



Factors Predicting Life Satisfaction Among Social Media Users

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the factors predicting life satisfaction among social media users, such as loneliness, age, gender, education, unemployment, marital status, trust, and religious involvement. Data was collected from 1547 social media users using convenience sampling. In the data collection process of the study, a questionnaire was shared on social media networks after uploading it to Google forms. In the correlation analysis, life satisfaction was determined to have a statistically significant negative relationship with loneliness, social media usage time, being unemployed and age. Conversely, a positive correlation was determined with trust in people, optimism about the future, religious involvement, marital status and female gender. Of the total respondents, 54.2% thought that social media increases loneliness, 20.3% stated that the use of social media increased their unhappiness, and 68.3% considered people to be very disrespectful to each other on social media networks. The predictors of life satisfaction found in the multiple regression model were loneliness, female gender, having a graduate or postgraduate degree, trusting people, positive expectation about the future, religious involvement and not being unemployed. Age and internet usage time did not have a significant effect in the regression analysis.

Keywords

Social media usage, Life satisfaction and loneliness

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Introduction

Life satisfaction has a special meaning for each individual given that each of us has a different personality, and this varies from individual to individual. As personality traits are unique and subjective, the elements of life satisfaction differ from individual to individual and are also subjective.

The concept of life satisfaction was first investigated in the 1960s. Academic studies in this field started with Neugertan, and later continued with Diener and Veenhoven, and these three constitute the leading scientists in the field of life satisfaction. One of the most well-known definitions of life satisfaction is as follows: Life satisfaction is the sum of the judgments of individuals about life (Deiner et.al., 1985: 71).

In other words, life satisfaction includes the assessment of life by the individual. Diener considers life satisfaction to be a cognitive assessment of the individual's conscious life. Veenhoven defined life satisfaction as follows: Life satisfaction expresses the quality of life when the individual's life is evaluated as a whole (Veenhoven, 1996: 13). In recent studies, the concept of happiness is often associated with life satisfaction. It is an umbrella concept used to express everything that is good. It can also be used for well-being and quality of life (Veenhoven, 2012: 63)

The idea of "living a good life" lies in the evaluation of life satisfaction. At this point, the determinants of a good life can be good health, physical strength, success, happiness, and tranquility. Personal assessments of people make it difficult to rate a good life. Some people's priority in life satisfaction is success, while for others it may be health (Pavot & Diener, 2009: 102). In fact, these variables may differ according to demographic structure such as gender and age. For example, health factors for older people can become an important determinant of life satisfaction.

Some studies have drawn attention to the relationship between life satisfaction and well-being. Well-being, which is an important determinant of life satisfaction, refers to the cognitive and emotional judgments of the individual's life. It is clear that a positive sense of well-being increases the individual's life satisfaction (Deiner et.al., 2009: 187).

The fact that many factors are included within the topic of life satisfaction makes it difficult to determine the framework. Numerous variables, which in various studies have all been thought to affect life satisfaction, amount to 6500 items. Detailed studies have reduced such a large number of variables to more reasonable numbers. In the literature, life satisfaction factors include economic comfort (having a good income), having a secure job, having a family, having good physical and mental health, having good social relations (relatives and friends), enjoying life and so on. (Dikmen, 1995: 118; Schmitter, 2003).

Today, it is well-known that some new life habits have an impact on life satisfaction. For example, in recent years the use of computers, the Internet and mobile devices (such as smartphones and tablets) have had a significant impact on life satisfaction. It is known that such tools, which started as tools for free time use, have reached the level of addiction today. Current technological developments are known to have an effect on life satisfaction, which may be either positive or negative. The main subject of this study is the use of social media as a result of the above-mentioned technological developments. The existence of a mutual relationship between the use of social media and life satisfaction is a known fact.

The Relationship between Social Media Use and Life Satisfaction

Today, the use of social media has become a popular life activity. The development of mobile technologies (the widespread use of smartphones and tablets) has greatly expanded the use of social media in daily life. Social media (Facebook, etc.), which had previously only been live on the internet via computer, changed its platform with the development of mobile technologies and now has a place in daily life through device applications. In fact, some social media applications only have a mobile version and cannot be used on a computer. This allows individuals to reach social media at any time.

In the early 21st century, the addiction phenomenon that became widespread in the form of internet addiction has become a social media addiction. Research results show that smartphones are an important part of the daily lives of individuals. According to PEW Research's Spring Global Attitudes Survey, in 2017 72% of Turks used smartphones. According to the same study, 83% of

smartphone users in Turkey have Facebook and Twitter social media accounts. The use of smartphones increases to 94% in countries such as South Korea.

The relationship between the use of social media and life satisfaction is important. There are studies showing the existence of the relationship between the two variables. An important question in this regard is which variable is the result, and which is the premise: whether the use of social media increases life satisfaction or whether those with lower life satisfaction tend to use more social media. Sometimes individuals prefer to use social media in order to avoid problems in their lives. Conflicting results have been reported in this regard.

In a study conducted by Hawi and Samaha (2016), a significant positive correlation was found between social media addiction and life satisfaction level. In another study of Facebook users of different ages in Poland, a negative correlation was found between Facebook addiction and life satisfaction (Balci & Koçak, 2017: 38). In a study conducted by Taşçioğlu and Tosun (2018:121) on two groups consisting of university students and adults, no relationship between Facebook use and psychological well-being was found.

The use of social media can be thought to be effective in reducing the daily stress of individuals. In a study investigating the relationship between free time use and social media usage of university students, a positive relationship was found between the relaxation dimension and social media use as the sub-dimension of free time. It was found that students could move away from the stressful environment they were in through social media (Karoğlu and Atasoy, 2018: 835).

Although there is no direct relationship between the two variables, there are also studies that have reported an indirect relationship. In a study conducted in China, it was found that the social environment provided by social media increased social support. Thus, it was concluded that social support contributes to life satisfaction. The study points to the negative result of this situation by pointing out that crowded social environments caused individuals to be faced with many demands (Zhan, 2016: 357).

Life Satisfaction-Unemployment Relationship

Working life is an important living space for the individual. Working is often an important tool for the individual to find meaning in life. When the important life events that affect the life of the individual are examined, “being unemployed” is a significant variable. Working or having a job affects people’s life satisfaction to a great extent (Keser, 2019:105,109).

A person’s work provides economic freedom and opportunities for the individual. The inability to meet economic needs means the loss of economic freedom. The results of some research on this issue indicate that there is a negative relationship between unemployment and life satisfaction (Erdogan, et.al., 2012: 1052). It was observed in one study that unemployed individuals have low overall life satisfaction compared to those who have jobs (Haworth, 1997: 38-39).

In a study conducted in the United Kingdom (Weich & Lewis, 1998), which examined the relationship between a full-time job and the level of depression and anxiety, those with a job had a low level of mental health problems. When the individual does not have any work, he/ she can become unhappy, economically weak, and restless. A previous study reported that unemployed individuals have low overall life satisfaction, and this finding is supported by academic research demonstrating that work has an important place in the life of the individual (Keser, 2019: 105).

Life Satisfaction - Age Relationship

Studies investigating the relationship between life satisfaction and the age variable have yielded varying results. In addition to those showing a significant relationship between them, there are also studies that have found no relationship. In some studies on this subject, young people have been found to be more satisfied with life (Lucas et.al., 2000: 295). However, research in the following years showed that there is a U-shaped relationship between the two variables. According to this, life satisfaction up to adulthood is high, it is low in middle age and increases in old age. The level of life satisfaction at this stage was associated with the retirement phase (Ree & Alessie, 2011: 177).

In Kyrgyzstan, a study conducted on employees working in a private security company showed significant differences between life satisfaction and age. Employees over 31 years of age were found to have higher life satisfaction than younger employees (Çavuş and Cumaliyeva, 2013: 14). In a study including Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Latvia, a significant relationship was found between life satisfaction and age. In Estonia and Latvia, the lowest life satisfaction was found in the age group of 51-60 years, with an increase in life satisfaction after the age of 60. In Finland and Sweden, life satisfaction was found to be low in groups between 41-50 years and 51-60 years (Realo & Dobewall, 2011: 300). Consequently, a U-type relationship has been found between life satisfaction and age in many studies, although different studies have yielded different results.

Life Satisfaction-Loneliness

Humans are social beings who like to live in a group. Therefore loneliness is an unwanted situation for most people. There have been many studies on the relationship between life satisfaction and loneliness. The common finding of these studies is a negative and significant relationship between life satisfaction and loneliness (Goodwin et.al. 2001: 225). In other words, the life satisfaction of people living alone is lower. In a study conducted by Salimi (2011) on university students in Iran, a negative correlation was found between life satisfaction and loneliness (2011: 295). In Turkey, a negative and significant relationship was found in the study conducted by Yılmaz and Altınok (2009) on school administrators (Yılmaz & Altınok, 2009: 466).

According to the findings of a study conducted in the USA on the relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction, the time spent online increases loneliness and decreases life satisfaction (Stepabikova et.al., 2010: 335). In the background of this finding, it is thought that the longer an individual spends time on line the more social life breaks down and the individual gradually becomes lonely, with a weakening of social connection with others.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the literature by examining the factors affecting the life satisfaction of social media users. The main research question is *to investigate the indicators predicting life satisfaction among social media users*. Variables to be tested for impact on life satisfaction include

age, gender, education, marital status, unemployment, time spent on social media usage, trusting other people, optimism about the future, expectations about the country's economy, religious involvement and loneliness.

Method of Research

In this study, a short version of the UCLA loneliness scale with 7 questions and Ed Diener's life satisfaction scales were both used. Ed Diener's scale has become one of the most widely used instruments in measuring life satisfaction in academic literature. The Turkish version of the scale was adapted by Bekmezci and Mert (2018) in which the scale consists of five questions.

A short version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale consisting of seven questions was used. The short version of the UCLA scale was devised by Allen and Oshagan (1995). The reliability coefficients as Cronbach's alpha are found as 0.80 for the life satisfaction scale and 0.90 for the UCLA loneliness scale. In addition to numerous demographic variables, questions about trust, religious commitment and expectations for the future were also included in the questionnaire as variables.

After the questionnaire was prepared, it was uploaded to Google Form via Google Drive. The link was shared on social media. In addition, the survey was transmitted by e-mail to other people via e-mail and was shared with their networks. Since a long questionnaire could be difficult to read and understand, it was preferred not to share it with less educated groups. Approximately 95% of the respondents had a university degree or postgraduate (MA, PhD.) degree. The high level of education also increased the reliability coefficient of the scales. The convenience sampling method was used. A total of 1737 people responded to the online survey, but questionnaires that did not include answers to more than 10% of the questions were excluded from the evaluation. A total of 1547 questionnaires were taken into consideration for the study analysis.

Table1
Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Description	Mean/ Percentage	Standard Deviation
Age	Age of Participants	32.97	11.24
Sex	1.Woman 2.Man	63.2 % 36.7 %	.
Education	1.High School and Lower 2.College degree 3. MA or PhD	5.3 % 62.9 % 31.8 %	
Length	Social media usage time	151	323,82
Life satisfaction	Five range 1. Strongly disagree... 5. Strongly agree	3.04	,84
Loneliness	Five range 1. Strongly disagree... 5. Strongly agree	2.15	.
Religious involvement	I have faith and practice it I have faith but do not practice it Skeptic / No faith	41.5 40.6 17.9	.
Tomorrow	I believe tomorrow will be better for me. 0.No, 1.Yes	34.1 68.9	.
Economy	What do you think about the course of the Turkish economy? 0. It is getting worse 1. It is getting better	92.4 7.6	.
Unemployment	0.No, not unemployed 1.Yes, unemployed	94.5 5.5	.
Trust	Can we trust most people? 0. No 1. Yes	78.4 21.6	.

Results

Correlation analysis revealed a negative correlation between the duration of social media use and life satisfaction ($r = -.107$, $n = 1512$, $p \leq .01$). Even if the coefficient is not much higher, its value shows a negative relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. In a traditional manner, people with low life satisfaction use social media for longer periods of time, or as social media usage increases, life satisfaction level of those decreases or people who are away from their real-life social environment become unhappy.

In addition to the UCLA scale for loneliness, a Likert type question was asked, namely "Does social media make people lonely?". While 28.3% of the respondents said "I disagree with this question", 17.5% stated that they were

undecided, and 54.2% of respondents thought that social media usage has isolated people. In particular, older people ($r = -.116$, $n=1499$, $p \leq .01$), those who do not trust other people ($r = -.133$, $n=1521$, $p \leq .01$), those who have lower overall life satisfaction ($r = -.213$, $n=1525$, $p \leq .01$) thought that social media had increased loneliness. In addition, 68.3% of respondents thought that people on social media were very disrespectful to each other.

As expected, a negative correlation was found between life satisfaction and loneliness levels among social media users ($r = -.292$, $n=1540$, $p \leq .01$). 20.3% of respondents stated that using social media increased their unhappiness. Elderly people ($r = -.170$, $n=1500$, $p \leq .01$), people who do not trust other people ($r = -.129$, $n=1522$, $p \leq .01$) those with low life satisfaction level ($r = -.16$, $n=1499$, $p \leq .01$), and those who feel lonely ($r = .286$, $n=1524$, $p \leq .01$) thought that usage of the social media increased the level of unhappiness.

The t-test results of gender revealed that life satisfaction level of females (the sample arithmetic mean $\bar{X} = 3.1$, and the sample standard deviation $S = .80$) was higher than that of males ($\bar{X} = 2.9$, $S = .89$) which is statistically significant ($n=1536$, $t = -3.71$, $p \leq .01$). The average usage of social media by females for longer periods ($\bar{X} = 169$, $S = 399$) is significantly higher than that of males ($\bar{X} = 121$, $S = 106$ and $n=1508$ test results are $t = -2.72$, $p \leq .01$). The mean age of females who answered the questionnaire ($\bar{X} = \bar{X} 31$ year, $S = 10.4$) was 5 years younger than that of males ($\bar{X} = 36$, $S = 11.84$). Data gathered from married respondents ($\bar{X} = 3.17$, $S = .85$) revealed a higher level of life satisfaction than that of the single respondents ($\bar{X} = 2.94$, $S = .81$) and others ($\bar{X} = 3.06$, $S = 3.09$) which is statistically significant ($F(2, 1535) = 13.15$, $p \leq .01$). Also single respondents reported that social media makes them more unhappy and lonely.

Regarding employment status, the groups with the highest life satisfaction are self-employed, pensioners and wage earners. As expected, the groups with the lowest levels of life satisfaction are the unemployed ($F(5, 1483) = 103.993$, $p \leq .01$). In response to the question about whether or not social media isolates people, more unemployed people endorsed this ($F(5, 1422) = 3.412$, $p \leq .05$). Unemployed respondents agreed that social media increased their unhappiness at the second highest rate after the students ($F(5, 1471) = 7.121$, $p \leq .01$). The fact that unemployed people and students use the Internet for much longer periods than other groups may have affected this result.

The level of education of the respondents was predominantly high. The One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test showed that life satisfaction differed according to education. The mean of life satisfaction with secondary education and below is 2.73 and this increased to 2.96 for those with a university education. For those with MA and PhD. degrees, it increased to 3.24 ($F(2,1533) = 24.517, p \leq .01$).

Religious commitment is closely related to life satisfaction. In this study, the mean of life satisfaction, which is 2.91 among those who claim to be a sceptic or non-believer, rises to 3.18 among those who believe and fulfill religious obligations ($F(2,1519) = 16.386, p \leq .01$). Trust constitutes another important factor affecting life satisfaction. The participants who trust other people ($\bar{X} = 3.31, S = .83$) were seen to have a statistically significant higher life satisfaction than those who do not trust others ($\bar{X} = 2.96, S = .83$) ($t(1533) = -6.739, p \leq .01$).

Another factor affecting life satisfaction is people's expectations about the country's economy. Those who are optimistic about their future are also high in life satisfaction ($t(1520) = -7.790, p \leq .01$). The field study of this research was done in a period of intense financial fluctuation in Turkey. The issue of the economy thus became one of the main concerns for many people in this period. The average life satisfaction level of the participants who think that the economy is deteriorating ($\bar{X} = 3.0, S = .84$) is well below those who think that the economy is getting better ($\bar{X} = 3.43, S = .77$); $t(1523) = -5.105, p \leq .01$).

Table 2
The Results of Multiple Regression

Regression Model	Unstandardized Coefficients of β		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig. p
	β	Std. Error	β		
(Constant α)	2,936	,152		19,367	,000
Sex1.Woman,2.Man	-,244	,043	-,141	-5,716	,000
Age	-,002	,002	-,028	-,940	,378
Education: 0.Other,1. High school and below	-,179	,092	-,047	-1,948	,052
Education2: 0.Other,1. Master degree and over	,175	,045	,097	3,922	,000
Marital status 0.Other,1.Married	,152	,050	,088	3,024	,003
Unemployed .0.No,1.Yes	-,411	,087	-,114	-4,726	,000
Trust, 1.No,2.Yes	,195	,050	,096	3,905	,000
Economy 1. getting worse 2.getting better	,238	,080	,073	2,987	,003
Religious involve1: 0.Other,1.Have faith and practiced	,111	,045	,065	2,464	,014
Religious involve2: 0.Other,1. 1.Have faith and but NOT practiced	-,028	,057	-,013	-,495	,621
Optimism: Tomorrow will be better for me.1.No,2.Yes	,218	,044	,124	4,979	,000
Loneliness	-,215	,023	-,228	-9,306	,000

a. Dependent Variable: Life Satisfaction

b. Adjusted R Square: ,181, F(12,158)=28,358, $p \leq .01$

Multiple regression analysis was calculated to predict life satisfaction. Loneliness was the most important indicator ($\hat{\beta} = -.228$, $t(12, 1458) = -9,306$, $p \leq .01$). Standardized Beta coefficients reveal that gender is the second most important predictor variable. Females expressed that they were happier than males ($\hat{\beta} = -.141$, $t(12, 1458) = -5,716$, $p \leq .01$). The data showed that the higher the level of education, the higher the level of happiness ($\hat{\beta} = ,097$, $t(12, 1458) = 3,922$, $p \leq .01$).

Other predictive variables in the model were optimism about the future ($\hat{\beta} = .124$, $t(12, 1458) = 4,979$, $p \leq .01$), trust of other people ($\hat{\beta} = .096$, $t(12, 1458) = 3,905$, $p \leq .01$), positive expectations about the future of the country's economy ($\hat{\beta} = .073$, $t(12, 1458) = 2,987$, $p \leq .01$), having faith and practicing it ($\hat{\beta} = ,065$, $t(12, 1458) = 2,464$, $p \leq .01$) and not being unemployed

($\hat{\beta} = t(12, 1458) = -4.688, p \leq .01$). It was also analyzed that age and internet usage time did not have any significant effect in the regression analysis.

Conclusion and Discussion

The loneliness variable was found to be the most significant predictor of life satisfaction. Other people have a big role in the life satisfaction of individuals. More than 80 years of research by Harvard University has determined that the most decisive factor in people's happiness is good relations with other people, not money or fame. (Mineo, 2017). In this research, being in a social relationship is of critical importance, and social media is a social network. For many people who cannot find happiness in real life, social media is where happiness is sought. A significant number of people join social networks for more social relationships (and more life satisfaction). However, the greater the duration of social media use, the lower the satisfaction with life (Bozkurt, 2018).

As highlighted in the Harvard research, the path to happiness and healthy aging is not through loneliness but through healthy social relationships based on trust. Yalom (2016) argues that loneliness is the most suitable medium for all diseases to develop. Bauman (2011) refers to the loneliness that arises from social media as "crowded loneliness". Although there are thousands of people in your social network, there is no one you can really call a friend.

The regression analysis demonstrated that trust in people is an important predictor of life satisfaction. Loneliness, especially in collectivist cultures, becomes a factor that decreases life satisfaction (Goodwin, Cook, Yung, 2001). However, the majority of those who use social media for a long time claim that social media has isolated people and weakened their relations in the physical world.

In some studies, life satisfaction scores between men and women are similar (Borges, Levine and Dutton, 1984, Bibi, Chaudhry and Awan, 2014)). In other studies, the life satisfaction of women was found to be higher than that of men (Al-Attayah, A. & Nasser, R., 2013), although results may vary from country to country (Meisenberg, Woodley, 2014). In the current study, the very high education level of both the males and females may have affected the results. In other words, the fact that women who participated in the survey

had a higher education and status average than other women may have led to the finding of higher life satisfaction of females.

Education has also been shown to be a factor that increased life satisfaction in both males and females. Higher education (especially a master's or doctoral degree) in Turkey creates a meaningful differentiation of income. In addition, postgraduate education is a respectable qualification that makes a difference to status. These factors may have influenced the respondents' life satisfaction. Indeed, other studies have found a positive relationship between subjective well-being and psychological well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin, Ryff, 2002; Stutzer, A 2004). Diener and Ryan, (2009) claimed that the aphorism of 'ignorance is happiness' is not true, but according to their results there is a weak positive relationship between education and life satisfaction.

In Turkey, there is a saying which can be translated as 'celibacy is sultanate'. However, the data reveals the opposite of this popular saying. Durkheim's work (1952) on suicide suggests that single people tend to have more 'egoistic suicide' tendencies than married people because single people do not have the social ties that bind marriages to life. It has been frequently stated that there is a relationship between marriage and life satisfaction. The regression analysis of the current study showed that marriage has a positive effect, albeit weakly. However, this relationship should not be considered as a one-sided determinism. Just as marriage can affect life satisfaction, so happy people are more likely to have a successful marriage (Bozkurt, 2017).

This research was conducted at a time when the Turkish economy was very unstable, and economic concerns seem to have affected the life satisfaction of the respondents. People who believe that the economy is moving in a positive direction are also people with high life satisfaction. Likewise, people who think that the future will be better for them will have higher life satisfaction. However, although there was a statistically significant correlation between the duration of social media usage and age variable in the correlation analysis, in the regression analysis the effect became insignificant.

Many studies have found a relationship between religion and life satisfaction (Ellison, David and Thomas, 1989). Religious people tend to be involved in the community more than others. In other words, religious people build stronger social links with people from their own community. This is one of

the factors that increase life satisfaction among religious people (Lim and Putnam, 2010; Kortt, Dollery, Grant, 2015). The results of this study were seen to be in parallel with results in current literature in this respect.

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