

# The Effect of Emotional Intelligence on Cyber Security: The Mediator Role of Mindfulness

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to examine the effect of emotional intelligence on cyber security and the role of mindfulness in this effect. The sample of the study is consisted of 342 (66.5%) females and 172 (33.5%) males. According to their ages, there are 243 (47.3%) people between the ages of 18-24, 166 (32.3%) between the ages of 25-34, 68 (13.2%) people between the ages of 35-44, 37 (7.2%) people aged 45 and over. In this study, it was used "Emotional Intelligence Scale", "Mindfulness Scale" and "Personal Cyber Security Provision Scale". The study was conducted with the relational survey model. Unstandardized beta values that obtained from the study will be seen as follows:  $\beta=0.15$  [0.08, 0.23] the direct effect of emotional intelligence on mindfulness,  $\beta=0.15$  [0.08, 0.23] the direct impact of Mindfulness on Cyber Security,  $\beta=0.07$  [0.03, 0.10] the indirect effect of Emotional Intelligence on Cyber Security. All effects obtained were found to be significant ( $p<0.001$ ). As a result of the analyzes, it was found that emotional intelligence affected mindfulness positively and cyber security. Furthermore, it was revealed that emotional intelligence directly and indirectly affected cyber security positively, and mindfulness played a partial mediator role in this effect.

**Keywords:** Cyber security, emotional intelligence, internet technology, mediation effect, mindfulness

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### ÖZ

Bu araştırmanın amacı duygusal zekânın siber güvenlik üzerine etkisini ve bu etkide bilinçli farkındalığın aracı rolünü incelemektir. Araştırma Türkiye'nin çeşitli illerinde yaşayan yetişkinler üzerinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmaya 342 (%66.5) kadın, 172 (%33.5) erkek olmak üzere 514 kişi katılmıştır. Yaşlarına göre katılımcılardan 243 (%47.3) kişi 18-24 yaş aralığında, 166 (%32.3) kişi 25-34 yaş aralığında, 68 (%13.2) kişi 35-44 yaş aralığında, 37 (%7.2) kişi 45 yaş ve üzerindedir. Araştırmada "Duygusal Zekâ Ölçeği", "Bilinçli Farkındalık Ölçeği" ve "Kişisel Siber Güvenliği Sağlama Ölçeği" kullanılmıştır. Araştırma ilişkisel tarama modeli ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmadan elde edilen standardize edilmiş beta değerleri: Duygusal zekânın bilinçli farkındalık üzerine doğrudan etkisi  $\beta=0.42$ , bilinçli farkındalığın siber güvenlik üzerine doğrudan etkisi  $\beta=0.15$ , duygusal zekânın siber güvenlik üzerine dolaylı etkisi  $\beta=0.07$  [0.03, 0.10] olarak elde edilmiştir. Elde edilen tüm etki büyüklükleri anlamlı bulunmuştur ( $p<0.001$ ). Sonuç olarak; duygusal zekânın bilinçli farkındalığı pozitif, bilinçli farkındalığın siber güvenliği pozitif yönlü etkilediği bulunmuştur. Ayrıca duygusal zekânın siber güvenliği doğrudan ve dolaylı olarak pozitif yönlü etkilediği ve bu etkide bilinçli farkındalığın kısmi aracı rol üstlendiği ortaya konmuştur.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Siber güvenlik, duygusal zekâ, internet teknolojisi, aracı etki, bilinçli farkındalık

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## INTRODUCTION

Internet technology and its foundations of which were laid in the 1950s has gradually become widespread and it has become one of the main factors affecting the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Today, internet technology has eliminated the distance between continents and has enabled the world to be called as “global village”. The use of Internet has become very common in our country in accordance to the world. As much as the rate of internet access of residences in our country was 30% in 2009, this rate reached 90.7% in 2020 (TUIK, 2020). Internet technology provides many facilities in our lives. In addition to the opportunities offered by the internet, it also brings various security risks for users. The risks of using the Internet are created by the abuse of the possibilities of this area by many malicious people. In order to prevent it, there are various control mechanisms including both technology-oriented and non-technology-oriented. There are various technological software and programs, non-technology-oriented interventions, legal enforcement, legislation, civil actions, education, individual awareness, and attention (Kim et al., 2011). However, despite all these security measures, studies have shown that 86.3% of children use the internet unsafely (Valcke et al., 2010). Adults’ protective behaviors are insufficient and their awareness is low (Öğütçü, 2010). In addition, many people are not aware of the risks of sharing their personal information on the internet with people who do not know (Young, 2008).

The public services are accessible with internet technology, and the role of public and private institutions in information technologies are increasing gradually and increasing security risks are too (Bıçakcı et al., 2015). The measures of security that the state, institutions, and individuals should take to ensure information security brought the concept of cyber security to the agenda (Choucri, 2012; cited in Tarhan, 2017). The concept of cyber security covers all communication providers and means ensuring the confidentiality, accuracy, and usability of information as well as an internet-oriented security provider (Hekim & Başibüyük, 2013). It requires the use of opportunities besides maintaining existing systems. It also encompasses various tasks such as internet administration, trade policy, counter-terrorism, and security intelligence. In this respect, the concept of cyber security is a very important national security mechanism (Klimburg, 2012).

Along with the technical measures to be taken to prevent cyber security threats, ignoring the human factor in providing cyber security will render the measures taken ineffective. For this reason, the awareness of individuals plays an important role in ensuring their safety (Yılmaz et al., 2016). At that point, awareness is a radar that constantly scans the inner and outer environment working in the background of consciousness. Mindfulness includes both awareness and attention. Attention takes images from the ground of awareness and keeps them in focus for a while. Thus, attention and awareness are intertwined (Brown & Ryan, 2003). In this context, mindfulness is the state of being fully awake and active in the moment. In other words, it is to live in the present by directing attention in another direction (Özyeşil et al., 2011). It is a person’s awareness of the information coming from the environment and paying attention to the situation that needs to be interpreted (İlhan & Esentürk, 2015). It can be said that awareness plays an important role in behavior and attitude by directing the person to the right behavior and attitude over time (Demir & Cicioğlu, 2020; Hutton & Baumeister, 1992).

Most of the security breaches, which cost companies an average of \$6.75 million in the USA, was reported as employees’ lack of mindfulness of security policies (Parrish & Nicolas-Rocca, 2012). Accordingly, it was reported that there is a positive relationship between low mindfulness and the dissemination of private data and personal information without a bad intention. Mindfulness, which is defined as an increasing attention to the events around us, is effective in preventing security violations (Landress, 2018). In addition, eliminating the lack of infrastructure in the prevention of cybercrime, which increases with the spread of the use of wireless technologies and increasing the bandwidth, and effective policy implementation and measures by the states will also be effective in ensuring cyber security (Von Solms & Kritzing, 2012).

By means of mindfulness, individuals can perceive their own and others’ emotions correctly and regulate them effectively. Mindfulness brings clarity and vitality to everyday experiences and encourages momentary emotional contact with life. In this way, the basic aspects of mindfulness can make the development of competencies involving emotional intelligence (Schutte & Malouff, 2011). The components of mindfulness allow individuals to effectively perceive, regulate, and ultimately understand emotions in themselves and others. Emotional intelligence is conceptualized as the ability to perceive, use, understand and manage emotions (Mayer et al., 2008). It is related to the emotion management component of emotional intelligence and the self-regulating function inherent in mindfulness (Brown et al., 2007). Therefore, awareness plays an important role in facilitating interpersonal awareness and using emotions, which are the basic components of emotional intelligence (Schutte

& Malouff, 2011). Moreover, it was reported in literature that people with high emotional intelligence have a high level of mindfulness (Baer et al., 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Sinclair & Feigenbaum, 2012).

Recent studies have shown that individuals with high emotional intelligence have a decreased use of problematic internet (Reisoğlu et al., 2013) and an increased level of coping with cyberbullying (Eliçora, 2020). In addition, it was revealed that mindfulness plays a fully mediating role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and internet addiction (Cankurtaran & Şakiroğlu, 2020). It was also reported in literature having high awareness has an impact on cyber security behaviors in individuals (Kritzinger & Solms, 2010). In the globalizing and digital transformation world, internet-based applications such as information technologies, online services and social networks have gained importance and developed very rapidly in recent years (Öztabak, 2018). As mentioned above, it is seen that the awareness and emotional intelligence levels of the users are effective in the conscious use of online applications. With the effect of globalization the security of users in the virtual world gains importance. It is thought that the conscious awareness and emotional intelligence of users are effective in cyber security behaviors, but no study has been found in literature. Therefore, considering these relationships, the hypotheses of this research can be expressed as follows:

1. Emotional intelligence is a predictor of cyber security behaviors.
2. Mindfulness is a predictor of cyber security behaviors.
3. Mindfulness has a mediator role in the relationship of cyber security with emotional intelligence and mindfulness.

## **METHOD**

This section may include research design, the study group, data collection tools and data analysis.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of emotional intelligence on cyber security and the mediating role of mindfulness in this effect. For this purpose, a correlational survey model was used in the research. Relational screening model; It is a research model that aims to determine the presence and/or degree of co-variance between two or more variables (Büyüköztürk et al., 2009).

### **Study Group**

514 people from different regions of Turkey participated in the research. 342 of the participants (66.5%) were women and 172 of them (33.5%) were men. When the ages of the participants are examined, there are 243 (47.3%) people between the ages of 18-24, 166 (32.3%) between the ages of 25-34, 68 (13.2%) people between the ages of 35-44, 37 (7.2%) people aged 45 and over. Finally, when the educational status of the participants are examined, there are 45 (8.8%) graduated, 335 (65.2%) graduated from the university, 97 (18.9%) graduated from the high school, 33 (6.4%) graduated from the primary school, and 4 (.8%) literated.

### **Data Collection Tools**

Emotional Intelligence Scale-Short Form, Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, Personal Cyber Security Provision Scale and Personal Information Form were used in this study.

**Personal Information Form:** This form was prepared by the researchers to determine the characteristics of the participants such as gender, age and educational status.

**Emotional Intelligence Scale-Short Form:** The scale was translated into Turkish by Deniz et al., (2013) to determine the level of perception of the individual's emotional competencies. The scale consists of 16 items and 4 sub-dimensions. The total variance explanation rate of the scale is 60.8%. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of this scale were found to be .72 for the well-being factor, .70 for self-control, .66 for emotionality, .70 for sociability, and .81 for the whole scale. In addition, as a result of the test-retest reliability studies, the correlation level was found to be .86. In the study, the Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was obtained as .73.

**Mindful Attention Awareness Scale:** The scale was adapted into Turkish by Özyeni et al. (2011). The scale consists of 15 items and one dimension. The item factor loads of the scale ranged from .48 to .81. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated as .80 and the test-retest correlation was calculated as .86. In the study, the Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was .89.

**Personal Cyber Security Provision Scale:** The scale was developed by Erol et al., (2015) to determine the cybersecurity-related behaviors of internet users. The scale consists of 25 items and 5 sub-dimensions. The total variance explanation rate of the scale is 48%. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale was found as .76 for protection of personal privacy, .77 for avoiding untrusted, .70 for taking precaution, .82 for protection of payment

information, .56 for not leaving a trace, and 0.73 for the overall scale. In the study, the Cronbach’s alpha value of the scale was obtained as .77.

**Data Collection**

Before starting the research, ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Necmettin Erbakan University (19/03/2021, No:2021/159). The data were collected online such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram because of the pandemic. The informed consent form was given on the first page of the study, and electronic consent of the participants was obtained. Demographic information form and scales were applied electronically. The research was carried out on volunteer participants over the age of 18.

**Data Analysis**

In the study, firstly missing data analysis was performed. SPSS package program was used to calculate frequency, percentage, standard deviation, mean, correlation, and Cronbach’s alpha values. In order to test the normal distribution of the data, the skewness and kurtosis values of the variables were calculated first. Direct and indirect effects between the variables were realized with SPSS PROCESS (Hayes, 2018). Bootstrapping was performed with 5,000 samples and a 95% confidence interval (Montoya & Hayes, 2017). In this study, we followed these recommendations for mediation analysis: (i) emotional intelligence must be connected to cyber security, (ii) mindfulness must be connected to cyber security (iii) emotional intelligence must be connected to mindfulness, (iv) there must be a statistically significant decrease in the impact of emotional intelligence on cyber security when mindfulness is controlled.

**FINDINGS**

In this part of the research, first of all, descriptive statistics and correlation results of emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and cyber security variables were given. Then, the model of the direct and indirect effects between these variables was tested.

**Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Results**

The mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis values, and Cronbach’s alpha coefficients and correlation values were given in Table 1. It was observed that the skewness and kurtosis values were in the range of ±1.96 and it showed a normal distribution (Karagöz, 2016). All Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were found to be sufficient because they were 0.70 and above (Pallant, 2016). A moderate positive correlation was found between emotional intelligence and mindfulness (r = 0.50, p<.001), between emotional intelligence and cyber security (r = 0.36, p<.001), and mindfulness and cyber security (r = 0.33, p<.001).

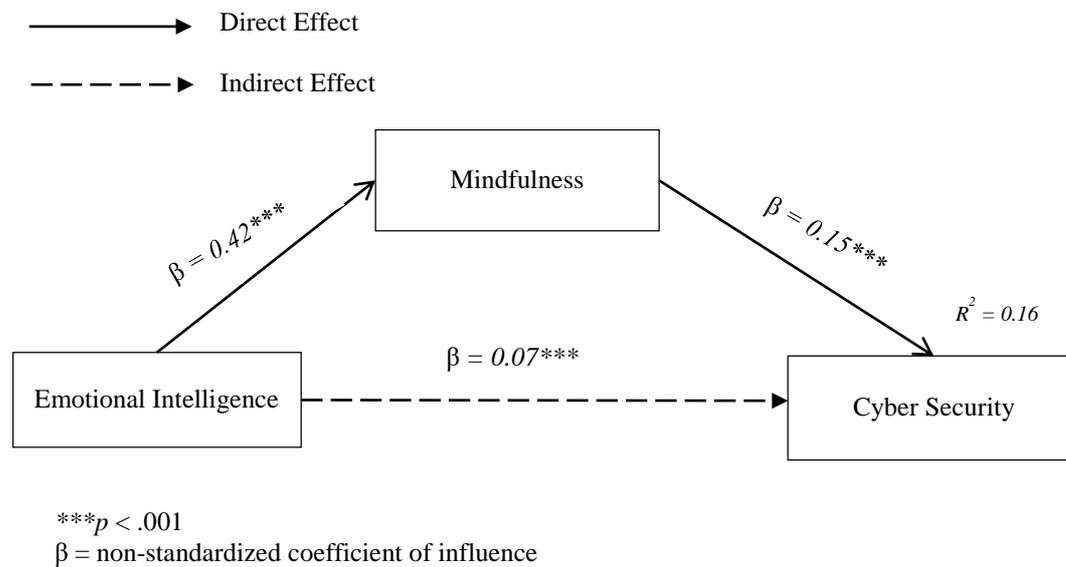
**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics, Reliability values, Correlation results

	$\alpha$	M	SS	Skew.	Kurt.	1	2	3
1. Emotional Intelligence	.73	93.37	17.36	.12	-.35	-		
2. Mindfulness	.89	57.72	14.91	-.28	-.35	.50**	-	
3. Cyber Security	.77	92.85	11.81	-.18	-.42	.36**	.33**	-

\*\*p< .001

**Testing the Mediator Effect Model**

The model regarding the mediating role of mindfulness in the effect of emotional intelligence on cyber security is shown in Figure 1. The Cronbach Alpha value of the scales used in the research was found 0.73 for emotional intelligence scale, 0.89 for mindfulness scale and 0.77 for cyber security scale. This study obtained correlations that are r=0.50 between emotional intelligence and mindfulness, r= 0.36 between emotional intelligence and cyber security, r=0.33 between mindfulness and cyber security. As a result of bootstrapping, it was observed that emotional intelligence had a significant effect on mindfulness ( $\beta = 0.42, t = 13.06, p < .001$ ). Similarly, mindfulness was found to have a positive effect on cybersecurity ( $\beta = 0.15, t = 4.12, p < .001$ ). In addition, an indirect effect of emotional intelligence on cybersecurity was found ( $\beta = 0.07, CI = 0.03, 0.10$ ). In the research, it was seen that mindfulness plays a mediating role in the effect of emotional intelligence on cyber security. In addition, it was determined in the study that emotional intelligence and mindfulness explained 16% of the variance (R<sup>2</sup>) regarding cyber security (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** *Structural Model*

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Nowadays with the transfer of transactions such as banking and public services to an interactive environment the widespread use of information technologies, which are at the center of our lives, has made these transactions open targets for attack (Doherty et al., 2009). The fact that the information circulation network, which is very important in general and, is moved to an interactive environment with this prevalence for the elimination of cyber security threats and the safe use of this network (Vural & Sağıroğlu, 2008). In this sense, cyber security covers comprehensive security that covers not only the internet but also all communication infrastructures (Hekim & Başibüyük, 2013). The human factor is the weakest link among the factors to ensure this security. In general, even if all security measures are taken, human-induced vulnerabilities can also invalidate these measures. For this reason, it is considered to raise awareness of people about this issue and to determine their awareness (Vural & Sağıroğlu, 2008).

Education and awareness are fundamental parts of all information security cultures (Glaspie & Karwowski, 2017). Accordingly, regardless of hardware and software, an uneducated and low-aware user becomes the carrier of a cyber-attack (Badie & Lashkari, 2012). Ögütçü et al., (2016) revealed that when more technology users perceive threats, more their awareness of the world of technology increases and more efficient their security behaviors become. Chen & Zahedi (2016) revealed that users tend to take security measures when they perceive or experience cyber threats. Jensen et al., (2017) highlighted that users who received mindfulness training were better protected from attacks they were exposed from the internet. Accordingly, the fact that individuals have high mindfulness provides the opportunity to get rid of mental confusion by being aware of the events around them and to use the internet better by focusing attention on positive areas (Peker et al., 2019).

Mindfulness is the state of focusing on the events happening around us in an accepting way without judgment (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and the opportunity to be fully alive and awake (Germer et al., 2005). Thus, it enables the individual to perceive the emotions of himself and those around him, and thus to regulate the individual's emotion (Koole, 2009). In this respect, mindfulness, perceiving, regulating, and managing emotions are highly related to emotional intelligence (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Since individuals with low emotional intelligence are more likely to experience both social and psychological problems (Mavroveli et al., 2007), it was revealed that they have a high tendency to escape from real life and be more active in the virtual environment, and emotional intelligence is a protective factor against problematic use of internet (Beranuy et al., 2009).

A low level of emotional intelligence facilitates online use of individuals, and they are more likely to experience high psychological and interpersonal problems (Petrides et al., 2016). Having a socio-emotional system that reduces the tendency of individuals to risky activities such as problematic technology use individuals to control their emotions and to have cognitive control over these emotions. Thus, it is an important preventive factor against exhibiting problematic behaviors (Shulman, et al., 2016). Moreover, it has been reported that

mindfulness has a mediating role because individuals with high awareness have the capacity to manage and regulate their emotions by being more aware of their emotional states (Kircaburun , Griffiths & Billieux, 2019). Individuals with a high level of awareness along with emotional intelligence have more sufficient resources to cope with their problems (Petrides, Gomez & Perez-Gonzalez, 2017). In literature, it has been revealed that emotional intelligence and mindfulness are positively related (Baer et al., 2004; Bao et al., 2015; Deniz et al., 2017; Griebel, 2015; Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Sinclair & Feigenbaum, 2012; Teal et al. , 2018; Wang and Kong, 2013).

In this study it was revealed that mindfulness plays a mediating role between cyber security behaviors and emotional intelligence. In this respect, it contributes to the literature by considering the cyber security behaviors of the participants in terms of emotional intelligence and mindfulness. However, these results have some limitations that should be considered while interpreting. These are the limited generalizations of the study sample with only the inclusion of various provinces of Turkey. Another limitation is that the study has a cross-sectional structure. Therefore, in future studies it is recommended that researchers reach a larger sample by considering these issues and test results of the research with longitudinal studies. Considering the results of the study, it is recommended for practitioners to carry out studies to increase the conscious awareness of users and to detect and develop their emotional intelligence in ensuring cyber security of users in the virtual environment.:

#### **Statements of Publication Ethics**

The research was conducted in accordance with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants participating in the study. Before starting the research, ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Necmettin Erbakan University (19/03/2021, No:2021/159). This study was not funded by any organization or institution.

#### **Researchers' Contribution Rate**

The first author contributed to the method, data analysis, reporting, summary, and general arrangement. The second author contributed to the design of the research, introduction, data collection, discussion, and bibliography. The third author contributed to the design and discussion of the data and provided review and feedback to the research.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this paper.

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