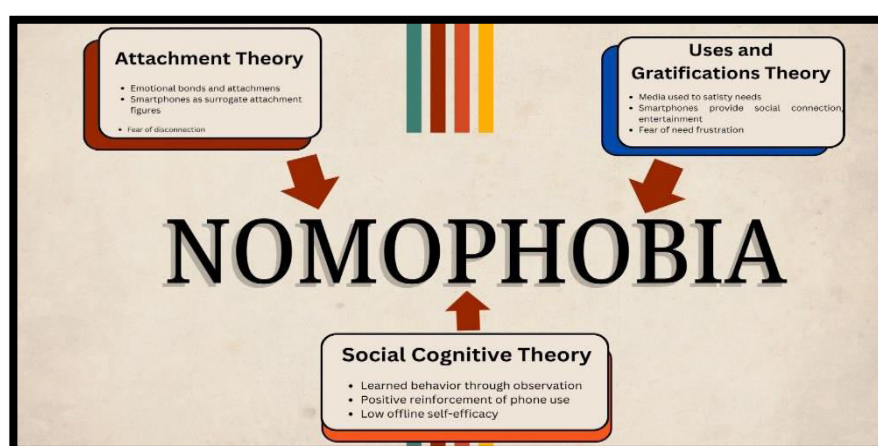

Figure 1: Theoretical pathways explaining nomophobia through Attachment Theory, Social Cognitive Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory

2. **Nomophobia: A Psychological Perspective:**

Unhealthy exposure of mobile device may cause of a new psychological phenomenon named "Nomophobia.""No mobile phone Phobia" is a split version of "Nomophobia" which is first used by the UK post office on 2008 on their journal.They have commissioned an evaluation organization referred to as YouGov to conduct evaluation of the anxieties practiced by mobile phone users.In the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, nomophobia has been proposed for categorization as a "specific phobia." However, nomophobia is yet to be included (Bragazzi & Puente, 2014). It is a term that refers to the ever-widely reliance on the smartphones and is currently being embraced as a socio-psychological scenario that equals numerous other psycho-physical conditions (Galhardo et al., 2020; Anshari et al., 2019). Nomophobia is defined using the kinds of nomophobic-anxiety, smartphone addiction, and insomnia dimensions, and it has a strong relationship with them (Daraj et al., 2023). Fear of missing out (FOMO) is a significant driver of nomophobia as well as the general anxiety that other people are having a good time at the expense of the one afraid of missing out. It is recorded that FOMO is positively associated with nomophobia (Gezgin et al., 2018).There are several factors affecting Nomophobia like Physiological factors, psychological factors, sociological factors, technological factors, environment factors etc. Sleeplessness, Headache, eyestrain, lethargy are the common symptoms of physiological factor of nomophobic condition (Sharma et al., 2015; Dongre et al., 2017).Psychologically, it induces feelings of anxiety and restlessness, which can lead to compulsive phone usage. From a sociological standpoint, the relentless pursuit of constant social connectivity can leave us feeling more isolated when we disconnect. Furthermore, companies employ technological strategies, such as addictive apps, and frequent phone use leads to social conditioning. As a result, these elements can cause issues like disrupted sleep, poor academic performance, and both mental and physical health challenges.Nomophobia is commonly assessed through the Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q), which organizes the disorder into a four-factor model: the fear of not being able to communicate, not being connected, not having access to information, and not having the convenience they associate with smartphones (Yildirim and Correia, 2015). This was followed by demographic factors (age and gender), and usage of smartphone. It is more common in people who are young and check their phones frequently(Daei et al., 2019; Ali and Matarneh, 2024).While nomophobia might impact people of any demographic, it appears to be increasingly prevalent among younger generations, aged 18 to 24, who grew up with smartphones as an integral component of their life (Kumar et al. 2021). According to the results of a meta-analysis and systematic review, around 50% of people struggle with moderate nomophobia symptoms, 20% suffer mild symptoms, and the other 20% experience severe symptoms. Notably, university students from non-

Western backgrounds had an increased chance of severe nomophobia, moreover in 2021 (Jahrami et al., 2022). The rate of mild, moderate, and severe nomophobia, which in Indian teenagers was 41.05%, 21.86%, and 5.1%, accordingly. Nomophobia has been related to despair, worry, and a low quality of life (Sharma et al., 2019).
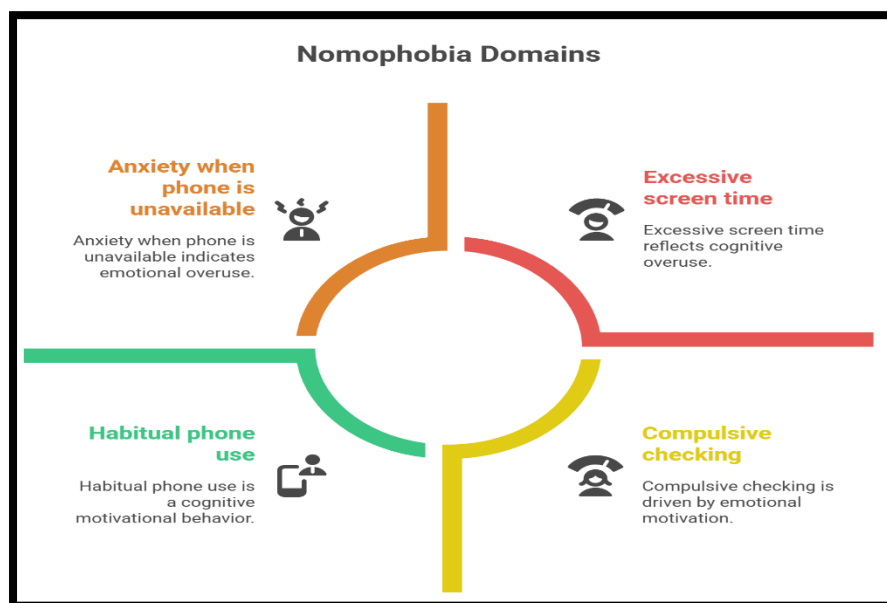

Figure 2: Nomophobia Domains

3. Nomophobia from the Perspective of Attachment Theory (AT):

The psychological concept known as Attachment Theory(AT), which originally was laid out by John Bowlby and then developed by Mary Ainsworth, explains the strong emotional bond that arises between individuals, between a child and its primary caregiver. It illustrates how a person's emotional, social, and psychological development across their life is greatly influenced by what kind of these early relationships (Bowlby, 1982; Hazan & Shaver, 1994).According to Connors (2011) and Thompson et al. (2022), AT delivers an essential basis for knowing the complexities of human connections and their persistent impact on psychological development and functioning over an individual's life. Research finds that technology attachment is a powerful predictor of prolonged use and refusal to change, althoughATwas initially created to describe human interactions (Friedrich, 2016).
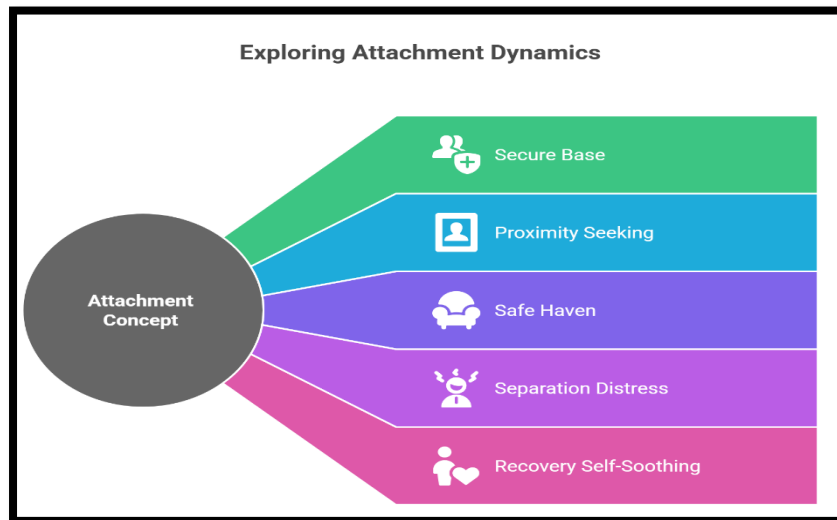
Figure 3: Exploring Attachment Dynamics

Nomophobia can be analyzed through the lens of the AT:

Emotional Dependency: Anxiously attached adults may use cellphones as "surrogate attachment figures" constant touch for comfort, connection, and reassurance in relation to nomophobia.

Fear of Disconnection: Anxiety akin to separation anxiety may be triggered by losing mobile connections.

Attachment System Hyperactivation: Nomophobics suffer when their phones are not available, just like kids do when their parents depart.
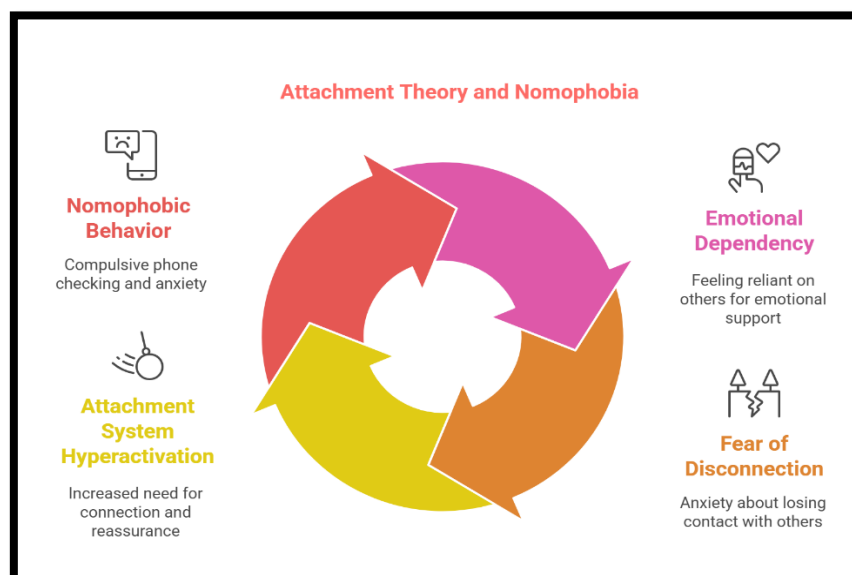

Figure 4: Attachment Theory and Nomophobia

Example: when a college student's phone battery is about to run out, they experience severe anxiety and fear since it disconnects them from their friends, relationship, and social media—a digital version of "separation anxiety."

4. **Nomophobia from the Perspective of Social Cognitive Theory (STC):**

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory(STC) presents an insight on how individuals learn steps in social environments by emphasizing the interplay among cognitive processes and environmental influences. Rather than being only a response to external factors, behavior is impacted by internal mental processes such as expectations, beliefs, and expected results. Miller and Dollard's theory of imitative learning became the foundation for Bandura's theories as well (Bandura A., 1962). Bandura's theory evolved to explain how people can influence their thoughts and behaviors to take responsibility for their life. Bandura believes that in addition to memory, focus, sensory reproduction, and motivational processes, learner-derived components such as "sense of self-efficacy" and "self-regulatory system" are also important to acquiring complicated skills and information (Bandura A., 1986). According to STC, most human learning takes place in a social setting. People pick up information, norms, techniques, ideas, and attitudes by following others (Dale, 2012).

Bandura's STC, through the concept of reciprocal determinism, which considers the interaction of the environment, behavior, and cognitions, provides a solid framework within which to identify the constructs that contribute to nomophobia, that is, discomfort or anxiety due to the absence of a phone. Peer expectations and social norms legitimating constant availability further endorse youth' desire for the cellphone. This creates a negative cycle where digital dependency both alters and is influenced by our everyday practices. In this respect, cellphones have been widely used among adolescents, both as a means of communication as well as for studies that influence their behavior (Juwita et al., 2024).

Nomophobia can be analyzed through the lens of the STC:

Copying Behavior: Overuse becomes normalized when peers are always on their phones.

Constructive Support: Messages, likes, and notifications encourage regular checking, which strengthens reliance.

Lower Digital Self-Efficacy: People who are less comfortable interacting with others in person could use phones more frequently.
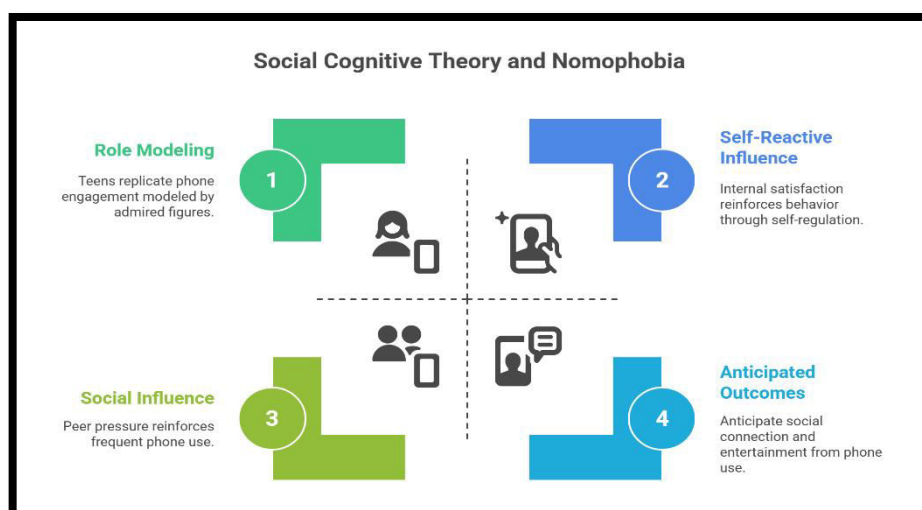
Figure 5: Social Cognitive Theory and Nomophobia

Example: Students who observe their classmates texting in class, for instance, may start doing the same. The teen eventually develops nomophobic tendencies because of feeling unable to function or interact without a phone.

5.   Nomophobia from the Perspective ofUses and GratificationsTheory (UGT):
The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) originated in the 1940s and 1950s within the field of mass communication research, but it was more formally developed in the 1970s. The term "uses and gratifications" was popularized by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in their influential 1973 work. People choose the media for satisfying unique psychological, emotional, or social requirements, according to UGT.UGT stresses user autonomy, implying as media consumption is deliberate and goal-directed, in contrast to passive audience models. Information seeking, entertainment, identity expression, social engagement, and escape from reality are examples of common gratifications.When it comes to mobile phones, gratifications include social affirmation, communication, entertainment, and information. Those who are deprived of these pleasures may feel anxious and distressed. Although this hypothesis may not be sufficient to address underlying psychological characteristics or developmental factors, it is particularly valuable in describing the motivational drivers of nomophobia. According to the UGT, teenagers use social media to find benefits and social connections, which might result in Problematic Social Media Usage (PSMU). This association is mediated by nomophobia, the fear of losing connection, which makes PSMU in teenagers worse (Pérez-Torres, 2024). Nomophobia is the anxiety of not possessing mobile connectivity, whereas UGTdescribes how people choose media to satisfy wants. Because nomophobia can impact media choices to meet the desire for continuous connectedness, the two ideas are related.   To meet requirements, consumers of media select communication channels. Users' intentions and actions have an impact on the media (Haridakis, 2012).

Nomophobia can be analyzed through the lens of the UGT:

Need-Driven Use: Smartphones may be used for a variety of purposes, including entertainment (YouTube), social interaction (WhatsApp), and information (Google).

Fear of Getting Needy Disappointment: When phones are not working, people worry about their needs not being addressed, which makes them anxious and stressed.

Loss of Control: Panic can be brought on by the inability to meet demands right away, such as responding to a message.
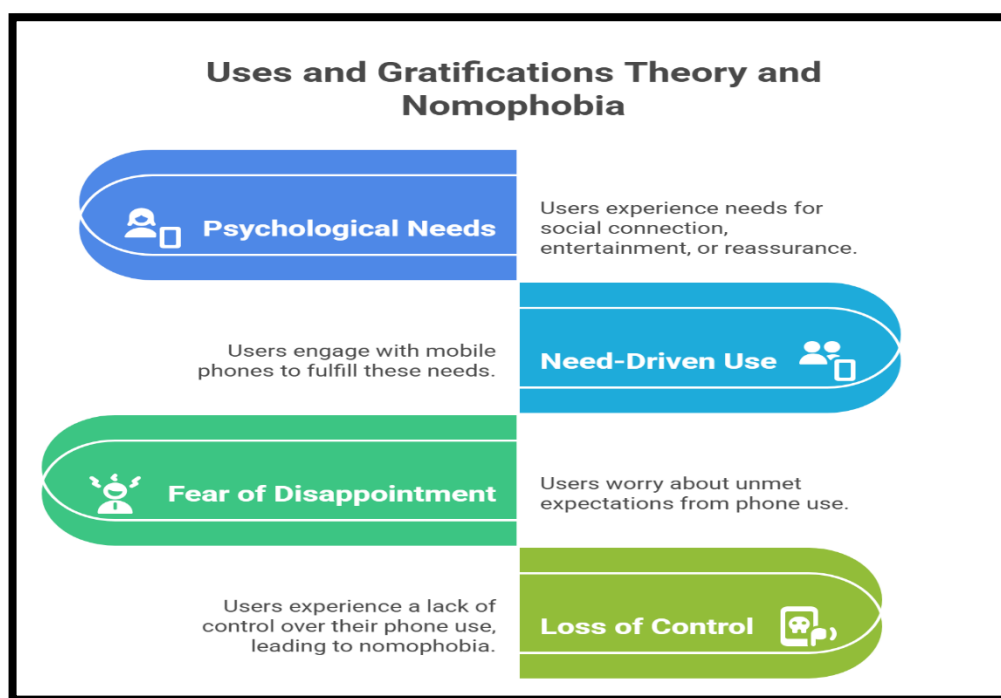

Figure 6: Uses and Gratifications Theory and Nomophobia

Example: A user checks their phone to feel engaged and connected, for example. They experience stress and worry when they are deprived of access (such as Wi-Fi), thinking that they will miss messages or news—classic symptoms of nomophobia.

6. **Common Factors Among Attachment Theory (AT), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) in Relation to Nomophobia:**

AT, SCT and UGT are related to Nomophobia through developing the psychological dependency on mobile Phone to satisfy the emotional, social, and cognitive needs.Each theory, though distinct in its framework, converges on the idea that mobile phones have evolved into psychological extensions of the self. Although each theory has a distinct framework, they all converge on the idea that mobile phones have evolved into psychological extensions of the self. These theories help to maintain emotional stability, develop social interaction, and fulfill interpersonal needs. The intersection of these three ideas shows how nomophobia is a complicated reaction bringing together

behavioral training, social-environmental interaction, and psychological connection, rather than just a dread of being without a phone.The three theories have similar underpinnings that include behavioral focus (habitual use and reinforcement), the psychological grounding (emotional attachment), and the environmental encounter (social conventions and anticipation). These interrelated issues are helpful in pointing to the root causes of the disorder since they reveal nomophobia as a modern manifestation of more fundamental psychological addiction that is rooted in digital technology. The common factors of these three theories are discussed through table and diagram.

Table 1: Common Factors among Attachment Theory (AT), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

| Common Factor	Explanation
Psychological Base	From explanation of each theory, we can say that cognitions, emotions, and motivations influence actions.
Behavioral Focus	These three theories reveal that how behaviors are acquired, sustained, or motivated.
Environmental Interaction	All three theories discuss that the individual interact with their environment or social world.
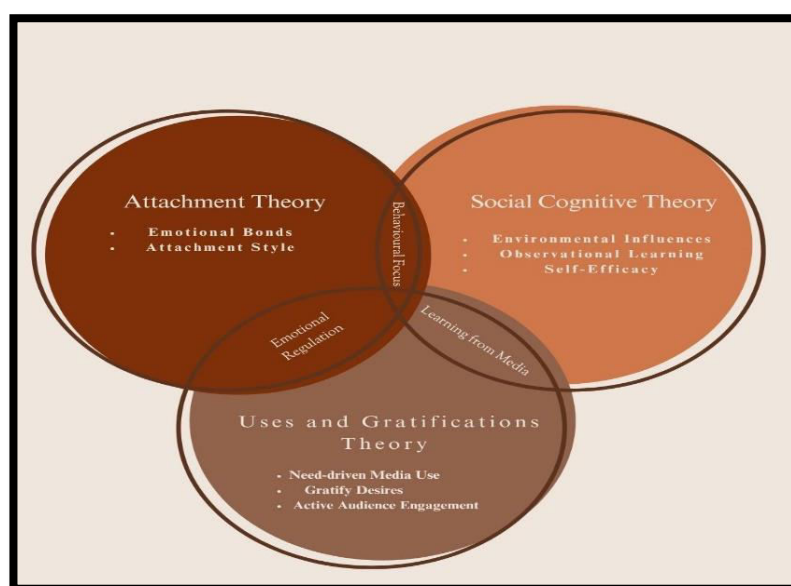
Figure 7: Common Dimensions of Attachment Theory (AT), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

7. **Comparative Analysis of Attachment Theory (AT), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) in Relation to Nomophobia:**

A diverse behavioral psychological problem is nomophobia. This involves numerous undiscovered dimensions, thus a comparative investigation of AT, SCT, and UGT would be helpful for a higher theoretical structure and an accurate assessment of this phenomenon. In addition to showcasing such unique contribution, a comparison approach reveals theoretical gaps and overlapping characteristics. In the end, this type of comparison analysis contributes in the creation of an additional thorough, multifaceted knowledge of nomophobia.

Aspect	Attachment Theory (AT)	Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)	Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)
Core Concept	Dependency and anxiety in relationships are shaped by early connections to emotion.	Behavior is acquired through reinforcement, copying, and observation.	The use of media is purposeful and driven by individual wants and desires.
Perspective of Using Phones	An emotional dependency or an action that seeks security.	An outcome of social modeling and environmental support.	A choice that is meant to satisfy social and psychological demands.
Application to Nomophobia	Smartphone as a surrogate "attachment figure" which provides emotional security.	Nomophobic behavior are learned by copying role model and reinforced by incentives	People use mobile phones to meet demands including staying in touch, having fun, and being in charge.
Relation to Nomophobia	Explains emotional dependency on smartphones and anxiety when separated from them.	Discusses that daily experiences serve as social models and reinforcers for nomophobic behavior.	Illustrates why people feel connected to their phones (e.g., fear of missing out).
Strengths	Explain emotional dependency and insecure attachment style	Outlines how social behavior is learnt and sustained.	Describes why people purposefully select to utilize mobile devices.
Limitation	Less focus on learned behavior or cultural impact	Less emphasis on the mental or emotional factors that influence behavior.	Focuses on purposeful choices; it could not take obsessive or unconscious use into consideration.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Attachment Theory (AT), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) in Relation to Nomophobia

8. **Toward an Integrative Framework:**

Previously we have discussed about AT,SCT and UGT in relation to nomophobia. By comparing strengths and limitation of these three theories we can say that no single theory can fully discovers the multidimensional characteristics of nomophobia. For in-

depth understanding of nomophobia this study proposes the development of an integrative framework which synthesizes emotional, behavioral, and motivational perspective.

The AT adds to the emotional aspect, the fact that users develop striking psychological connections to mobile devices just like to people. This is the reason why when the users are not in contact with their phones, they become distressed and anxious. Key contributions of SCT present the aspect of environmental and social factors, the reinforcement and normalization of behavior, like habitual checking the phone, through modeling and behavioral observation. Lastly, UGT describes motives that are inherent in the use of smartphones and center around the idea how users attempt to meet a particular need, be it social connection, entertainment, or information.

Combining all these theories, the proposed framework should conceptualize the phenomenon of nomophobia as a behavior with a changing relationship between emotional attachment, social learning, and need-based gratification. The proposed framework not only illustrates the psychological depth of nomophobia but also offers the foundation of tailoring operationalization of future empiric studies and intervention plans. It is but a staging point to a more comprehensive theoretical framework that can explain the cross-relationships that give rise to the emergence and maintenance of nomophobic behaviors.
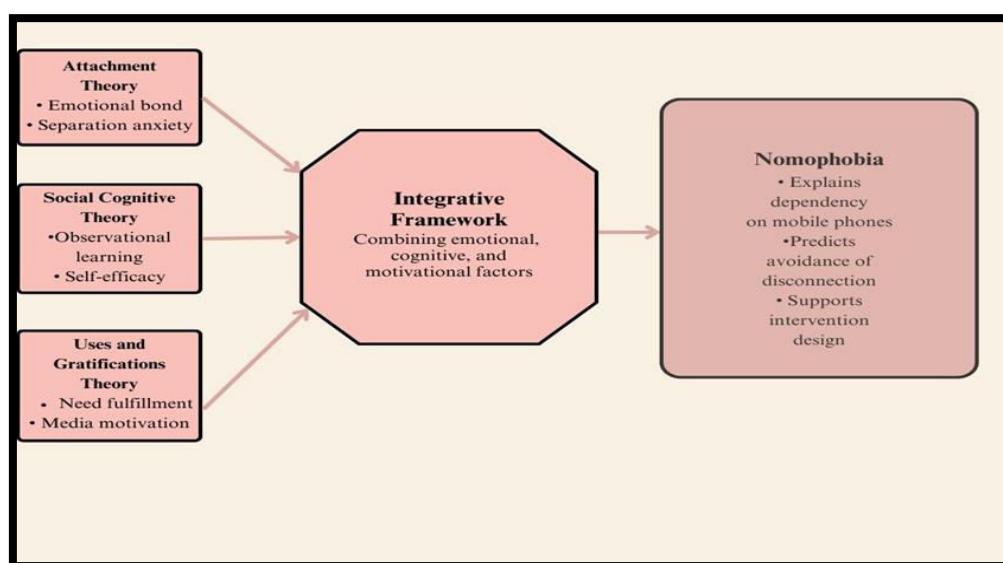

Figure 8: Integrative Framework

9. Conclusion:

Mobile phones have become the digital drug of modern life. We cannot imagine our life without mobile in the current time. That is the reason, why the new psychological phobia called the Nomophobia has been created. The study of nomophobia in this paper was framed by three established psychological theories of Attachment Theory(AT), Social Cognitive Theory(SCT), and Uses and Gratifications Theory(UGT). These three theories provide distinctive approaches-emotional attachment, learned behaviors, and media use motivation-to the explanation of how and why people

become so addicted to mobile devices. The comparison and synthesis of the three perspectives brings out the fact that the nomophobia phenomenon cannot be entirely explained using an isolated theoretical perspective. The creation of an integrative framework brings to the fore how emotional, cognitive, and motivational elements are related and presented a more comprehensive conceptual basis in elucidating nomophobic behavior. This comprehensive theoretical intervention does not only develop the academic discourse but also gives a guideline to teachers, psychologists, and policymakers who may want to resolve the problem of psychological dependence on mobile technology in modern society.Suggested interventions for controlling nomophobia include mindfulness-based interactions, limiting phone use, stress management techniques, yoga, lifestyle changes, professional help, and more.

10. Educational Implication:

- **Digital Well-being Literacy:**Literacy should be promoted to develop awareness about digital handling and controlnomophobic tendencies.
- **Psychological Awareness Training of Teachers:**Trained teachers on social modeling and emotional attachment are better at identifying the early symptoms of technology overindulgence and offering therapeutic support
- **Classroom Policies toward Conscious Technology:** Instructional regulations, which are well balanced and theoretically informed (e.g., special no-tech zone and scheduled rests) will help to reduce the apprehension caused by being parted with a gadget.
- **Psychology Based Curriculum Design:** If students are to be less reliant on smartphones as the external source of satisfaction, they may need their learning materials and lessons to act as a source of cognitive and emotional fulfillment in themselves.

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