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How the internet and social media affect and shapes romantic relationships**Ekrem ÇULFA**

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How the internet and social media affect and shapes romantic relations

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the effects of social media on romantic relationships. Its purpose was to elucidate how the internet and social media influence these relationships and shape their dynamics. The research was conducted using qualitative methods. Sixty participants, 35 women and 25 men residing in Istanbul, were involved, all engaged in romantic relationships via social media channels.

The findings indicated that participants predominantly utilized platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and other media tools as effective social networks. It was observed that communication through social media has become a habitual behavior readily accessible to individuals, and the romantic relationship processes developed through social media significantly affect individuals, with virtual connections increasingly integrating into real-life interactions. Consequently, it was determined that relationships formed in the virtual realm and those in the physical world are now intertwined within individuals' romantic relationship experiences. Furthermore, the study found that social media substantially negatively impacts romantic relationships.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction

This study investigates the impact of social media on romantic relationships, focusing on how the internet and various social media platforms shape and influence these connections. With the rise of digital communication, understanding the implications of social media on interpersonal relationships has become increasingly important.

Objectives

The primary aim of this research is to explore the effects of social media on romantic relationships, identifying the nuances of how these platforms alter traditional relationship dynamics.

Methodology

The research employed a qualitative approach involving a sample of 60 participants—35 women and 25 men—residing in Istanbul, all engaged in romantic relationships facilitated through various social media channels. An information collection tool was developed based on expert opinions and consisted of two parts. The first part included 14 interview questions designed to gather in-depth insights, while the second part contained five demographic questions aimed at understanding participant backgrounds.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was utilized to analyze the collected data, identifying nine themes, 17 categories, and 58 distinct codes. This analytical framework allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding social media's role in their romantic lives.

Findings

The findings reveal that participants primarily utilize platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter as social networks. The study indicates a notable shift in how romantic relationships are initiated and maintained through social media, with individuals frequently forming connections with people they meet online. This phenomenon illustrates that virtual relationships now represent a new facet of romantic engagement. Furthermore, social media communication has become habitual and easily accessible for individuals. Participants indicated that their primary expectations from partners in romantic relationships included the ability to manage media interactions effectively, along with valuing human and spiritual characteristics over physical attributes.

Integration of Virtual and Real-Life Relationships

A significant finding indicates that processes beginning in virtual environments seamlessly integrate into participants' real lives. This intertwining of virtual and physical interactions reflects a broader trend in how romantic relationships are constructed and maintained in the digital age.

Negative Impacts of Social Media

While social media offers various benefits for romantic interactions, the study also uncovers several adverse effects. Participants expressed concerns about misunderstandings, jealousy, and insecurity arising from digital communications, indicating that social media can complicate rather than facilitate romantic relationships.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study illustrates that social media plays a complex role in shaping romantic relationships. While it enables new forms of connection and interaction, it also introduces challenges that can negatively impact intimacy and trust. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for individuals navigating romantic relationships in an increasingly digital world. Future research should further explore the long-term effects of social media on relationship satisfaction and stability.

Keywords: Social media, Internet effects, Romantic relationships, Influence

INTRODUCTION

Since humanity has existed in nature, communication has emerged as a phenomenon both among individuals and within the social structure. Communication has become indispensable since the first human communities formed historically. It is understood that communication has gained power in the social, historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts, paralleling developments in information and technology up to the present day. Communication has evolved and developed like a living organism; communication and similar sociological structures have formed a history. Consequently, the discipline of communication has received intense focus as a field of study in recent times (Taşçıoğlu, 2019, p. 6).

The most important communication tools of today are social media channels. "Social media is a term used for online tools and websites that allow users to share information, ideas, interests, and knowledge, creating interaction. As the name suggests, social media facilitates community and networking by encouraging participation and involvement" (Sayımer, 2008, p. 123). It is evident that individuals who communicate and share through social media applications determine the content entirely by themselves and constantly interact with one another through these platforms. In short, social media represents a form of communication where sharing, interaction, and discussion are essential, free from limitations related to time and space (Güçdemir, 2010, pp. 22-23).

Research on social media communication, interaction, and effects is essential. Understanding where social media stands in emotional relationships through various forms of communication is significant.

A. Problem Status

Today's leading social media channels are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. These applications provide communication and offer many opportunities, such as obtaining information, playing games, and conducting searches while attempting to meet a wide range of human needs. In addition to these functions, social media is believed to impact individuals' romantic relationships significantly. Consequently, social media will inevitably exert sociological effects as it appeals to all ages and demographics. It is observed that social media permeates every aspect of our lives, influences our experiences, manages and directs our psychosocial processes, and has become a powerful medium whose effects on social and individual levels are often irreversible. Social media is inescapable in our private lives; in short, it is present in every area of our lives.

From this perspective, the thematic focus of this study is how social media directs and affects human relationships, especially its impact on romantic relationships. This study aims to describe the effects of social media applications on romantic relationships, whether individuals enter into romantic relationships through these platforms, the frequency with which they maintain these relationships, and their perspectives on the quality and quantity of these connections.

Communication is one of the most essential parts of human life, and the channels that provide this communication serve as organs today. With the advancement of technology, it is evident that these communication channels, which are indispensable in people's lives, shape today's relationship network and have a sociological effect. Technological devices that are always in our lives and do not leave us alone, and the internet, as a result of this, are a part of people's lives and even serve as organs. For this reason, the use of social media channels instead of face-to-face or arranged relationships in the formation of human relationships, especially romantic relationships, and the sociological examination of the results of the relationships established through these channels constitute the general framework of this study.

B. Importance of the Research

The development of the internet over time has led to an increase in the number of people connecting to it. Technological developments supporting this phenomenon touch people's lives and affect them as a form of decision-making authority. People now use social media, make friends online, and establish new relationships. For these reasons, the effect of the internet on people is not confined to a single area; it impacts many aspects of life and significantly

influences human existence. In other words, the internet generally guides people and plays a vital role in decision-making. Therefore, the effects of the internet on human relationships are significant.

To better understand these effects, we can look at examples and developments. The impact of social media on society and its internalization over time has made it a crucial decision-making mechanism. People live their private lives on social media, meet their needs, make new friends, and even choose spouses or partners. It is undeniable that this new type of relationship has sociological implications. This study discusses the effects of such relationships on a sociological level. The importance of this study lies in the fact that the impact of social media on relationships is a recent and relevant topic. Its effects on society are multidimensional, and it holds value in both academic and practical aspects. Additionally, since the study employs qualitative interview techniques to explore the impact of romantic relationships, it seeks answers to social problems through participants' statements, providing in-depth data for future researchers.

C. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to determine the effects of the internet and social media on romantic relationships and how they shape these connections. In line with this purpose, the primary research questions addressed in the study are as follows:

D. Problem Statements of the Study

The problem statements to be addressed in line with the purpose of the study are as follows:

- Which social media channels do individuals prefer, and what are the reasons for this preference?
- Do individuals enter romantic relationships with people they meet on social media?
- What are the reasons for choosing social media channels for romantic relationships?
- Do physical expectations take precedence in romantic relationships?
- Do people encounter difficulties meeting individuals from social media in physical spaces?
- Do social media channels offer individuals real or virtual togetherness in romantic relationships?
- To what extent does social media affect romantic relationships?

E. Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to individuals in Istanbul experiencing romantic relationships through various social media channels. Sixty volunteers, twenty-five males, and thirty-five females, participated in the study.

The study consists of the conceptual and theoretical framework and the findings. The first part covers the concepts, theories, and research on social media and romantic relationships. This section examines communication and its history, communication channels and types, the internet and its development, communication and internet sociology, the emergence of social media, and romantic relationships in Türkiye. The second part presents the findings and results of the interviews conducted with individuals engaged in romantic relationships through social media channels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Communication and Communication History

Communication has transformed significantly over time in terms of richness and diversity, evolving into its current form. It is a process that begins with humans and prioritizes the individual. Communication is a phenomenon that encompasses all living beings, making it a universal and comprehensive concept. People develop their communication skills through body language, speech, writing, and drawing during the communication process (Süllü, 2018, p. 121).

With the transition to social life, humanity has increasingly needed to communicate and share in forming its spiritual, physical, and cultural identity and passing it on to future generations. This need is because opinions, experiences, and information that are not shared cannot foster integration; the potential for communication among individuals from different cultures and communities will decrease (Çamdereli, 2004, p. 16). Consequently, people are increasingly hungry for complete, accurate, and up-to-date information, with competition most evident in the speed of news dissemination (Jeanneney, 2009, p. 19).

1. A Look at Communication Tools in Social History

In the recent period, "artificial intelligence," "cloud computing," "hypersexuality," "new media," "social networks," "multimedia," "virtual reality," etc. A significant part of communication research, which deals with new phenomena that have emerged with technological developments in social communication, has been directed to the economic

politics of these phenomena (Mosco & Fuchs, 2014; Wayne, 2009). The critical economic politics of communication, which emerged as North American and European-centered studies since the late 1960s and focused on problems such as “the media industry, international corporations, their appearance in the world and their power, their entry into the central and peripheral countries and underdeveloped countries,” has emerged as a result of the neoliberal restructuring of the 1990s. Although it slowed down with the change of the center of communication in the structuring-transformation period, after the mid-2000s, especially under the new conditions that emerged with the impact of the global capitalist crisis in 2008, they have been forming a "new tradition of critical political economy that meticulously puts the Marxist conceptual set to work" (Başaran, see Mosco and Fuchs, 2014, p. 12-17). The implementers of this new tradition aim to "illuminate" Marx's concepts such as "mode of production, means of production" with "examples related to new media economics, culture and technology" and to present these concepts "as a tool to be used in understanding new media" (Aymaz, 2018, p. 125; Wayne, 2009, p. 56).

2. Technical Development, Social Need and Communication

The machine and the technology related to it cannot be considered independently of the historical social production processes. According to Marx, nature cannot make locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, and machines. These are the products of man. All technical and technological tools are the means of domination of the human will and are the natural extensions of human labor. “They are organs created by the human hand and the human brain; they are the objectified power of knowledge.” (Marx, 2003, p. 176). “All tools, from advanced technological machines to simple hand tools, are the natural forces of social labor. The productive use of these natural forces requires something made by man. A water wheel is needed to benefit from the power of water, and a steam engine is needed to benefit from the expansion of steam” (Marx, 1986, p. 400). Thus, the tools produced by advanced technology expand and multiply as tools of a mechanism created by man (Marx, 1986, p. 400). The development in the technology of tools and machines means that the production process is transformed from a simple labor process to a scientific process that puts the forces of nature at its service and makes them work in the service of human needs (Marx, 2003, p. 170). Social needs come first among technical developments.

3. Technique and Communication as Objective Conditions

Communication is primarily a set of social processes that include the production, transmission, reproduction, and receipt of symbolic forms such as words, music, graphics, pictures, moving

images, and managing different types of resources. Individuals mostly use technical tools to produce and disseminate symbolic forms. Therefore, mass communication is a social process that operates through "communication media" or "mass communication tools."

4. History of Social Relations and Communication

With communication tools, new action structures in society, new forms of interaction, and new social networks of relations have been formed. Using communication tools to determine how space and time are perceived transforms the situation regarding social life's spatial and temporal phenomena. Therefore, the history of communication tools is a history of social relations. (Barbier and Lawenir, 2001, p. 11).

5. Media, History, and Human

Communication is the reflection of human existence that reveals its social nature. Unlike other living beings that directly adapt to their natural environment, humans have not had to act instinctively to adapt to the seas, lakes, mountains, forests, cold, heat, storms, etc., created by nature. They have done this through the cultural codes they have revealed with sociality (Oskay, 1993, p. 310).

Communication Channels and Types

Communication is the process of transferring information between the sender and the receiver for a specific purpose. Communication is a concept that has come into our language from the English word communication. Communication means sharing information between at least two people or groups and transmitting it bilaterally (Telman & Ünsal, 2005, p. 19). communication is a complex structure. It is used functionally and multi-dimensionally. Humanity owes its progress and development to communication. The types and processes of communication, which are indispensable elements in ensuring this development, are of great importance in transferring the experiences and knowledge that humanity has gained through communication (Güler, 1990, p. 479).

1. Definition of Communication and Its Basic Processes

Since communication has many socio-psychology and cultural variables, it is impossible to define it under a single roof. In this respect, communication can be defined in various ways depending on how it is approached. Some scientists' definitions are as follows: Becer (2011, p. 14) defined communication as exchanging emotions, thoughts, information, and behaviors within an organization, where at least two people or groups are defined as receiver and sender.

Dökmen (2004, p. 19) defined communication as producing, transferring, and giving meaning to information.

Demireller (1999, p. 36) defined the meaning he attributed to communication as the process of conveying thoughts and feelings to each other between individuals or groups through verbal, written, visual, and symbolic means such as arm, hand, etc. movements.

The experiences, knowledge, culture, etc., that individuals gain throughout their lives will be transferred to the next generation through communication. Thus, it will be emphasized how an increasingly continuing communication process can affect attitudes and behaviors (Yüksel, 1989). We can briefly describe communication between individuals as transferring and sharing. When evaluated from a different perspective, it is evident that communication has an effect that integrates and adds to the social life piece by piece, ensures its progress, and makes life much easier. The elements of the communication process need to do their job. Any element of the communication process is expected to transfer the process to the next one without encountering a problem. If one of the elements causes a problem, communication may not occur or be interrupted. In short, regardless of the type of communication, if any of the elements and stages that constitute communication do not fulfill their function, the process cannot be completed.

Social Media in Türkiye

Social networks in many areas of Türkiye are essential for users and companies. At the top of these areas, social networks used to make friends and social circles in Türkiye are the most suitable model. Examples of social networks other than making friends and social circles can be given as business and brand-focused social networks. When we narrow down the example, Club VAIO, formed by SONY VAIO users, stands out in our country as the brand user community. Club VAIO has more than 2.5 million members in Europe, which indicates that Social Networks have a solid structure, even in special-focused situations. It is necessary to know that Turks' internet usage habits are the most important factor shaping the density ranking of social networks in Türkiye. Facebook, used for making friends and networking, retains its first place among everyone, with nearly 13 million Turkish members in Türkiye. According to the figures for May 2009, The number of internet users in Türkiye is 18.1 million. This number reached 40.7 million in 2016 and 62.07 million in 2021.

Romantic Relationships and Their Types

People have specific needs in order to continue their lives. Emotional needs are as important as physiological needs. People often try to meet their emotional needs by having a romantic

relationship (Soğancı, 2017). People cannot live alone, continue their existence with others, and especially seek close relationships. Love or romantic relationship, a type of close relationship, is sometimes used to describe an individual relationship, sometimes a special relationship, and sometimes a certain feeling that a person has for a particular person in their life. The critical part of love or romantic relationships is the need for another person (Atak & Taştan, 2012).

One of the critical developmental steps for the transition from adolescence to adulthood is to develop a romantic relationship. According to Sternberg (1986), a close relationship refers to an emotional attachment that results from two people who love each other being able to understand and communicate with each other mutually.

Romantic relationships are also close relationships. When the literature is examined, it is seen that the definition of romantic relationships and love varies from person to person and from society to society. Researchers have examined romantic relationships and love from different perspectives. While Freud expressed love as the Nirvana of the sexual instinct, Fromm defines love as understanding, respect, responsibility, and interest; Harlow defines love as attachment behavior (Moss and Schwebel, 1993. Cited in Atak and Taştan, 2012). According to Branden (1988), romantic relationships are seen as a relationship with spiritual, emotional, and sexual passion and attraction between the partners (Cited in Atak and Taştan, 2012).

On the other hand, Moss and Schwebell (1993) say that romantic relationships have factors such as attachment, emotional-cognitive-physical closeness, and reciprocity. Prager (1997) states that romantic relationships are affected by three factors: love, trust, and commitment. Erden İmamoğlu (2009) stated that a romantic relationship is a mutual sincerity and trust where partners share extraordinary things and draw attention to the fulfillment of mutual needs and relationship satisfaction (Kılıç, 2020, p. 7). People in a romantic relationship experience joy and happiness when there is no problem. However, when there is a negative situation in the relationship, they experience feelings of fear of separation, sadness, and crying. In order to have a secure romantic relationship, people need to meet each other's expectations and needs (Soğancı, 2017). The main reason for anxiety in romantic relationships is that the needs and expectations of the partners are not met mutually (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2014).

Romantic relationships, just like other types of relationships, include three factors:

- Love and attachment, • Meeting psychological needs, • Mutual commitment (Hinde as cited in Soğancı, 2017).

In Levinger and Snoek's model, there are four different levels in the relationship:

- Zero relationship level (another person is unaware of the other's existence),
- Awareness level (there are no two people; one of the people is aware of the other's appearance),
- Superficial relationship level (there is an interpersonal relationship),
- Reciprocal relationship level (people have intense mutual relationship interaction).

According to Levinger and Snoek's model, relationships can go forward or backward or show changes between these four levels (Atak & Taştan, 2012). According to Moss and Schwebel (1993), the level of positive emotions, cognitive and physical closeness, and commitment feelings experienced mutually between people are determined by closeness in permanent romantic relationships. Moss and Schwebel mention five main components of closeness

. These five essential components are: • Commitment, • Emotional closeness, • Cognitive closeness, • Physical closeness, • Reciprocity.

According to these definitions, romantic relationships can be described as a relationship process in which partners are in a two-way cognitive, emotional, and behavioral sharing; commitment is formed, emotional and physical closeness occurs, and individuals have mutual trust. In his interpersonal relationship model, Hinde considered relationships as a series of interactions (Soğancı, 2017). The interpersonal relationship model is not about individuals but about individuals on each other. According to this model, relationships are formed by the interactions of individuals. According to the interpersonal relationship model, each relationship established affects and is affected by others. Relationships have many dimensions other than just individuals' behavior and personal characteristics. These dimensions are the scope, quality, type of interactions, relative frequency to other interactions, and the qualities resulting from their order, the bilateral complementarity in the behaviors of the individuals in the relationship, similarity, the perception of themselves and the individuals in the relationship and the similarity of these perceptions to the average individual and relationship concepts, and the commitment of individuals to the continuation and maturation of the relationship. Relationships are shaped around these dimensions. There may be only one of these dimensions in the relationship, or there may be more than one (Atak & Taştan, 2012). All romantic relationships develop and mature by going through certain stages. The first stage is when the partners feel a physiological arousal and attraction. Then, the power of the interaction that occurs when people share common feelings and values increases. After this power increases, people become

psychologically and socially attractive to each other and begin to be each other's romantic relationship partner candidates (Özteke, 2016).

METHOD

The method for the research problem is explained, and the subheadings regarding the research model, universe and sample, data collection tools, data collection, and data analysis are given below.

A. Research Model

In order to investigate the effect of social media and technological developments on romantic relationships, we need to enter society and follow and know these platforms daily. In this context, people should be examined, conversations and interviews should be held with them about these issues, and questions should be asked about social media, the internet, and technology. The most important thing is to learn the place of the internet in people's lives and its effects. Although many people use social media, the number of people who do not reflect this in their private lives and do not meet their needs through the internet is very few. Based on these results, the research was conducted using the relational screening design, one of the qualitative research methods that will reveal the effect of social media on romantic relationships.

The characteristic of qualitative research is that it is research in which qualitative data collection methods such as document review, observation, and interview are used to reveal perceptions, facts, and events in a way that reflects reality in a natural environment. Although the reality presented cannot be generalized, it can provide a perspective that can give an idea about the universe (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 39). As a result of this, the phenomenological research model that emerged tries to draw the attention of the participants in the research to perceptions and facts that they are aware of but do not have a detailed and in-depth awareness of and to ensure that they discover them (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 48). In particular, the participation of people or people who have observations about these people in the research as participants with relevant experiences of the phenomenon that is the subject of the research is essential in revealing the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 2014). Here, in order to learn the participants' thoughts on the effects of the internet and social media, how they affect romantic relationships, and how they shape these relationships, a qualitative research management interview technique was used.

B. Sample

The population of this research comprises individuals who engage in romantic relationships through social media channels. A maximum diversity sampling technique was employed to refine this population. A total of 60 participants, consisting of 35 women and 25 men, aged between 19 and 41 years and residing in Istanbul, were included in the study through convenience and snowball sampling methods. The maximum diversity sampling approach used in participant selection reflects the broad spectrum of individuals involved in the research problem, capturing a high level of diversity within a small sample group (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 56).

C. Data Collection Tools

A semi-structured interview form prepared by the researcher, after obtaining expert opinions, was used to determine the views of the individuals participating in the study on the "effects of social media on romantic relationships ."Before preparing the interview questions, the researcher conducted a national and international literature review. Relevant literature studies were used. After obtaining comprehensive information on the research topic through the literature review, items likely to be included in the interview form were determined. In order to evaluate these items in terms of the purpose, meaning, and scope of the study, interviews were conducted with three faculty members and three experts who had previously worked closely on the subject. A preliminary application of the interview questions was conducted with five participants individuals. The views of these participants were not included in the analysis. After these stages, the form was finalized using the information obtained, and the interview questions were directed to the participants within the scope of the study.

D. Data Collection

Priority interviews were conducted with the participants. In these interviews, priority was given to information about the nature of the research. Care was taken to create an interview environment where the participants could feel comfortable and peaceful and express their views sincerely. During the interview, efforts were made to ensure that the researcher did not influence the participants while answering the questions. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the research, data diversification was also used. Diversification of data sources is essential in terms of reaching multiple realities by revealing different perceptions and experiences by including participants with different characteristics in the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 207). In order to ensure this diversity, the research participants were selected from individuals of different genders, educational statuses, age groups, economic situations, and work styles.

The average time for individuals participating in the study to answer the research questions was 17 minutes ($n=17$; $n=60$). The shortest interview with participants was 6.5 minutes.

E. Data Analysis

Participants' responses were transferred to an Excel file as text from the original. Content analysis was used to analyze the data obtained regarding the participants' views. The purpose of selecting content analysis is to gather the participants' views that are considered to be similar or close to each other around certain concepts and themes and to organize and interpret them in a way that is meaningful for the reader (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 227). The answers to the questions in the semi-structured interview form were subjected to content analysis. For this purpose, each participant was first coded with a participation number. The participants' responses were analyzed, and codes were created. Repetitive codes and views close to each other were created as sub-themes. The basic approach formed by the sub-themes formed the themes. Codes, sub-themes, and themes are presented in the form of tables. Sample answers from the participants who gave their opinions about the codes were given and interpreted under the tables, remaining faithful to the original. The resulting data was discussed with the support of the relevant literature, results and suggestions were developed, and a rich and productive result was created.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings obtained for our purpose are given according to the order of the sub-problems. The findings obtained in the research are categorized. The numerically expressible ones from the categorized findings are tabulated and interpreted.

Descriptive Findings

In the research, the answer to the question of the effects of the internet and social media, how they affect romantic relationships, and how they shape these relationships was investigated. Based on the participants' responses, individuals, codes, categories, and themes were created as a result of the content analysis. Nine themes, 17 categories, and 58 codes were reached in the analysis. The themes of the research are; "social media is enveloping our lives," "virtual relationship is the new face of romantic relationship," "social media communication is at my fingertips," "priority in romantic relationships is inner beauty," "trends from virtual space to physical space," "real relationship and virtual relationship are intertwined," "jealousy over social media is a deep problem," "marriages are flowing towards social media" and "social media popularity means insecurity in relationships." The codes of the research are; "active

social networks," "reality of social media," "trustworthiness can be understood with dual social activity," "trustworthiness cannot be understood," "new direction of relationship social media platforms," "my media account is always open if there is the opposite sex," "unhealthy virtual relationships," "social media manages relationships," "human characteristics," "psychic characteristics," "social media is a tool, a physical environment, a purpose," "virtual relationship is the truth itself," "today's relationships are in danger," "new address of marriage-social media," "marriage is a matter of luck," "doubt ends the relationship," "a person's popularity should not be too much on social media ."The themes of the qualitative research, the categories of these themes, and the summary findings of the codes of the categories are given in the relevant tables.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations section of the research, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations regarding the personal preferences of the participants in order to achieve the purpose and discussions, conclusions, and recommendations regarding the qualitative findings obtained from the semi-structured interview form regarding the three sub-objectives of the research are included.

A. Discussion and Conclusion

With this research, an evaluation was made to determine the effects of the internet and social media, how they affect romantic relationships, and how they shape them. In this context, it was aimed to reveal whether individuals using social media platforms enter into romantic relationships in their applications, how often they continue these relationships, what their perspectives are on the quality and quantity of relationships, and in this context, the effects of social media on romantic relationships.

Seven sub-problems can be mentioned regarding the research: These are;

1. Which social media channels do individuals prefer more?

What is the reason for this?

2. Do individuals enter a romantic relationship process with individuals they meet on social media?

3. Why do you prefer social media channels for romantic relationships?

4. Do physical expectations come first in romantic relationships?

5. Do people hesitate to meet people they meet on social media channels in a physical space?
6. Do social media channels offer individuals real or virtual togetherness during the romantic relationship process?
7. To what extent does social media affect romantic relationships?

The discussion and results of the research are given in hierarchical order, as in the findings section.

Discussion and Results Regarding the Personal Information of the Participants in the Research

The discussion and results regarding the personal information of the participants in the research are given below. Accordingly, 59.32% (f=35) of the participants are female, and 40.68% (f=25) are male. The majority of the participants are female. The youngest participant was 18 years old, and the oldest was 41 years old. The average age of the participants was 25.86. 1.69% (f=1) of the participants were high school graduates, 81.36% (f=48) were university graduates (associate and undergraduate degrees), and 16.95% (f=10) were master's degrees and above. There were no primary school graduates or below. The vast majority of the participants were university graduates. 72.88% (f=43) of the participants had a moderate economic status, 25.42% (f=15) had a good economic status, and 1.70% (f=1) had an excellent economic status. It was reported that the vast majority of the participants had a moderate economic status. 71.18% (f=42) of the participants were working, and 28.81% (f=17) were not working. The vast majority of the participants stated that they are working.

Discussion and Results Regarding the Sub-Problems in the Research

In this section, the findings obtained from the qualitative interviews regarding the purposes of the research are discussed, and the results are given.

a. discussion and results regarding the participants' preferred social media channels, their reasons, and their views on these channels

Discussion and results regarding the theme of social media pervading our lives:

As a result of the participants' responses, the sub-categories of "effective social networks" and "reality of social media" were described. These two categories describe the theme of "social media pervading our lives." The participants' views regarding the first problem of the research constituted the codes "Instagram," "Twitter," and "other media tools." These codes together describe the sub-category of "active social networks."

Within the scope of the research, participants stated that they use the Instagram social media communication network intensively in the most active social networks. Participants said they use Instagram because they like sharing photos on the Instagram social network system. They think Instagram is ahead of other social media networks in terms of content and visuality. The rich content of the Instagram social network is believed to create a more entertaining environment. In addition, it is seen that the reason for using Instagram intensively is that everyone around them actively uses it. Again, the fact that Instagram provides up-to-date and active information in almost every area of life is also practical in terms of follow-up. It is seen that the socialization opportunity that Instagram offers to its followers causes them to like and use this platform more. The research findings can be explained under several headings. In the age we live in, where the only constant thing is the phrase "change," it is seen that the speed of people's social, cultural, economic, psychological, etc., vital themes has increased. This is inevitable. It can be said that the most essential element that will meet these themes is meeting people's communication needs. This need for communication can be said to be realized intensively through social media communication networks today. In this context, it is seen that Instagram is highly preferred as a social communication network tool today. It can be said that the content, visuality, ease of use, social groups it creates, and current news it shares are prominent elements that its followers follow. Within the research scope, some participants stated that they intensively use Twitter social media communication networks in active social networks. Participants reported that they are more active on Twitter because it is a more formal social network, unlike other social networks, and especially because it prioritizes Türkiye and the World agenda over individual agendas. It can be said that Twitter is more selective than other social media communication tools and that it publishes realistic news, a prominent element in being followed by its followers. The research findings can be explained under several headings. Twitter is used intensively in social media sharing and communication platforms. However, it can be said that it stands out as a social, political, political, and critical platform at the official language level. At this point, it is thought that the intensity of using social communication networks may differ in line with the social demographic characteristics of the participant group.

Within the research scope, a few participants stated that they used other social media to communicate intensively. The participants reported that the WhatsApp platform provided personal communication much faster. According to the research findings, the participant group uses Instagram and Twitter social media groups intensively and uses other media

communication tools very little. When examined, it is seen that communication and social sharing groups, such as Facebook, TikTok, etc., are not preferred, according to the findings of this study. The reason for this can be explained by the fact that the average age of the participants is 29, and this group generally prefers to use Instagram social media sharing and communication tools.

The participants' opinions regarding the first problem of the research constituted the codes "does not reflect the truth," "partially reflects," and "reflects the truth." These codes together describe the sub-category of "reality of social media." Within the scope of the research, the majority of the participants reported that social media does not reflect reality. The participants reported that an unreal life is created on social media, that individuals live this life as if it were real, and that they internalize the joys and sorrows created by this life and add them to their lives. However, it is seen that individuals draw a portrait of perfect human behavior outside of their natural personality, identity, or behavior levels.

The participants reported that social media mostly hides the bad aspects of human beings and that there is a dark side. In addition, it was reported as a critical behavioral situation that everyone shows themselves in a perfect human profile on social media communication and sharing platforms, but these individuals hide their weak and bad aspects. It was stated that people only share moments when they are happy and have fun, but life is not only about happiness, and sad moments are not shared on these platforms. Again, individuals create different identities and personality profiles by showing their deficiencies, especially on social media. In addition, it has been reported that many individuals show their sexual orientation, emotional state, and family status differently in order to become famous and earn money on social media.

The research findings can be explained under several headings. It has been proven through many variables that social communication and sharing platforms need to reflect the truth in people's use. The most important of these variables is that the socio-psychological, economic, and individual information individuals use to introduce themselves on social media platforms is misleading. In addition, it is seen that the variables in which they indicate their emotional states (grief, joy, anxiety, etc.) do not reflect individuals and are misleading and unrealistic information. Another heading is aimed at those who use social media mass media to earn money. These individuals generally have very different temperaments and personality structures, and they act in a structure that misleads other individuals with a human profile that has nothing to do with them. All these variables and facts are thought to create doubts about the

reliability of social media communication platforms. It was observed within the research scope that some participants partially agreed with the reality of social media. The participants stated that the rate of fake news in social media environments is very high.

They reported that it is significantly exaggerated so that the news will be read. It was stated that there is a trust problem at the new level. However, the fact that people hide their real identities, constantly portray happy and problem-free people, and the fact that these people are not like this in their everyday lives increases doubts about the reality of social media. Although participants think social media communication tools and sharing platforms are harmful, the situation varies depending on the platform. For example, they reported that more popular Instagram has a romantic atmosphere. They state that Twitter is a more formal and realistic mass communication and sharing tool, that there is also partisanship and teamwork on Twitter, and that Facebook describes memories at the level of the upper age group. They reported that 89 individuals who use the Instagram platform, in particular, reduce its reliability by prioritizing dreamy and fairy-tale lives over a virtual world far from reality. The rapid spread of false information on social media, regardless of its accuracy and settlement in the minds, and the fact that it is not possible to correct the false perception in time are essential problems that need to be clarified about the reliability of social media tools. It has also been reported that some people try to show their daily lives differently than they are to cover up their inferiority complexes and prove that they live a happier life than others.

The research findings can be explained under several headings. The participants approached social communication and shared platforms with suspicion. The reasons for this can be stated as the fact that social media news is often exaggerated and the belief that the profiles of social media users do not reflect their personality-identity, etc. structures. Another result is that certain social groups use social media communication and sharing tools more intensively. This situation is seen as the individuals in particular social media groups expressing themselves in line with the characteristics of that social media platform. Thus, it is thought that individuals are forced to present many characteristics and behaviors that they do not have and to play the role of an individual outside of themselves by staying in the behavioral traits imposed on them by social media.

b. discussion and conclusion regarding the participants' views on virtual friendship

Discussion and conclusion regarding the theme of virtual relationships, the new face of romantic relationships:

As a result of the participant's responses, the sub-categories of "reliability is understood with dual social activity," "reliability cannot be understood," and "the new aspect of the relationship, social media platforms" were described. Together, these three categories described the theme of "virtual relationship, the new face of romantic relationship ."The participants' views on the second problem of the research formed the codes "by meeting," "by observing, " from media sharing, living together," "by looking at the profile picture," and "unreliable and incomprehensible." These codes together describe the sub-category of "dual social activity" and "reliability is understandable."

Within the scope of the research, most participants reported that reliability can be understood by meeting and getting to know the person in front of them through dual social activity. The participants reported that the reliability of the individuals in front of them can only be understood by coming face to face and seeing their behavioral style and emotional state changes. It was reported that they can understand whether the person in front of them is lying in the processes that proceed by talking on social media. However, it is necessary to see whether the person is trustworthy by coming face to face later to confirm this or using verbal and nonverbal communication elements.

The participants stated that while the trust problem is enormous in the routine flow of life, it is difficult for fake, virtual, and maybe ugly friendship processes to reach a trustworthy point on social media with each passing day, but communication can be established by coming together with these people in their natural environment. Suppose a friendship relationship is to be preferred in social life. In that case, they have reported that they can meet and seek real friendship in a natural environment due to sharing, social media relationships, following accounts, and showing stability in these processes. According to the research findings, social media platforms could be more reliable. Reliability in social media communication and sharing platforms and their sustainability can be possible by combining some variables. We can summarize these variables as continuing the relationship by taking the people you meet on social media outside to a natural environment.

c. discussion and conclusion regarding the participants' views on the process of romantic relationships established via social media:

Discussion and conclusion regarding the theme of social media communication at my fingertips:

As a result of the participant's responses, the sub-categories sub-categories of "my media account is always open if there is the opposite sex" and "unhealthy virtual relationships" were described.

The participants' views on the third problem of the research were "I close," "I do not close," and "I think" codes. These codes described the sub-category sub-category of "my media account is always open if there is the opposite sex."

Within the scope of the research, the participants reported that they would not close their accounts on social networks during the process of a relationship with the opposite sex. The majority of the participants reported that they did not feel the need to close the communication channels belonging to their names on social media platforms during the process of establishing a relationship with the opposite sex. The participants, who considered closing their social media channels as disrespectful to the person opposite them, stated that they could still review the behavior of the opposite sex. Participants see social media as their entertainment and personal communication space, and they reported that asking the person they are in a relationship with to turn it off is disrespectful and that such a situation may even lead them to reconsider the relationship and end it for themselves.

d. discussion and conclusion regarding participants' views on virtual friendship and physical expectations

Discussion and conclusion regarding the theme of inner beauty as a priority in romantic relationships:

As a result of the participants' responses, the sub-categories of "social media manages relationships," "human characteristics," and "spiritual characteristics" were described. Together, these three categories described the theme of "inner beauty as a priority in romantic relationships." The participants' views on the fourth problem of the research formed the codes "positive," "simplification," "variability according to individuals," and "negativity." These codes described the sub-category sub-category of "my media account is always open if there is the opposite sex."

e. discussion and conclusion regarding the participants' views on transferring their virtual friendships to physical spaces and their time expectations

Discussion and conclusion regarding the theme of trends from virtual space to physical space: As a result of the participant's responses, the sub-category of "social media tool physical environment purpose" was described. This single category described "trends from virtual space

to physical space." The participants' views on the fifth problem of the research were "time unnecessary/immediately," "short term/1 month", "medium term/3 months", "long term/1 year", "unexpected," and "no need to meet" codes. These codes described the sub-category of "social media tool physical environment purpose."

f. discussion and conclusion regarding participants' views on reality in romantic relationships they established via social media

Discussion and conclusion regarding the theme of intertwined real and virtual relationships: As a result of the responses of 107 participants, the sub-category of "virtual relationships are the reality itself" was described. This single category described the theme of "intertwined real and virtual relationships ."The participants' views on the sixth problem of the research were coded as "has an effect," "varies," and "does not have an effect." These codes described the sub-category "virtual relationships are the reality itself." Within the scope of the research, participants reported that social media affects flirting. Participants stated that people act much more comfortably in the virtual world than in the real world and are primarily comfortable expressing themselves. As a result, they reported that they are more active in flirting in the virtual world than in the real world. People can reach each other very easily thanks to the virtual environment, communicate quickly, do not experience the difficulties they have in face-to-face communication in the virtual world, and can easily ask questions they cannot ask in face-to-face communication in the virtual world, etc. When the reasons come together, it is seen that the social media environment is very effective in dating relationships. In addition, it has been reported that the spread of social media and communication through social media has drawn people's dating relationships to the virtual environment and increased them as much. Many people cannot find a natural environment to meet the opposite sex. However, social media tools can turn this acquaintance into an opportunity very quickly and turn it in people's favor. Although the reliability of the social square is a matter of debate, it has now become the center of people's lives, is a part of life, and offers the opportunity to meet new people in some way. According to the participants, it is complicated to understand people and their consciousness structures; there are as many characters and thoughts as there are people, and they cannot understand each one and know what their purpose is; this diversity is reflected in the social media environment, and it is tough to solve this diversity.

g. discussion and conclusion regarding the participants' views on how much social media affects romantic relationships

Discussion and conclusion regarding the theme of jealousy on social media as a profound problem: The sub-category "today's relationships are in danger" was described as a result of the participant's responses. This single category described the theme of "jealousy on social media is a deep problem." The participants' views on the seventh sub-problem of the study were "creates unhealthy relationships," "increases insecurity," "does not pose a threat," and "may change depending on the conditions" codes. These codes described the sub-category "today's relationships are in danger."

Recommendations

Based on the findings and results, recommendations for practitioners and researchers are presented. The recommendations are as follows:

Recommendations for Practitioners

Research findings show that individuals primarily use Instagram, Twitter, and other media tools among social media channels at the level of active social networks. This social network should implement development measures for studies that facilitate its use and respond to individuals' communication needs.

It is observed that individuals seek reliability in their romantic relationships by meeting and getting to know people they encounter on social media, observing their interactions, sharing media, living together, viewing profile pictures, and engaging in bilateral social activities. The process of seeking reliability on social media communication platforms is significant. It is essential for individuals who interact through social media and advance their relationships as a result of this interaction to exercise caution regarding reliability. The social media environment comprises multifunctional structures and systems, and resolving these issues quickly is not feasible. In this regard, individuals should share personal information carefully and be cautious about accepting another person's personal information as truth. Individuals tend to use social media to connect with people they meet online, prioritizing the transition of their romantic relationships to physical spaces as a goal. It would benefit individuals to move their online romantic encounters into physical environments. While social media platforms can influence romantic relationships, they can also negatively affect them. Users should consider this if they are entering or contemplating a romantic relationship in the social media environment, as they may be adversely affected.

Recommendations for Researchers

Individuals perceive social media as a reality of life. Researchers can investigate the reasons behind this perception. The primary expectations of individuals from the opposite sex in their romantic relationships have been identified as the ability to manage media relationships, human characteristics, and internal-spiritual qualities. It has also been found that individuals who enter into romantic relationships through social media do not prioritize physical attributes. Researchers can delve deeper into the reasons for this and compare their findings with our study. During the romantic relationship process, it is evident that relationships outside the virtual environment and those within it have become intertwined, making it difficult to distinguish between them. This phenomenon warrants further exploration by researchers.

According to the research findings, social media jeopardizes a significant portion of romantic relationships, indicating that romantic relationships formed through social media present a complex issue. Researchers can study the reasons for this under the themes of socio-psychology and communication. Additionally, the findings suggest that social media is becoming a new avenue for marriage, with trends indicating that marriages are increasingly occurring through social media. Researchers can investigate variables such as the number of marriages occurring on social media versus those occurring outside of it, the distribution of these marriages over time, and so on, quantitatively comparing them with our research findings. It has been observed that there is resistance to being in a home environment with differing nutrition and food behavior preferences between the home and outside environments. Researchers can compare this situation in depth with our findings. The research was conducted qualitatively; thus, researchers can transform our study into a quantitative dimension to examine the effects of social media on romantic relationships and compare their findings with ours.

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