

Research Paper

The Relationship Between Social Media Privacy Protection Skills and Social Media Addiction: A Study on Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The research was conducted to determine whether there is a relationship between adolescents' social media privacy protection skills and social media addiction levels. A total of 499 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18 participated in this correlational study. The study used a Personal Information Form, the Social Media Privacy Protection Skills Scale for Adolescents, and the Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents. Descriptive statistical analysis, point bi-serial and Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis were used to analyze the data. As a result of the study, it was found that as the adolescents' class level and daily social media usage time increased, their social media addiction increased. It was also found that as adolescents' social media privacy skills increased, their use of social media applications decreased. There is a relationship between adolescents' social media privacy skills and their social media addiction, and as adolescents' social media privacy skills increase, their social media addiction decreases.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence, one of the fastest periods of human development, is an important period of life development due to physical, sexual, cognitive, social, emotional, hormonal, and relational changes. The most important need of adolescents to support their development is social interaction (Üstündağ, 2024). During the pandemic, adolescents turned to intensive use of technology because they were obliged to use digital technology to interact socially with their friends. The increased need for social interaction led to a dependence and orientation on social media and other social networks (Hamilton et al., 20-21). Thus, social media played an important role for adolescents of this age because they are both more technologically oriented and much more curious than adults due to education and socialization. This is evidenced by the fact that adolescents account for more than 80.0% of registered users of WhatsApp, X, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram (Statista, 2021). Furthermore, adolescents are still connecting with others through their social media accounts, despite the years that have passed since the pandemic (Victor et al., 2024). Adolescents' use of social media not only allows them to communicate with their friends and families and socialize by making new friends, but also increases learning opportunities by using it for educational purposes (Acar et al., 2022; Alimoradi et al., 2022; Ruckwongpatr et al., 2022). However, while these positive possibilities of social media increase usage rates, the tendency for adolescents to spend long periods of time on social media is worrying, as intense exposure can lead to addiction (Pornosakulvanich, 2018).

Social media addiction is generally considered a behavioral problem, as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) does not include social media addiction in the category called 'other disorders resulting from addictive behavior (APA, 2013; Moreno et al., 2022). As a behavioral problem, social media addiction can be defined as excessive use, inability to satisfy the desire to use, neglect of daily tasks, damage to social relationships, and lying about the duration of use (Savcı & Aysan, 2017). In cases of addiction, not being able to access social media can also cause negative emotions such as unhappiness, anger, and stress (Longstreet & Brooks, 2017). As a result of the negative emotions caused by social media addiction and the preference for social media over direct interaction, face-to-face communication and interaction are negatively affected (Subramanian, 2017). Individuals' focus on social media interactions instead of face-to-face communication and excessive use of social media leads to a decrease in social skills and deterioration of interpersonal relationships (Affounh et al., 2021). Research also shows that adolescents belong to the risk group in terms of internet addiction (Üstündağ, 2024) and are addicted to social media (Üstündağ, 2022).

In addition to all users, it is very important for adolescents who use social media, especially at the level of addiction, to have knowledge and awareness about social media privacy and to protect their privacy. Privacy awareness is basically a prerequisite for individuals to know their personal rights and to protect these rights (Şahin et al., 2022). The fact that an individual has privacy awareness shows that he/she is aware of the privacy of others and that he/she adopts behaviors to protect his/her own privacy. In short, privacy awareness involves consistent, respectful, and egalitarian attitudes and behaviors towards oneself and others (Öztürk

et al., 2019; Tabata & Hirotsune, 2014). Therefore, adolescents' awareness can enable them to take measures to protect their privacy when using social media applications. This is because research has shown that if adolescents do not take adequate measures to protect their privacy on social media, they are more vulnerable to cyberbullying, abuse, exposure to sexually explicit messages, fraud and mental health problems caused by these situations. In another study, it was emphasized that adolescents use some strategies to protect privacy on social networking sites, but these strategies are not sufficient and the importance of reconceptualizing privacy (Marwick & Boyd, 2014). Today, it is accepted that the privacy of individuals is seriously endangered with the addictive level of social media use and the presence of many individuals on these platforms (Özden, 2019). For this reason, adolescents need to gain the ability to protect their digital privacy as well as media literacy and technology usage skills. Digital privacy trainings are important to raise the awareness of not only adolescents but also parents who should guide their children on digital privacy (Yığıtbaşı & Çelik, 2023). Research has revealed that it is important to provide digital privacy education to all children, including adolescents, from an early age to create a healthy society (Eryılmaz, 2021; Kurtuluş, 2022; Livingstone et al., 2022; Üstündağ, 2024).

Since we live in an age where digital technology is advancing rapidly, it is important to support the skills of adolescents who are the adults of the future. Because adolescence is one of the most important developmental processes and the habits acquired during this period are likely to continue throughout life. Since digital technology supports adolescents to lead a life intertwined with technology, this situation may cause adolescents to spend more time on social media. As mentioned, the high risk of social media addiction in adolescents makes it necessary for them to develop the ability to protect their privacy on social media. For this reason, determining whether there is a relationship between adolescents' social media privacy protection skills and social media addiction levels constitutes the main purpose of the research. The hypotheses determined within the scope of this main purpose are:

H1. There is a relationship between adolescents' social media privacy protection skills and social media addiction levels and various variables.

H2. Adolescents' social media privacy protection skills predict their social media addiction levels.

METHOD

Research Model

This research is a correlational study. A correlation study is a research model that is conducted to determine the relationship between two or more variables and to obtain clues about cause and effect (Metin, 2014).

Participants

This study was conducted in Ankara in the 2023-2024 academic year. Four high schools were selected as the population of the study using the proportional probability selection method according to the number of students. The students who will participate in the research from the selected schools were determined using simple random sampling method. In the simple random sampling method, every possible combination of items in the population has an equal probability of being included in the sample. The G*Power method was used to determine the sample size and it was concluded that the total sample size should be at least 398. A total of 499 adolescent volunteers aged 15-18 years and attending high school participated in the study.

Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form, Social Media Privacy Protection Skills Scale for Adolescents and Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents were used in the study.

Personal Information Form: In the form prepared by the researchers, it was aimed to determine the demographic information of the adolescents participating in the study.

Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents (SMASA) was developed by Özgenel, Canpolat, and Ekşi (2019). The scale was developed according to APA DSM-5 criteria. It consists of 9 items and is graded as 5-point Likert (Never-1, Rarely-2, Sometimes-3, Mostly-4, Always-5). There are no reverse scored items in the scale. A minimum of 9 points and a maximum of 45 points can be obtained from the scale. A high score on the scale indicates a high level of social media addiction. The Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale was found to be 0.90, and the Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be 0.91 as a result of its use in our study.

Social Media Privacy Protection Skills Scale for Adolescents (SMPPSSA) was developed by Odabaş, İlhan, Kılıçer (2021). The scale consists of 27 items and is 5-point Likert type. The scale has three dimensions, Privacy Protection Tendency, Self-Efficacy and Privacy Protection Behavior. The score of adolescents' ability to protect social media privacy is obtained by summing the score of the individual's level of agreement with all items in the scale. There is one reverse item in the scale. The lowest score of 27 and the highest score of 135 can be obtained from the scale. The higher the score obtained from the scale, the higher the competence of the individual's ability to protect social media privacy, and the lower the score, the lower the competence of the individual's ability to protect social media privacy. Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was determined as .90.

Data Collection

After obtaining permission from the Ankara Provincial Directorate of National Education, the principals of the schools were interviewed. After informing the principals about the purpose of the research and the method of implementation, an announcement was posted in the schools. The same notice was also sent to parent information groups. Scale forms were prepared and after consent was obtained, the prepared scale forms were administered to the adolescents' face to face. Participation in the study was voluntary

and consent forms were obtained from both the adolescents and their parents. Completion of the data forms took between 15-20 minutes.

Data Analysis

Mean and standard deviation were used as descriptive statistics for continuous data. Compliance with normal distribution was examined by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and it was determined that the data were normally distributed. The relationship between the variables was evaluated by Point bi-serial and Pearson correlation analyses and regression analysis. The cut-off points used for the interpretation of the correlation coefficients obtained are as follows; 0.00-0.19 very weak, 0.20-0.39 weak, 0.40-0.69 medium, 0.70-0.89 high and 0.90-1.00 very high relationship (Alpar, 2012). The data were analyzed with IBM SPSS 25 (IBM SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL) package programmed. Statistical significance level was taken as 0.05.

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study participants

Variables	Girls		Boys		Total		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Age	15 years old	77	41.2	143	45.8	220	44.1
	16 years old	89	47.6	93	29.8	182	36.5
	17 years old	16	8.6	52	16.7	68	13.6
	18 years old	5	2.7	24	7.7	29	5.8
	Total	187	100.0	312	100.0	499	100.0
Grade	9 th grade	4	2.1	95	30.4	99	19.8
	10 th grade	150	80.2	134	42.9	284	56.9
	11 th grade	27	14.4	52	16.7	79	15.8
	12 th grade	6	3.2	31	9.9	37	7.4
	Total	187	100.0	312	100.0	499	100.0
School type	Anatolian High School	171	91.4	84	26.9	255	51.1
	Technical Vocational School	16	8.6	228	73.1	244	48.9
	Total	187	100.0	312	100.0	499	100.0
Social media usage status	Yes	186	99.5	311	99.7	497	99.6
	No	1	0.5	1	0.3	2	0.4
	Total	187	100.0	312	100.0	499	100.0
Daily social media usage time	Less than 1 hour	9	4.8	32	10.3	41	8.2
	1-3 hours	91	48.7	159	51.0	250	50.1
	4-5 hours	58	31.0	71	22.8	129	25.9
	More than 5 hours	29	15.5	50	16.0	79	15.8
	Total	187	100.0	312	100.0	499	100.0

499 adolescents participated in the study. The average age of the participants was 15 years. 37% of the participants were female and 63% were male. 56.9% of the participants are attending the 10th grade. All the participants use social media (99.6%). 8.2% of the participants spend less than 1 hour, 50.1% spend 1-3 hours, 25.9% spend 4-5 hours, and 15.8% spend more than 5 hours on social media (Table 1). In addition, the most frequently used social media applications of the adolescents participating in the study were WhatsApp (92.2%), Instagram (91.8%), Youtube (89.9%), Tiktok (52.1%), X (25.8%) and Facebook (14.4%).

Table 2. Results related to the scales.

	SMASA	Privacy Protection Tendency	Self-Efficacy	Privacy Protection Behaviour	SMPPSSA	
N	499					
Minimum	9.00	10.00	9.00	9.00	31.00	
Maximum	45.00	50.00	90.00	40.00	134.00	
Mean	19.73	39.88	34.45	24.56	98.90	
Std. Deviation	7.22	9.70	8.82	7.04	21.04	
Skewness	Statistic	.737	-1.08	-.383	.031	-.792
	Std. Error	.109	.109	.109	.109	.109
Kurtosis	Statistic	.142	.745	3.383	-.791	.748
	Std. Error	.218	.218	.218	.218	.218

The mean SMASA score of the adolescents was determined to be \bar{x} =19.73 and the mean SMPPSSA score was determined to be \bar{x} =98.90. When analysing the sub-dimensions of the SMPPSSA scale, the tendency to protect privacy sub-dimension has the highest mean (\bar{x} =39.88), while the protection of privacy sub-dimension has the lowest mean (\bar{x} =24.56). This result can be interpreted as

adolescents tend to protect their privacy in social media as a knowledge, but they have shortcomings in translating this tendency into behaviour (Table 2).

Table 3. Correlation analysis results

Variable (Scales)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8a	8b	8c	8d
1. Gender	1										
2. Age	,074	1									
3. Grade	-,076	,768**	1								
4. School type	,625**	,137**	-,087	1							
5. Social media usage status	-,016	-,022	-,048	,001	1						
6. Daily social media usage time	-,072	,177**	,194**	,041	-,074	1					
7. SMASA	-,219**	,069	,125**	-,152**	,077	,486**	1				
8a. Privacy Protection Tendency	-,182**	-,117**	-,063	-,215**	-,163**	-,049	-,058	1			
8b. Self-Efficacy	-,071	-,035	-,019	-,128**	-,140**	,007	-,072	,626**	1		
8c. Privacy Protection Behaviour	-,028	,034	,075	-,063	,022	-,113*	-,083	,514**	,350**	1	
8d. SMPPSSA	-,123**	-,057	-,012	-,174**	-,126**	-,058	- ,185**	,896**	,825**	,719**	1

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

r_{pb} : Point bi-serial correlation coefficient.

r : Pearson correlation coefficient

The study found a positive correlation between adolescents' mean SMASA scores and their grade level and daily social media use time, while a negative correlation was found between gender and school type. In addition, a negative correlation was found between adolescents' mean SMPPSSA scores and their gender, school type and social media use status. A negative correlation was also found between adolescents' mean SMASA scores and their mean SMPPSSA scores ($p < .001$) (Table 3).

Table 4. Regression analysis results

Variables		β	t	f	R^2	p
SMPPSSA	SMASA	.321	.612	21.868	.287	.000

According to the results of the analysis, adolescents' social media privacy skills have a positive effect on their social media addiction ($\beta = .321$; $p < 0.05$). Adolescents' social media privacy skills explain 28.7% of their level of social media addiction. As there is a negative correlation between them, an increase in adolescents' social media privacy protection skills is associated with a 32.1% decrease in their social media addiction levels ($R^2 = 0.287$) (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

There are important findings from the research. The first is that all adolescents use social media applications, and their daily usage time is an average of 3 hours. Second, social media addiction increased with the adolescents' grade level and daily social media use time. Thirdly, the use of social media applications decreased as adolescents' social media privacy skills increased. The final and most important finding is that there is a relationship between adolescents' social media privacy skills and social media addiction, and that social media addiction decreases as adolescents' social media privacy skills increase. In line with the findings, the research hypotheses were accepted.

In the study, it was determined that all adolescents use social media applications. Although social media is used in all age groups, this rate is quite high among adolescents (Tutgun-Ünal & Deniz, 2020) and the result of the study supports this finding. In addition, it was determined that the social media applications that adolescents use the most are WhatsApp, Instagram, Youtube, Tiktok, X and Facebook (92.2, 91.8, 89.9, 52.1, 25.8 and 14.4% respectively). Ayyıldız and Şahin (2022) also revealed in their study that the rate of Instagram, YouTube, X, Facebook, Snapchat and TikTok use is higher among young people and that these individuals are also in the high social media addiction group. Social media applications have long been an important means of information acquisition, interpersonal communication, information learning, leisure and entertainment, and public opinion manipulation (Stamenković & Mitrović, 2023). However, the purposes of using social media and the frequency of using applications may vary according to social media addiction status (Zhao & Zhou, 2021). According to the literature, social media addiction may develop as the duration of social media use increases and this may also cause different negative effects on individuals (Geirdal et al., 2021; Sun

& Zhang, 2020; Üstündağ, 2022; 2024). In summary, it is important to recognize that social media applications are a double-edged sword. The literature shows that while social media applications provide important advantages for adolescents in both education and social life, they can also have harmful effects and lead to social media addiction. Therefore, to reduce social media addiction, creating opportunities to support adolescents' social relationships and directing them to outdoor activities such as sports can make a positive contribution.

The main findings of the study can be stated as follows: as adolescents' social media privacy skills increase, the use of social media applications may decrease, there is a relationship between adolescents' social media privacy skills and their social media addiction, and social media addiction may decrease with the increase in adolescents' social media privacy skills. The literature shows that adolescents' social media privacy protection skills are at a medium level (Karahisar & Hayır, 2023). The results of the study conducted by Eryılmaz (2021) show that there is a negative and low-level relationship between adolescents' social media addiction and privacy perceptions, and as adolescents' privacy perceptions increase, their social media use is negatively affected. In this context, the findings are consistent with the literature. Adolescents mostly share parts of their daily lives, photos of their travels and their current situation on their social media accounts (Üstündağ, 2020). Therefore, the content shared by adolescents on social media covers personal situations. In this context, even if they are not aware of it, adolescents do not avoid revealing their privacy to everyone (Üstündağ, 2020). Üstündağ (2022) found that there is a relationship between the level of social media addiction among adolescents and their psychological needs. Considering the social developmental characteristics of adolescence, it is known that peers are extremely important for this age group. Through the established friendship relationship, adolescents share common beliefs and values with their friends, spend their free time together, exchange information on different topics and develop their social skills by discussing the topics they are interested in, and have important opportunities to belong to a group and develop self-esteem (Atalay & Özyürek, 2020). In this context, social media applications can be seen as platforms that adolescents use to meet their social development needs. This is because peer relationships provide an important environment for meeting psychological needs and developing social skills (Gowers, 2005). Peer groups, which also move into the virtual environment to maintain peer relationships, can support the psychological and social needs of adolescents by influencing levels of popularity, social status, prestige, and general acceptance by the group (Adams, 2005). The important issue here can be seen as raising adolescents' awareness of privacy. In social media applications, privacy concepts such as not sharing personal data, having control over personal data, not sharing other people's information and protecting individual dignity should be given importance and attention (Baritci, 2019). In addition to privacy awareness, the literature also reveals the importance of media literacy education in increasing media literacy skills among adolescents and reducing internet addiction (Üstündağ, 2024). This finding supports the finding that social media addiction may decrease as adolescents' social media privacy skills increase. Therefore, it is expected that an adolescent with high privacy skills will be more successful in consciously using social media. Therefore, in addition to digital privacy education, adolescents should also be provided with media literacy education.

CONCLUSION

Social media addiction is one of the most important problems of our time, which has become widespread among young people. The research findings have clearly demonstrated this. The research points to the importance of supporting young people's social media privacy skills to reduce social media addiction. Although all adolescents use social media, their level of privacy and addiction is seen as an important situation requiring intervention. For this reason, there is a need to educate adolescents on media literacy, social media privacy awareness and social media addiction prevention by making the necessary curriculum arrangements.

In general terms, the findings show that adolescents' social media privacy skills predict social media addiction. As social media occupy an important place in the lives of adolescents and their usage rates are very high, this study makes an important contribution to the literature on media and adolescents as it emphasizes the importance of privacy awareness for adolescents to be conscious social media users and it is the only study conducted. Of course, it is difficult to counteract the harms of social media, but it is possible to guide adolescents to use social media applications correctly and consciously with privacy awareness.

However, our sample is limited to Ankara province and a relatively small sample group. Therefore, similar studies can be repeated with larger groups. In addition, other studies can be designed to examine parents' use of social media and their skills in protecting privacy on social media.

Ethics and Consent: Ethics committee approval for this study was received from the Ethics Committee of the Health Sciences University Gülhane Scientific Research Ethics Committee University (Date: 19/3/2024; Decision Number: 2024/123).

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