Metaphor Perceptions of Adolescents towards the Concept of Social Media

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine adolescents' perceptions of the concept of social media through metaphors. The study group of the research consisted of 182 (87 (%47.8) male, 95 (%52.2) female) high school students studying in the Aegean Region of Turkey in the 2022-2023 academic year. The age range of the study group is between 14-18. Also, the average age is 15.97. The study group is at the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grades of high school. In the research, a questionnaire consisting of two parts prepared by the researchers was used as a data collection tool. The first part of this form included questions about demographic information (gender, age, school, class, etc.). In the second part, "Social media is like … because …" were asked to complete the statement. The data obtained from the research were evaluated by content analysis, one of the qualitative research methods. In the study, 93 metaphors related to the concept of social media were obtained from adolescents. It was determined that the most frequently used metaphors were "book", "water", "cigarette", "teacher", "chocolate" and "life" metaphors. The created metaphors are divided into conceptual categories and themes. As a result of the positive category, the themes of happiness, need and useful were reached. As a result of the negative category, addiction, time wasting and harmful themes were obtained. In addition, when we look at the content of the meanings that adolescents attribute to social media, it was concluded that 53.28% of them ascribed a positive meaning to the concept of social media, and 31.31% attributed a negative meaning to social media.

Keywords: Metaphor, Adolescent, Perception, Social Media

Introduction

In the current century, global developments in the field of the internet and technology are advancing rapidly and affect human life as much as possible (in many areas such as communication, education, health, shopping, and entertainment). One of these domains is considered as virtual platforms called social media, which enable users to connect with each other on networks (Berryman et al., 2018; Infante & Mardikaningsih, 2022; Wiederhold, 2020).

Social media is defined as cheap and easy-to-access electronic tools with different functions such as communicating, disseminating, and sharing information, commenting, discussing, and expressing thoughts (Edosomwan et al., 2011; Griffiths et al., 2014; Sağar, 2021). Social media is also described as platforms that offer functions such as revealing personal information about oneself through certain groups and identities, socializing, watching others from the outside, meeting the feeling of appreciation, and being followed (Kwon & Wen, 2010; Sağar & Özçelik, 2022b; Zhao et al., 2008). Through these platforms, it is possible to share such as videos, photos, texts, content, and online news (Comm, 2010; Evans, 2008). In addition, these virtual environments serve to meet the needs of communication and identity, as well as to carry out some activities such as obtaining information, shopping, obtaining job

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opportunities, learning and having fun (Ateş & Sağar, 2021; Goel et al., 2013; Sağar, 2021, 2022; Szczygieł & Podwalski, 2020). Therefore, social media can be expressed as virtual platforms that provide important positive contributions to life in meeting the different goals of individuals by offering many functions such as information, education, communication, emotion, thought and content sharing (Sağar, 2019, 2021, 2022). In this context, it can be said that social media is a system network that allows many needs of individuals to be met.

Social media, which has a serious use around the world, is widely used especially among adolescent groups (Ivie et al., 2020; Michikyan et al., 2016; Sağar & Özçelik, 2022b). As a matter of fact, the fact that adolescents were born in the age of technology and that they grew up with technology are the main factors that make them dependent on social media (Ivie et al., 2020; Moawad & Ebrahem, 2016). In addition, the fact that the internet is an important technology, adolescents' constant interaction with phones and computers, frequent communication with family and friends in social networks, easy access to information, and more entertainment opportunities make adolescents a more sensitive group in the use of social media (Bányai et al., 2017; Ivie et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2013; Park & Kim, 2013). In this context, it can be said that it is very important for adolescents who are in intense contact with social media to reveal their perceptions of social media and to define the meanings they attribute to social media.

Metaphors are one of the most frequently used methods in terms of identifying perceptions about any subject, phenomenon and defining the meanings attributed to it. Metaphor is one of the most powerful mental tools at the point of structuring, directing and controlling the thought about the functioning of an event (Lakoff & Johnson, 2007). In other words, it is also described as the way people comprehend and understand the world (Morgan, 1998). A concept, event or phenomenon is explained by analogy with another concept, event or phenomenon, or something is explained by analogy with another thing through metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2007). In addition, there are two basic concepts in a metaphor: target and source. The target is defined as the concept that is wanted to be explained and that the person is unfamiliar. The source, on the other hand, is evaluated as a concept that uses the common features of the target concept to explain the target concept (Forceville, 2002). Therefore, it can be said that the conceptual system of the person is based on metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In addition, metaphor is widespread in daily life, not only in language but also in thought and action. Therefore, the ordinary conceptual system in which one thinks and acts is basically seen as metaphorical in nature (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In this context, social media, which is used as a daily and common environment, can be evaluated metaphorically. Considering these characteristics of metaphor, it is important to reveal the meanings that adolescents attribute to the concept of social media, which has a serious place in their lives, with metaphor. In addition, it is thought that it will contribute to the educational, protective and remedial mental health studies to be carried out in the field of social media. Therefore, the study is considered valuable and important in terms of the field. In this context, the general purpose of this research is to reveal the perceptions of adolescents about the concept of "social media" through metaphors. For this general purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What are the metaphors adolescents have for the concept of "social media"?

2. Under which conceptual categories and themes do adolescents' metaphors for the concept of "social media" come together?

Method

Design

In the research, the "phenomenology" pattern, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. Phenomenology studies enable research that aims to investigate the phenomena that are not completely foreign, as well as that cannot be fully expressed. In phenomenology, the data source consists of people

or groups who live the subject of the research and can reflect this phenomenon to the outside (Creswell, 2008).

Study Group

The research was conducted with the participation of 182 (87 (%47.8) male, 95 (%52.2) female) students studying in high schools in the Aegean region of Turkey in the 2022-2023 academic year. The age range of the study group is between 14-18. Also, the average age is 15.97. The study group is at the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grades of high school. The gender, age and class information of the participants are given in Table 1. The sampling of the research was carried out on the basis of the easily accessible sampling method.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Group

		f	%
Gender	Female	95	52.2
	Male	87	47.8
Age	14	34	18.7
	15	41	22.5
	16	21	11.5
	17	67	36.8
	18	19	10.4
Class	9.	31	17.0
	10.	56	30.8
	11.	76	41.8
	12.	19	10.4

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected with a questionnaire created by the researchers. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part includes demographic information (gender, age, school, class, etc.). In the second part of the created form, "Social media is like … because …" statement is included. Adolescents were asked to complete this statement. In addition, while creating the data collection tool, related studies were taken into consideration (Schmitt, 2005; Jensen, 2006; Karabulut et al., 2017).

Collection of Data

Adolescents participating in the study were informed about the principle of confidentiality, and informed consent was obtained from parents and adolescents on a voluntary basis. A form prepared by the researchers was distributed to each student who wanted to participate in the data collection process. In the form, "Social media is like … because …" were asked to complete the statement. One class hour was given to the students to fill out this form and the data were collected in the classroom environment.

The forms taken from the adolescents were considered as the data source of the study. The data collection process took approximately ten days.

Data Analysis

Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the collected data. By examining each of the metaphors taken from the participants, the forms that were not suitable for the research purposes were not included in the research. The written data were transferred to Word in computer environment. Then, the collected metaphors were divided into themes within the framework of various conceptual categories related to their similarities and differences (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). Within the scope of the research, two researchers first worked individually to categorize the data. In the next stage, the researchers came together and consulted about the similarities and differences, and finalized the themes under the categories. In addition, the categories and themes created by a doctor lecturer who is an expert in the field were examined in terms of the reliability of the research. Then, the frequencies and percentages of the metaphors transferred to the Word environment were calculated in the SPSS program.

Ethics Committee

Ethics committee approval was obtained from Afyon Kocatepe University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Decision Date: 27.01.2023; Meeting: 01; Decision: 2023/18) before the research was conducted.

Findings

Adolescents participating in the research produced 93 metaphors about the concept of social media. The metaphors produced by the adolescents were evaluated within the scope of positive and negative categories and divided into 6 themes. Themes created in the positive category; "Happiness", "Need", "Useful". Themes created in the negative category; It is formed as "Addiction", "Time Wasting", "Harmful".

The metaphors that adolescents have produced regarding the concept of social media are given in Table 2.

Table 2

Metaphors for the Concept of "Social Media"

Number	Metaphor	f	%
1.	Shopping	2	1.1
2.	Alcoholic beverage	4	2.2
3.	Encyclopedia	3	1.6
4.	Purified water	1	.5
5.	Honey	1	.5
6.	Swamp	1	.5
7.	Uncertain	1	.5
8.	Knife	1	.5
9.	Wise	1	.5
10.	Knowledge repository	1	.5

11.	Computer	1	.5
12.	Space	1	.5
13.	Ice	3	1.6
14.	Magnifying glass	1	.5
15.	heavenly place	1	.5
16.	Sunflower seed	5	2.7
17.	Environment	1	.5
18.	crocus flower	2	1.1
19.	Chocolate	7	3.8
20.	Precipitate	2	1.1
21.	Bin	1	.5
22.	Skewers	1	.5
23.	Rotten apple	1	.5
24.	Gossip	1	.5
25.	Sea	2	1.1
26.	Bottomless well	1	.5
27.	Friend	1	.5
28.	World	3	1.6
29.	Amusement center	1	.5
30.	Bread	3	1.6
31.	Apple worm	1	.5
32.	House	1	.5
33.	Fast food	1	.5
34.	Film	2	1.1
35.	Whirlpool	1	.5
36.	Glasses	1	.5
37.	rose thorn	1	.5
38.	Weather	2	1.1
39.	Swimming pool	1	.5
40.	Life	7	3.8
41.	The key that opens every door	2	1.1
42.	Cow	1	.5
43.	Cable	1	.5
44.	Black hole	3	1.6

45.	Cormorant	1	.5
46.	Black box	1	.5
47.	Darkness	1	.5
48.	Brother	1	.5
49.	Fight	1	.5
50.	Tick	1	.5
51.	Guide	1	.5
52.	Clothes	1	.5
53.	Book	12	6.6
54.	Copy	1	.5
55.	Meatball	1	.5
56.	Sand watch	1	.5
57.	Cookie	1	.5
58.	Box	1	.5
59.	Library	4	2.2
60.	Lollipop	1	.5
61.	Article	1	.5
62.	Neighbourhood	1	.5
63.	Machine	1	.5
64.	Make-up	2	1.1
65.	Happiness	1	.5
66.	Banana	1	.5
67.	Breath	2	1.1
68.	Lancet	1	.5
69.	School	1	.5
70.	Ocean	1	.5
71.	Orchid	1	.5
72.	Game	2	1.1
73.	Game console	1	.5
74.	Teacher	8	4.4
75.	Cake	2	1.1
76.	Window	1	.5
77.	Anodyne	1	.5
78.	Port of refuge	2	1.1

79.	Cigarette	8	4.4
80.	Weapon	1	.5
81.	Duster	2	1.1
82.	Black Coke	2	1.1
83.	This	12	6.6
84.	Surprise egg	1	.5
85.	Sugar	3	1.6
86.	Sweet	1	.5
87.	Tiramisu	1	.5
88.	Soil	1	.5
89.	Salt	3	1.6
90.	Trap	1	.5
91.	Sleep	1	.5
92.	Drugs	2	1.1
93.	Food	3	1.6
	Total	182	100.0

The metaphors created by adolescents regarding the concept of social media are shown in Table 2. When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that adolescents produce 93 metaphors for the concept of "Social media is like … because …". The most common metaphors among these metaphors were "book (6.6%)", "water (6.6%)", cigarette (4.4%)", "teacher (4.4%)", "chocolate (3.8%)" and "life (3.8%)".

The metaphors and themes that adolescents have produced in the "Positive Category" regarding the concept of social media are given in Table 3.

Table 3

Metaphors and Themes Regarding Adolescents' "Social Media in the Positive Category" Category

Theme	Number	Metaphor	f	%
	1.	Friend	1	5.0
	2.	Heavenly place	1	5.0
	3.	Crocus flower	2	10.0
	4.	Meatball	1	5.0
	5.	Chocolate	7	35.0
Happiness	6.	Rainbow	1	5.0
	7.	Cookie	1	5.0
	8.	Make-up	1	5.0
	9.	Surprise egg	1	5.0

Theme	Number	Metaphor	f	%
	10.	Game	1	5.0
	11.	Sugar	2	10.0
	12.	Sleep	1	5.0
	Total		20	100.0
Theme	**Number**	**Metaphor**	**f**	**%**
	1.	Bread	3	9.7
	2.	Life	7	22.6
	3.	Breath	2	6.5
Need	4.	This	12	38.7
	5.	Soil	1	3.2
	6.	Salt	3	9.7
	7.	Food	3	9.7
	Total		31	100.0
Theme	**Number**	**Metaphor**	**f**	**%**
	1.	Shopping	2	4.3
	2.	Encyclopedia	3	6.5
	3.	Wise	1	2.2
	4.	Knowledge repository	1	2.2
	5.	Computer	1	2.2
	6.	Magnifying glass	1	2.2
	7.	World	3	6.5
	8.	Glasses	1	2.2
	9.	The key that opens every door	2	4.3
Useful	10.	Cow	1	2.2
	11.	Brother	1	2.2
	12.	Guide	1	2.2
	13.	Book	12	26.1
	14.	Copy	1	2.2
	15.	Library	4	8.7
	16.	Machine	1	2.2
	17.	School	1	2.2
	18.	Teacher	8	17.4
	19.	Anodyne	1	2.2
	Total		46	100.0

The metaphors that adolescents produced positively regarding the concept of social media are expressed in Table 3. When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that 53.28% of the adolescents perceive the concept of social media as a positive element (10.98% in the theme of happiness, 17.03% in the theme of need, 25.27% in the theme of useful). The views on the themes created are as follows:

It has been determined that among the metaphors produced in the theme of "happiness", social media is most likened to chocolate with 35%. Examples of opinions on this theme are as follows:

"Social media is like chocolate because I love using social media as much as I love chocolate."

"Social media is like chocolate, because just like I don't want to give up chocolate, I don't want to quit when it comes to social media, I love it so much."

"Social media is like chocolate, because it makes people happy and it's beautiful."

From the metaphors produced in the "need" theme, it was concluded that social media is most like water with 38.5%. Examples of opinions on this theme are as follows:

"Social media is like water because we cannot do without it"

Social media is like water because we need water in our lives. Just like social media because we also need water."

"Social media is like water, because it is indispensable in our lives. Just as we cannot give up on water, we cannot give up on social media."

Among the metaphors produced in the "Useful" theme, it has been determined that social media is most likened to a book with 26.1%. Examples of opinions on this theme are as follows:

"Social media is like a book because every time we look at it, we find new information."

"Social media is like a book, because whatever I'm looking for is in the book, it's also in the social media.

"Social media is like a book because I can find everything I'm looking for in it."

The metaphors and themes that adolescents have produced in the "Negative Category" regarding the concept of social media are given in Table 4.

Table 4

Metaphors and Themes Regarding the "Social Media in the Negative Category" Category of Adolescent

Theme	Number	Metaphor	f	%
	1.	Alcoholic beverage	5	15.6
	2.	Purified water	1	3.1
	3.	Sunflower seed	5	15.6
	4.	Film	2	6.3
	5.	Article	1	3.1
Addiction	6.	Make-up	2	6.3
	7.	Game	2	6.3
	8.	Cake	2	6.3
	9.	Cigarette	8	25.0
	10.	Black coke	2	6.3

Theme	Number	Metaphor	f	%
	11.	Drugs	2	6.3
	Total		32	100.0
Theme	**Number**	**Metaphor**	**f**	**%**
	1.	Bin	1	11.1
	2.	Whirlpool	1	11.1
Time Waste	3.	Black hole	3	33.3
	4.	Sand watch	1	11.1
	5.	Box	1	11.1
	6.	Duster	2	22.2
	Total		9	100.0
Theme	**Number**	**Metaphor**	**f**	**%**
	1.	Knife	1	6.3
	2.	Ice	3	18.8
	3.	Rubbish	2	12.5
	4.	Rotten apple	1	6.3
	5.	Apple worm	1	6.3
Harmful	6.	Fast food	1	6.3
	7.	Rose thorn	1	6.3
	8.	Scalpel	1	6.3
	9.	Weapon	1	6.3
	10.	Black coke	2	12.5
	11.	Sugar	1	6.3
	12.	Trap	1	6.3
	Total		16	100.0

The metaphors that adolescents produce negatively regarding the concept of social media are given in Table 4. When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that 31.31% of the adolescents perceive the concept of social media as a negative element (17.58% in the theme of addiction, 4.94% in the theme of time wasting, 8.79% in the theme of harmful). The views on the themes created are as follows:

Among the metaphors produced in the theme of "addiction", it was concluded that social media is most likened to cigarettes with 25.0%. Examples of opinions on this theme are as follows:

"Social media is like cigarettes because once you start you can't stop."

"Social media is like cigarettes, because the more we smoke, the more addicted we get to play social media."

"Social media is like cigarettes because once it starts we can't stop."

Among the metaphors produced in the theme of "time wasting", it was found that social media is more like a black hole with 33.3%. Examples of opinions on this theme are as follows:

"Social media is like a black hole because it wastes a lot of time."

"Social media is like a black hole to me because it doesn't do me any good and it consumes my time like a black hole. That's why I can't find time for other activities."

"Social media is like a black hole because it absorbs our time."

Among the metaphors produced in the "harmful" theme, it was found that social media is mostly like ice with 18.8%. Examples of opinions on this theme are as follows:

"Social media is like ice. It will be nice at first, but it will disappear as it melts. In addition, there are problems that do not arise in life, such as slipping on ice."

"Social media is ice cold because we use it to cool off, but then it makes us sick. Just like social media, we go there for good, but then too much makes us sick and hurts."

"Social media is ice cold because it's so bad it makes you sick in every way."

Discussion

The purpose of this research is to reveal adolescents' perceptions of the concept of social media through metaphor. For this purpose, 182 adolescents studying in the Aegean Region of Turkey were asked to produce metaphors for the concept of social media, and a total of 93 metaphors were obtained. In this context, it has been determined that the metaphors frequently mentioned by adolescents are "book", "water", "cigarette", "teacher", "chocolate" and "life". The created metaphors are divided into conceptual categories and themes. As a result of the positive category, the themes of happiness, need and useful were reached. When the literature is examined, the theme of need in the positive category within the scope of this study is similar to the theme of social media, which is the need in the positive category in the study of Egüz and Kesten (2018). In another study, the category of human life and the need theme obtained in this study are consistent (Fırat & Yurdakul, 2012). As a result of another research conducted by Le Roux and Parry (2020), metaphors such as social media as a city square, social media as a beauty contest, social media as a parliament and social media as a masquerade ball were reached for the positive contributions of social media. The result of the research obtained by Roux and Parry (2020) is similar to the beneficial theme in the positive category reached in this research. In the study conducted by Reinhardt (2020), the participants expressed with various metaphors that social media contributed positively to their education life. This result is compatible with the beneficial theme in the positive category reached within the scope of the research. In addition, in the study on adolescents' perceptions of the concept of social media, Weinstein (2018) concluded that the majority of adolescents perceive social media positively. In the context of the studies and the result of this study, it can be said that social media is a source of happiness and contributes positively to people by producing

useful solutions for different needs in life. In addition, the role of technology in leaving positive impressions in the lives of individuals is undeniable. As a matter of fact, according to Modahl (2001), there are two main purposes for individuals to use technology. The first of these is hedonic use. In this usage, the main purpose such as having a good time, distraction, seeking adventure is entertainment. The other purpose of use is need (utilitarian) use. There is a realistic necessity in this use. An example of this is that individuals make purchases from the internet or social media through technology due to time wasting or need. Based on this information, it can be said that these conveniences provided by technology are effective in leaving positive impressions on individuals' social media perceptions.

In the negative category, which is another result of this study, the themes of addiction, time wasting and harmful were reached. When the literature was examined, it was seen in a study that most of the metaphors produced regarding the concept of social media were evaluated in the harmful theme. This result is similar to the harmful contact in the negative category reached within the scope of this study (Erdem et al., 2017). In the study conducted by Üztemur and Dinç (2020), the themes of time wasting, harmful and addiction in the negative category created for the concept of social media and the themes in the negative category reached as a result of this study show compatibility. Another theme reached in the negative category is the addiction theme. Similarly, Onursoy's (2017) study on the concept of social media coincides with the "addiction" theme obtained from the negative category. Another theme obtained in the negative category within the scope of this study is the time wasting. This result supports the theme of "time wasting" that Egüz and Kesten (2018); Kert and Kert (2010) reached in their research on the concept of social media. In the context of existing studies in the literature and the results of this study, it can be said that social media may cause problems due to negative use. It can be stated that it will cause time wasting in individuals due to intensive use and may cause harm to individuals by causing use problems such as addiction.

Considering the relevant literature, it is emphasized by Kuss and Griffiths (2011) that in addition to the positive functions of social media, it can also cause some negativities arising from intensive use. They point out that social media provides benefits such as creating personal accounts, communicating with real-life friends, and opening pages for useful communities. In addition, they also stated that individuals who are asocial in real life have negativities about being more introverted, spending more time on the internet and disrupting their daily life activities. As a matter of fact, the positive-negative categories reached as a result of the research conducted by Köseoğlu (2018); Sağar and Özçelik (2022a) support this view. In addition, in another study conducted, it is stated that individuals may experience difficulty in leaving the social media environment by developing addiction as a result of continuous use of social media as a means of entertainment (Larose, 2011). In addition, it has been supported by the results of the relevant research that social media causes some problems in school and work life by negatively affecting the time management skills of individuals (Andreassen, 2015; Chou & Hsiao, 2000; Khan et al., 2017). In line with these studies, it can be said that the unconscious use of social media can cause some problems in both personal and academic and social life.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

In this study, in which adolescents' perceptions of the concept of social media were investigated through metaphor, it was seen that adolescents evaluated social media in positive (happiness, need and useful themes) and negative categories (addiction, time wasting and harmful themes). In addition, although it is seen that adolescents have negative perceptions about the concept of social media, it has been concluded that they have more positive perceptions about the concept of social media. In addition to revealing such an important result, the fact that this study only consists of adolescent students studying in high schools in the Aegean Region of Turkey constitutes the limitation of this research. A similar metaphor study in terms of being a source for other studies can be done in other regions of Turkey with different sample groups. In addition, this study was conducted with 182 participants. In other studies, studies can be conducted with a higher number of participants. Another limitation of this study is that it was conducted using only qualitative research method. In future research, studies can also be carried out using quantitative research methods. As a result of this research, addiction, time wasting and

harmful themes were reached within the scope of the negative category. With another research, the causes of negative perceptions about the concept of social media can be examined. In addition, intervention studies can be carried out to prevent these negativities. Conscious use can be encouraged through activities such as seminars and conferences for the healthy use of social media. In addition, the people around the adolescents, their families and teachers at school can be provided with necessary training on healthy social media use so that they become an appropriate role model. Within the scope of this study, it has been concluded that the majority of adolescents perceive the concept of social media as a positive tool by seeing happiness, need and usefulness within the positive category. In this direction, the reasons why they see social media as positive can be investigated in another research.

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