

## EXAMINING SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE MOTIVATIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIGITAL LABOR<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The latest developments in communication technologies and the emergence of new applications have made the economic aspect of new media an important area of research. The new process, which started with digitalization, has also transformed forms of production and consumption. The prevalence of new media technologies and popular user content brought about interest in different topics such as user labor, user data usage, and user data sharing. While the production of content by users on social media platforms constitutes the main data that facilitates the operation of these systems, the collected user data is sold to large corporations for advertising purposes. Despite the exploitation of user labor in the new media environment and several security flaws on these platforms, the amount of content on social media platforms continues to grow day by day. The main motivation of new media users regarding this content does not involve tangible compensation. There are different sources of motivation in the usage of new media by users. By maintaining their existing relationships over social media or establishing new social relationships on these platforms, users strengthen their social capital. Additionally, by joining various groups, users of new media reinforce their feelings of liking and belonging, they keep producing to obtain the respect and status that they could not obtain in real life.

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Moreover, while it is much easier for some people to express themselves via social media, others meet the needs they are unable to meet in real life by creating fictional personalities on these platforms. Therefore, it may be argued that there are various social or emotional motivations effective in user-based production in new media. This study was designed as a study of users to determine the needs that push individuals to spend digital labor on new media platforms and which needs are met by new media. In this study, a survey form that was created in the form of a scale based on field research that was conducted with 220 users between the ages of 14 and 64. Consequently, it was determined that the participants acted not with “material” motivations but with “social” motivations while using social media platforms. The most frequently stated main motivations of the participants were found to be “relaxation/blowing off steam” and “self-expression”.

**Keywords:** *New Media, Digital Labor, User, Motivation, Social Capital.*

## **SOSYAL MEDYA KULLANIM MOTİVASYONLARINI DİJİTAL EMEK PERSPEKTİFİNDEN OKUMAK**

### **ÖZ**

İletişim teknolojilerindeki son gelişmeler ve yeni uygulamaların ortaya çıkması yeni medyanın ekonomik boyutunu önemli bir inceleme alanı haline getirmiştir. Dijitalleşme ile birlikte başlayan yeni süreç, üretim ve tüketim biçimlerini de değiştirmiştir. Yeni medya teknolojilerinin yaygınlaşması ve öne çıkan kullanıcı içerikleri, kullanıcı emeği, kullanıcı verilerinin paylaşılması ve kullanılması gibi farklı konuları gündeme getirmiştir. Sosyal medya platformlarında kullanıcıların içerik üretimi hem bu sistemlerin işlemlerini sağlayan temel verileri oluştururken hem de toplanan kullanıcı verileri reklamcılık hedefleri ile büyük şirketlere satılmaktadır. Yeni medya ortamında kullanıcı emeğinin bu şekilde sömürülmesi ve güvenlik yönünden birçok açığa rağmen sosyal medya platformlarında üretilen içerikler her geçen gün artmaktadır. Yeni medya kullanıcıları için bu ortamda üretilen içeriklerin temel motivasyonu maddi bir karşılık içermemektedir. Kullanıcıların yeni medya kullanımında farklı motivasyonlar yer almaktadır. Kullanıcılar bu platformlarda sosyal medya üzerinden var olan ilişkilerini sürdürerek ya da yeni sosyal ilişkiler geliştirerek sosyal sermayelerini güçlendirmektedir. Ayrıca yeni medya kullanıcıları çeşitli gruplara katılarak sevgi ve aidiyet duygularını güçlendirmekte, gerçek hayatta edinmeyecekleri saygı ve statüyü edinmek için sürekli olarak üretmeye devam etmektedir. Bununla birlikte kimi bireyler için sosyal medya aracılığı ile kendini ifade etmek çok daha kolayken kimi bireyler de bu ortamlarda kendileri için oluşturdukları kurgusal benlikleri ile gerçek hayatta karşılayamadıkları ihtiyaçlarını gidermektedirler. O halde yeni medyada kullanıcı üretiminde çeşitli sosyal ya da duygusal motivasyonların etkili olduğunu söylemek mümkündür.

Bu çalışma bireyleri yeni medya üzerinde dijital emek harcamaya iten gereksinimlerin neler olduğunu ve yeni medyanın hangi ihtiyaçları karşıladığını tespit etmeyi amaçlayan bir kullanıcı çalışması olarak tasarlanmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, 14-64 yaş grubu aralığından 220 katılımcıya çalışma kapsamında geliştirilen alan araştırmasına dayalı ölçeğe uygun anket formu uygulanmıştır. Sonuç olarak, katılımcıların sosyal medya platformlarını kullanırken “maddi” motivasyonlarla değil, “sosyal” motivasyonlarla hareket ettiği tespit edilmiştir. Çalışmada katılımcıların öne çıkan temel motivasyonları “rahatlama/kafa dağıtma” ile “kendini ifade etme” olarak belirlenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Yeni Medya, Dijital Emek, Kullanıcı, Motivasyon, Sosyal Sermaye.*

## INTRODUCTION

While the rapid developments in communication technologies have created new areas of consumption, they have also led to significant convergences in the production-consumption relationship. The audience as a commodity in the context of conventional mass media changes in the internet environment and becomes a “digital commodity”. As per the audience as a commodity in the internet environment, the users are also content creators, and they constantly take part in community-building by creative activities (Saraçoğlu, 2015: 12). As opposed to the audience of conventional mass media, the audience in the internet environment can participate in this environment without restrictions in time or space and produce content. The user who is producing content shares a visual product or text they have created with other users via new media. After this, a process of interaction arises with feedback options provided to other users such as liking or commenting on a piece of content. With the content creation function that is open to all users in the interaction process, data entry is provided for the network environment.

The form of labor shown by users in the new media environment has already exceeded the boundaries of the concept of free time. Adorno and Horkheimer describe the concept of free time as an extension of working time. Today, on the other hand, immaterial labor has turned into a form of labor shown by individuals even within their physical working hours. Considering new media in the context of labor, Aymaz (2019: 67) emphasizes that the commodity in this process is the time spent by users on social media, and the time of users is marketed on these platforms. Mobile devices that are carried everywhere by users have allowed them to access social media platforms like Facebook at any time of the day. Individuals have started to spend longer periods of time during the day (working and leisure hours) communicating and socializing on these platforms (Fisher, 2019: 138). Individuals are no longer merely consumers, but they have become consumers who produce. Information production and the transition to an organized network structure have eliminated the need for a spatial or physical center by reducing the importance of

distances (Hardt and Negri, 2018: 298). While social networks have transformed into social factories that produce digital labor, those who have profiles on social networks have turned into vendors, and those who follow these profiles have turned into potential customers (Özmağas, 2015: 15).

The creation of personal profiles on social media platforms by users initiated the relationship between the concepts of new media and social capital (Yıldız, 2017: 72). The concept of social capital, which emphasizes the importance of social relationships, is reinforced by the intensity and proximity of the relationships established by the individual with their environment. With the advancement of communication technologies and the emergence of new media, a significant proportion of the relationships and communication activities of individuals has started to take place on social media platforms. The communication that takes place via new communication technologies eliminates most of the problems that are encountered in interpersonal communication processes and provides the individual with a more comfortable and freer space. Accordingly, individuals on social media platforms have a set of motivations to initiate and maintain communication on these platforms.

New media offers users a new world that makes a new image possible. Social networks, which provide users with the opportunity to create their own image, have become some of the most attractive tools in the formation of social capital (Özdemir, 2019: 94-95). The connection of belonging established by individuals and their efforts to create a new identity via networks are compatible with their nature, and this situation corresponds to the need to belong outlined as a social need in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Aydemir, 2011: 79). While trying to understand the labor of the individual in the digital world and make inferences, it will be useful to keep in mind that they are meeting a basic need on these networks.

Netchitailova (2017: 3), who used an approach of combining economic, political, and cultural studies in her research on Facebook, states that users share sentiments on this network and argues that the production on such networks is a part of being human. This is because communication and friendship are a social component of human life. The motivation that is applicable to the productivity of the individual is associated with the necessity of social relationships.

The main purpose of this study is to determine the motivations that lead users to spend labor in the new media environment and reveal the social motivations underlying the behavior of labor. The characteristics of the new media environment have led the line between the notions of production and consumption in this environment to be continuously blurred. A user in this environment can participate in both production and consumption processes. All these production practices on social media platforms which are connected to the daily lives and experiences of individuals allow the owners of these platforms to gain profits. As stated by Fuchs, individuals who have turned into digital workers in the new media environment have alienated themselves from their own production and become unable to keep the privacy of their information

under control. In spite of these developments, individuals are increasing their production on social media platforms every single day. In this sense, the main issue of focus for this study is the identification of the main motivations that draw individuals to these environments, in which their daily lifestyles have become a commodity, and lead them to remain in a constant production process.

In the literature review that was conducted in the scope of the study, academic articles such as dissertations and research articles associating the usage of social media with needs and motivations were examined. Biliciler (2018: 33), who examined motivational factors on social media based on the uses and gratifications theory, stated that social media has an important role in achieving the saturation of needs and gratification. Forms of communication on social media such as establishing new relationships and strengthening interpersonal communication by becoming members of various groups meet different social needs including being liked, belonging, and acceptance by others (Biliciler, 2018: 33). In their study on the usage motivations of social media, Yeniçıktı (2016: 229) obtained results varying according to occupations regarding the social media usage motivations of their participants. The results of their study revealed that providing and receiving information constituted a frequent source of motivation for homemakers, upper-level managers, and students. Moreover, students were also among the participants with higher rates of motivation through communication/socialization and curiosity. Another prominent result of the study was that professionals had higher scores of connection/observation motivation, whereas skilled laborers had higher scores of entertainment/recreational motivation. The social media usage motivations of individuals are highly diverse, and they may vary depending on factors such as age, occupation, and socioeconomic status.

In their study focused on Instagram usage, Hayır and Karahisar (2022: 264) associated social media usage with the higher levels of the hierarchy of needs and emphasized that individuals aim to be liked, accepted, and noticed on social media. In another study, which investigated the usage motivation sources of Clubhouse as one of the popular applications of the COVID-19 pandemic period, it was stated that the application provided social and hedonic gratifications. It was found that Clubhouse met different motivations of individuals such as information collection and sharing, recreation, entertainment, and pastime (Çağlan-Bilsel & Özmen, 2022: 36).

This study offers significant contributions in the context of examining which social and emotional needs of individuals are met in exchange for the labor they spend in the new media environment and what types of gratification they get from this experience. In addition to this, this study differs from others and is valuable for this field of research considering the absence of a comprehensive study examining the labor-oriented relationships of users in the new media environment.

The study was carried out using the CATI (Computer-Aided Telephone Interview) method, which is a quantitative research method. The data that were collected in the study were analyzed using the SPSS program.

This study, which investigated user motivations on social media from a digital labor perspective, revealed that the participants acted not with “material” motivations but with “social” motivations while using social media platforms. This study aims to fill a gap in this field and guide future qualitative studies by contributing to the current literature.

## **COGNITIVE CAPITALISM AND DIFFERENT FORMS OF LABOR**

New media technologies, which have emerged with the rise of internet technologies, have influenced social life substantially. Individuals who spend most of their work and leisure time in front of a computer have easy access to websites and television broadcasts designed for news, games, and entertainment. New media has become one of the most important mass communication tools by increasing its power day by day. With new media environments, users are taking part in settings where they are no longer merely consumers and can contribute to content. The learning and sharing of these pieces of content produced by users led to the emergence of a “participatory media culture” (Dijk, 2016: 313). Debates about the topic of “participatory culture” led to discussions about whether participation in the field of communication would create a democratic effect.

In this fluid era, which is a consequence of the structuring of the internet and networks, cognitive differentiations occurred in many phenomena including the concept of labor, and this new era was named “cognitive capitalism” (Çetin, 2019: 368). In cognitive capitalism, labor is defined by information that is “immaterial” and based on cognitive characteristics (Vercellone, 2015: 43). In this transformation process taking place in the qualities of labor, the extent of exploitation has also gone through a change.

While defining the concept of labor, Marx emphasized the distinction between productive and unproductive labor. Whether labor is productive or not is dependent on its relationship to capital. Productive labor refers to labor that produces added value for the capital, while no added value arises as a result of unproductive labor (Wittel, 2019: 404). The creation of added value means that individuals take part in the production process not for themselves but for the capital (Marx, 2020: 484). The examination of the social lives and cultures of today’s individuals from a factory production perspective as an extension of immaterial labor practices has turned new capital accumulation into an indispensable part of social life (Özdemir, 2019: 37).

Lazzarato (2005) calls labor that is not tangible “immaterial labor” and defines it as “labor that produces the informational and cultural content of a commodity”. In the informational aspect of this definition, he emphasizes the dominance of computers and the change experienced in the labor processes of workers at large firms. The cultural content aspect, on the other hand, refers to activities that are not ordinarily considered work. The adoption of an informational structure by production processes has isolated the labor force from the object of labor, and labor has turned into

“intangible labor” (Hardt and Negri, 2018: 296). The definition made by Lazzarato points to a substantial change in labor processes. Physical labor is being replaced by mental labor, and these new developments provide new opportunities for the capital.

The development of network-based ways of production has also caused the line between working hours and non-working hours to be blurred. The daily activities of individuals have been reshaped based on sources of capital. In particular, a good example of how capital dominates all bases is the time spent by users on social networks and the transformation of daily communication practices into production processes. The time spent by users on social media is spread throughout the whole day, and the concept of a “factory” extends beyond a workplace where people work in exchange for wages and reaches all spaces (Fuchs, 2014: 162). Users can connect to the internet at any time and from anywhere via computers and smartphones.

Fuchs, who considers discourses on immaterial labor along with the political economy of the internet, discusses the capital accumulation models of the digital world using the concept of “digital labor”. He discusses the concept in the context of a broad spectrum of different forms of alienation and exploitation in digital media technologies. The digital labor performed on commercial social media involves issues such as the content created by users, the control of user data by the capital, and the ownership being in the hands of private firms rather than users (Fuchs, 2014: 501-502). Social media produces profits for certain firms, and the creation of added value, as stated by Marx, occurs.

Social media platforms constitute a model that operates with content created by users. This content created by users includes individual user data and forms an audience as a commodity. The aforementioned data not only allows the operation of these platforms but also makes it easier for the storage of several pieces of information about the interests of users. All collected data serves to manipulate consumers by being used in targeted advertising activities.

In this new order being shaped in the internet environment, users experience feelings of “entertainment” against their exploitation and take joy. This exploitation, which feels like entertainment, has become a part of free time. The main benefit of this situation is financial, and in exchange for the labor of the user, large corporations such as Alphabet (Google) gain profits. User experiences that are sold as a commodity to advertisers create a capital accumulation model that is based on the exploitation of unpaid labor (Fuchs, 2014).

## **VISIBILITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AT THE EXPENSE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Social media platforms, which continue to exist thanks to the content produced by users, are a good example of the transformation in production and consumption processes in the digital era. The user of new media contributes to the production process in the context of their “participation” in social media platforms involving activities such as uploading photographs, commenting on posts, and liking content. On the other hand, the capital that owns social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter does not share the profit with the user or pay them anything (Duman and Özdoğru, 2018: 80). Saying that users create a commodity by producing this content, Çetin (2019: 367) describes users as “agents who consume while producing” and names this situation “implicit labor”.

According to Fuchs (2014: 144-145), the capital accumulation model of Facebook is dependent on targeted advertising. In this form of advertising, by analyzing and monitoring the online behaviors of users, different advertisements are shown to different groups of users. This way, personalized advertisements that could attract the interest of users are offered to them, and the behavior of clicking on these advertisements and purchasing the associated products is triggered. The user creates a monetary value but experiences alienation toward oneself and their control over the monetary profit in question (405).

In critical approaches regarding the internet and digital technologies, primary issues that are focused on include the global marketplace into which the internet has transformed and the transformation of users into customers by the internet (Çakır, 2015: 34). The business model used by social sharing platforms is dependent on the commodification of user data (Fuchs, 2015: 356). Lyon emphasizes that in consumer societies, the quality of being a “commodity for consumption” is what makes individuals the real members of society (Bauman and Lyon, 2013: 47). In the new media environment, the data shared by users also makes them real members of these platforms. Such that, the desire of the user to be seen, known, and recognized leads to the unhesitant growth of shared content and sheds light on the indifference of the user to being observed.

Barak (2018) investigated studies examining social media usage motivations since the 2000s and revealed that these studies have reported four main motivations, namely self-presentation, watching, social interaction, and self-expression.

On social media platforms, profile creation and content upload processes are carried out entirely by the user. This situation provides users with the opportunity to present themselves in the way they want and makes these platforms an effective tool for self-presentation. Users of the virtual environment, while creating an impression, take into account the desires of society and display “idealized performances” in this environment (Morva, 2014). The opportunity to present oneself within a flawless fictionality provided by social media tools is among the prominent motivations for their usage by individuals.

Another motivation to use social media is watching. When the individual presents themselves on social media platforms, in fact, they expose themselves to watching. Likewise, by constantly following up on what others are doing, they also watch others. Niedzwiecki (2019) expresses this issue by arguing that the new possibilities provided by the internet also provide new ideas for us to open our lives to the public, and we always try to participate more in watching, being watched, and thus, peeping. The visibility-recognition of the individual and all their efforts to create the image they desire in the eyes of others entrap them inside this peep culture. Moreover, the individual also constantly watches other individuals in the internet ecosystem, and watching becomes a significant motivation for them. This situation can be observed in the form of following the lives of one's colleagues or a famous personality, their recommendations, and their life.

Social interaction is among the factors that motivate individuals on social media platforms the most. Advancements in communication technologies and the sheer diversity of social media tools have resulted in the socialization-related needs of individuals to be shifted towards this realm. On social networks, which allow the participation of several people with the help of the internet, the individual can maintain and reinforce their existing social relationships and expand their social circle by meeting new people. Different factors, especially the elimination of time and space constraints, faster and easier communication, and individuals feeling more comfortable to interact in virtual environments, are influential in the prominence of socializing as a motivation source.

In the new media era, individuality and privacy are reshaped, and individuals derive pleasure from sharing all details of their lives with society. The human capital that is dependent on digital labor would require the performances to be displayed to keep the virtual storefront in the new media environment alive to be actions that would contribute to this capital (Özmkas, 2015: 25). All these efforts of users in the new media environment are motivated by a desire for investment in their social relationships.

The usage rates of the internet and the numbers of accounts on different social networks on new media increase continuously. Through these environments, individuals can create an identity that appears to be "ideal" and present this identity to their followers, and these platforms are utilized as a "storefront". Furthermore, digitalization and new technologies have become a basic need for individuals today, and refusing to use them has become difficult. In this context, an important precaution that can be taken regarding issues such as surveillance and privacy violations that constantly push their limits involves informing the users about how their data is shared and raising awareness in them about digital media literacy.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, a scale was developed based on field research, and it was aimed to understand the collective labor process of the participants taking place through production in the new media environment better and reveal the effects of interpersonal communication processes on the affectivities created in these environments. Within the scope of the study, a field study was carried out to uncover the connection between the data provided by the participants regarding digital labor and the social outcomes they achieved personally.

### **Objective and Hypotheses**

This study focused on the premise that users spending labor in the new media environment also find resolutions for their different social and emotional needs, and they reach some forms of satisfaction. Users, who spend their labor on new media, also achieve emotional outcomes. These users base the emotional outcomes they achieve in new media environments on not a single practice but interpersonal communication processes that arise as a consequence of collective labor. To a considerable extent, they have been alienated from this labor, to which they hold on via emotional gratification. The emotional outcomes achieved by them have turned into a commodity that is designed according to the approval of others. In this sense, this study aimed to identify which needs users meet via the new media environment and what kinds of satisfaction they get from using these platforms.

The hypotheses that were formed to achieve this aim were as follows:

H<sub>1</sub> – Users achieve various social and emotional outcomes in exchange for their digital labor on new media.

H<sub>2</sub> – Users continue to take part in production on social media despite the collection of their data via social media.

H<sub>3</sub> – Ways of “self-expression” on social media are a source of motivation for users.

### **Sample**

A sample refers to a set that is selected from a population based on certain rules and assumed to adequately represent the said population (Karasar, 2014: 110). The population is the entirety of the set of elements that the researcher is interested in. It can be extremely large or infinite, while the sample is a subset or part of the population. The population for a study is usually too large to analyze, and collecting all data for a population can be either impossible or too costly. Even in cases where resources are sufficient, selecting a sample to examine is usually a necessity (Newbold et al., 2013: 22).

The population of this study consisted of users of social media who actively contributed to content production. The probability-based sampling method was used in the selection of the sample of the study.

In this study, a probability-based sampling method was utilized. Based on various criteria, participants showing similar characteristics were included in the sample. The sample covered individuals conventionally categorized under gen Z, Y, and X, aged from 14 to 64. To include participants meeting the inclusion criteria, filters were applied based on the social media usage characteristics and frequencies of individuals in the population, and those satisfying the conditions were enrolled. At this point, from among the 815 individuals who were contacted for the study, the interviews with those who were not social media users at all and those who very rarely used social media were terminated. Interviews were completed with a total of 220 participants, making sure to include 110 male and 110 female individuals. In terms of the distribution of the participants in provinces, the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS 1) classification, covering the Turkish Statistical Territorial Unit Classification (İBBS), was taken into account, and social media users from 12 provinces of Turkey were included.

While 22.7% of the participants were living in Istanbul, 13% were living in Bursa, 12.1% were living in İzmir, 11.9% were living in Gaziantep, 9.7% were living in Ankara, 8.8% were living in Adana, 6.8% were living in Kayseri, 5.1% were living in Tekirdağ, 4.6% were living in Erzurum, 2.2% were living in Trabzon, 1.8% were living in Samsun, and 1.5% were living in Van.

Before starting the study, approval was obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Committee at Istanbul University. In accordance with the ethics committee's approval decision, the study was conducted between 15 March 2022 and 15 April 2022.

## **Data Collection**

In the first stage of the study, a review of the relevant literature was carried out, and books, dissertations, and research articles on the topic were examined in detail. As a result of this process, a measurement instrument was created with questions and statements suitable for application as a survey in line with the objectives of the study. Using this measurement instrument, it was aimed to collect information about the underlying social and emotional motivation sources of digital labor. To establish the functionality, validity, and reliability of the instrument, opinions were obtained from experts at the Istanbul University Center for Statistical Applications and Research, and the pretests and field studies were conducted in collaboration with the center. The finalized version of the measurement instrument was sent to different experts in the field of communication, and their views and recommendations were received.

This study was conducted with a quantitative research design. In quantitative studies, the exact boundaries of variables can be identified, and the relationships among these

can be measured (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016: 49). It was also determined that a quantitative design would be more suitable for this study to reach more participants for more generalizable results in the identification of the underlying motivation sources of digital labor. The scale that was developed as described above included 23 questions, and it was applied as a survey among the participants. The survey platform was created using CATI.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The data that were obtained in the study were analyzed using the SPSS program. The data were subjected to t-tests in the context of the variables of gender, age, marital status, education level, and socioeconomic status. In these analyses, the null hypothesis is rejected or not rejected by looking at the p-value of the t-statistic. When the null hypothesis is rejected ( $p < 0.05$ ), it is decided that the mean values of the tested variable differ significantly between the groups (Durmuş et al., 2022: 120).

The results to be obtained in the study, namely the research questions that were aimed to be answered, were tested based on a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  (5% margin of error;  $1 - 0.05 = 0.95$ ) and in a 95% confidence interval. This way, the significance of the results of all analyses was tested, and the results that exceeded the error margin mentioned above were rejected (Newbold et al., 2013).

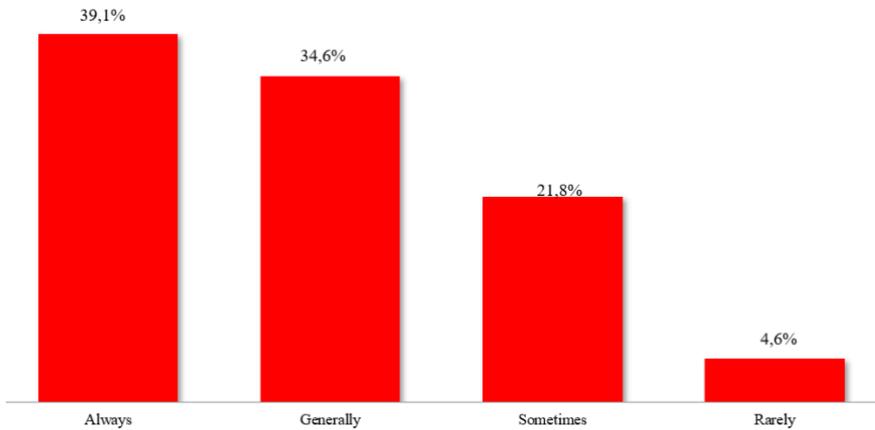
### **Limitations**

The results of this study, which was conducted to present the underlying social and emotional motivation sources of digital labor, are limited to the responses of the 220 individuals who were included in the sample. Another limitation was the assumption that the participants answered the questions directed at them completely and honestly. The data that were collected in the study with the CATI technique will be deleted at the end of 5 years.

## RESULTS

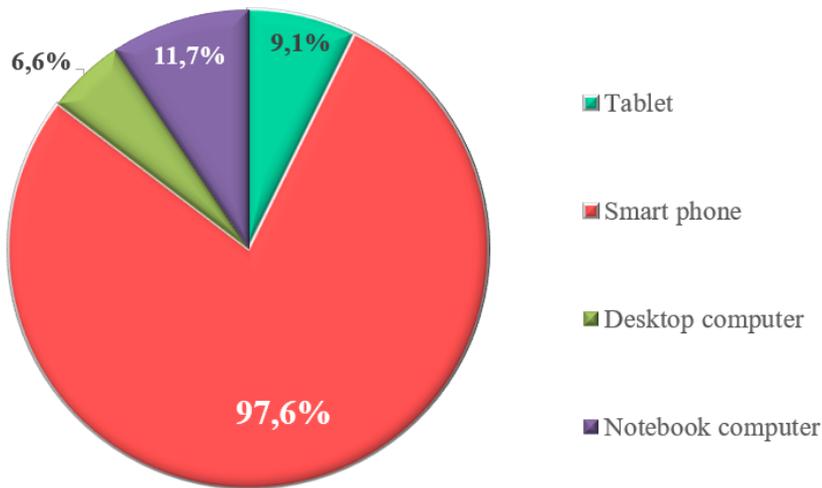
The data that were collected from the participants in this study were analyzed using the SPSS program. These data included information on social media usage activities, content creation practices, social media usage motivations, and affectivities in the scope of the objective of the study.

It was determined that 39.1% of the participants were always using social media, while 34.6% responded that they were using it usually. The frequent usage of social media by the vast majority of the participants, at a rate of 73.7%, was an important indicator in the context of the objectives of the study.



**Figure 1.** Social media usage frequency

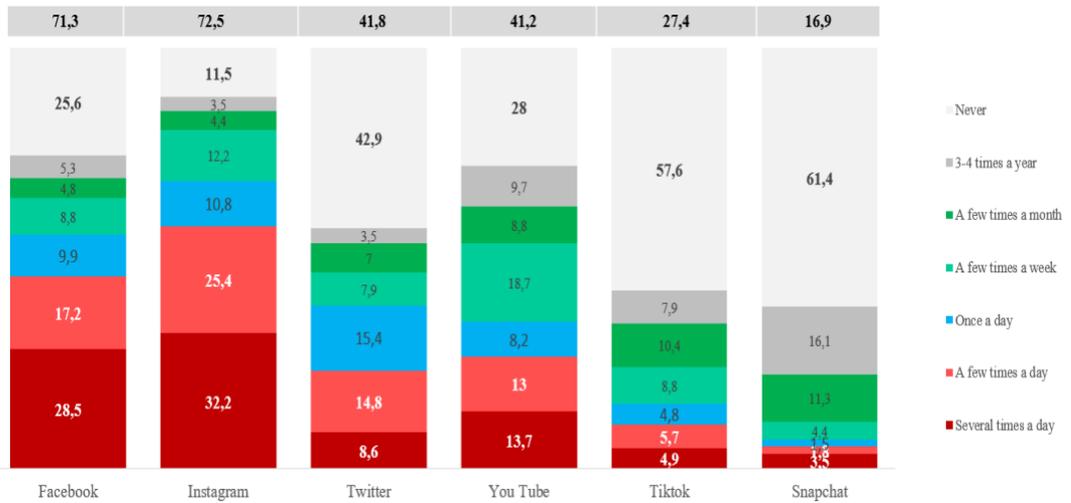
Smartphones were used by 97.6% of the participants to access social media.



**Figure 2.** Devices used to access social media

The prevalence of smartphone usage among the participants indicated that they had access to social media via these devices that were always on them. The possibility of connectivity at any time provided to users by mobile devices leads to the allocation of a considerable amount of time during the day by these users, and there is no longer a need to arrange a separate period to use social media. Users can visit these platforms whenever they want to during their commute, at home, and at the workplace, produce content, and support the traffic on social media.

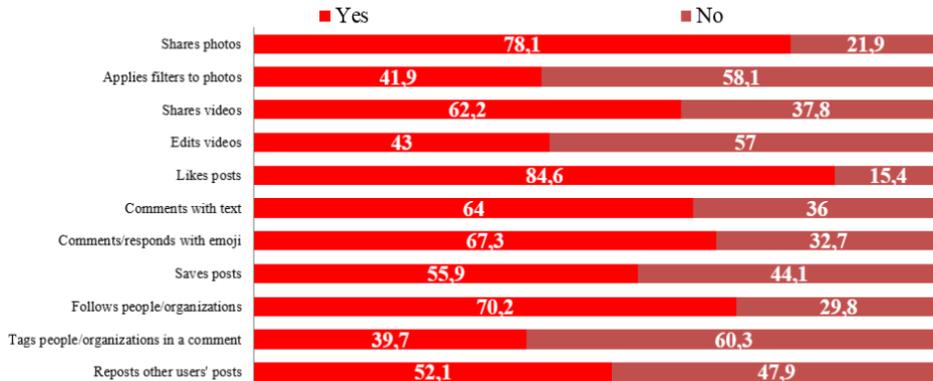
To measure the usage frequency of social media platforms other than visiting these platforms and browsing (active usage, e.g., sharing/posting, commenting, reposting), the participants were asked to state their usage behaviors separately for each platform (several times a day, a few times a day, once a day, a few times a week, a few times a month, or 3-4 times a year). According to the mean values of the responses of the participants, Instagram was determined to be the most actively used social media platform at a rate of 72.5%. Instagram was followed by Facebook at a rate of 71.3% and Twitter at a rate of 41.8%.



**Figure 3.** Active social media usage frequency

### Results on Forms of Digital Labor Contribution on Social Media

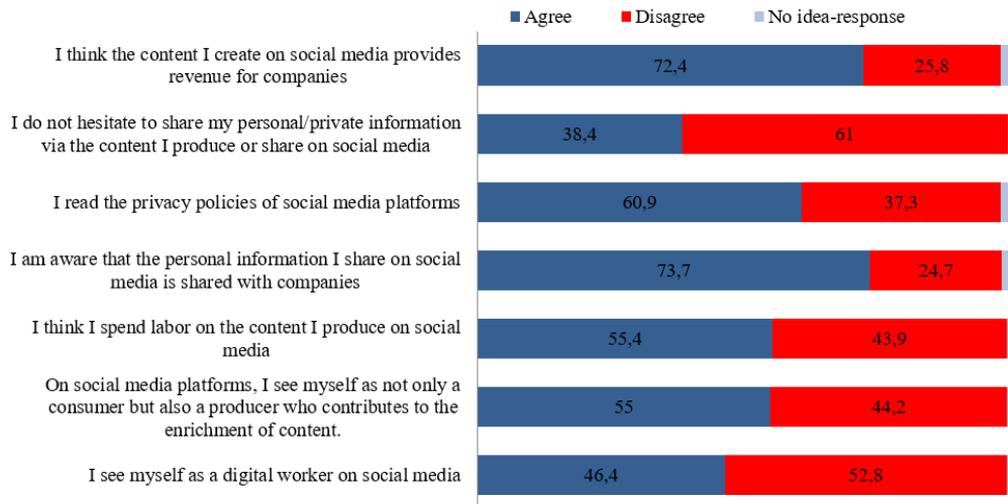
The participants were determined to spend labor the most frequently by liking posts and sharing photographs. While 84.6% of the participants contributed by liking posts, 78.1% contributed by sharing photographs. It was learned that 67.3% of the participants left emoji under posts on social media, and 64% commented in text form. Other activities involving high rates of participants in the context of digital labor were determined as following an organization or a person at a rate of 70.2%, sharing videos at 62.2%, saving posts at 55.9%, and sharing another user's posts at 52.1%.



**Figure 4.** Social media activities

It was stated by 73.7% of the participants that they were aware of the fact that their personal information in social media environments is shared with companies. While 60.9% of the participants said they read privacy policies on social media platforms, 61% reported that they preferred not to share their personal information on these platforms. Among the participants, 72.4% thought that they were aware of their contribution to the revenue of companies with their behaviors constituting labor on social media. It was seen that the participants cared about privacy in their behaviors constituting labor on social media, and the vast majority of them had knowledge about this issue. Despite this, the social media usage rates and content creation frequencies of the participants appeared to be high.

The rate of participants who defined themselves as creators contributing to the enrichment of content was 55%, whereas 55.4% thought they spent labor on the content they were creating on social media. Although more than half of the participants had knowledge about privacy and the revenue of companies, they participated in social media platforms as producers of content and continued to spend their labor. On the other hand, 52.8% of the participants reported that they did not define themselves as a “digital worker”. In this context, it may be stated that behaviors on social media platforms that constitute labor were seen by the participants as a part of daily life and not a job.



**Figure 5.** Content creation practices on social media

### Results on Motivation Sources for Using Social Media

According to the responses of the participants, one of the most frequently encountered sources of motivation for using social media was leaving the stresses of everyday life behind and letting off some steam. It was stated by 72.8% of the participants that they relaxed while using social media. It was determined that 40.2% of the participants felt valued during their behaviors on social media platforms, and 39.9% said being visible and noticed made them happy. Being visible to others and being noticed by others serves the function of a reward that reinforces social and cultural capital for individuals (Saltık, 2018: 356). The individual puts their “self” in the frontlines on social networks, and they accept and reinforce this “self” with the likes they get from others.

In terms of becoming a part of social communities, it is important for individuals to contribute to content in line with their areas of interest and form public opinion while using social media. Only 32% of the participants stated that they used these platforms to build public opinion/an agenda, while 62.7% said they did not take part in opinion-building/agenda-setting activities. Sixty percent of the participants did not agree with the statement about their social media usage that “they built esteem”, and 65.8% did not agree with the statement that “they gained status”. It was expressed by 58.3% of the participants that they did not take part in social responsibility activities on social media, and 71.8% stated that they did not gain anything from these platforms in terms of establishing business networks. While social media platforms offer individuals the possibility to express themselves and share their opinions about social issues and other topics, for the participants of this study, these platforms provided more

individualistic opportunities and gratifications rather than the membership of a community.

Sixty percent of the participants revealed that they presented themselves on social media platforms in a way they wanted to appear. To boost their personal capital in these environments, individuals have the opportunity to gain a new area of self-presentation. Social media allows the individual to present oneself within a flawless fictionality. A significant part of the participants, at a rate of 47.5%, reported that while uploading photographs, they made an effort to ensure that their posts would be liked by society, and they would conform to the shared ideals of beauty in society. With the posts they share on social media platforms, individuals want to attract the attention of others, be liked and accepted by others, and meet their need for respect by aiming to elevate their status this way (Biliciler, 2018: 34).

Another form of labor on social media platforms that allows users to interact with others and become a part of social networks is commenting on posts. Among the participants of this study, 58.3% stated that they could express themselves by commenting on a post on social media. It was seen that 54.7% of the participants thought they established a friendlier language by using emoji, and 53.9% believed using emoji made the text they wrote clearer. The usage of emoji provides convenience for individuals in the process of sharing emotions, and it gives them the opportunity to reinforce the thoughts and feelings they want to express. Social media platforms empower the form in which individuals express themselves and constitute an effective tool for the continuation of this expression.

The structure of social media that is convenient for establishing, expanding, and maintaining a network of relationships also provides a suitable environment for the formation of social capital. Of the participants of this study, 61.1% believed that they were beneficial to individuals and society with their social media posts. In social media environments, individuals can share about themselves in a way they desire to do so, and they can create a fictional self. Individuals also make use of the advantages of these environments in terms of self-expression, and they can share their thoughts and feelings with others in an effective way. Furthermore, 69.3% of the participants stated that they paid attention to act sincerely and in a friendly manner in their posts shared on social media, and 47.7% revealed that they improved their social relationships by making new friends on social media.

Some statements were also directed to the participants to measure how they felt while using social media and their emotional states. According to their statements, 53% let off steam on social media, 50.8% felt happy, and 45% felt optimistic. Considering them along with the results mentioned above, these statements were compatible with the finding that individuals relax and let their hair down on social media platforms. Additionally, 72.8% of the participants revealed that on social media, they did not feel lonely.

## CONCLUSION

The development of new communication technologies that affect all areas of social life and the formation of new media environments led to substantial changes in the production and consumption processes in the media. While developments experienced in the field of technology have led to significant impacts on the concept of labor, new media environments have also given rise to the necessity to rethink acts of labor in this field.

New media users visit platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter multiple times throughout the day. For users, this behavior serves different purposes such as relaxation/distraction at the workplace, passing time while commuting, and resting-entertainment at home. Here, while discussing user activities in terms of digital labor, the motivations of the user should also be considered.

This production process, in which users contribute by sacrificing a significant part of their personal time, is also an indication that wages are not at the top of their sources of motivation. The main hypothesis of this study was that users achieve various social and emotional outcomes in exchange for their digital labor on new media, and these outcomes are effective in their content creation activities. With the help of the interactive structure of social networks, users are involved in online communities and groups, and they strengthen their sense of belonging by establishing social relationships. In this social interaction, the individual can present oneself, and with reference to Goffman's concept of self-presentation, they perform on their own stage. One of the main results of this study was that the participants obtained social attainments as a result of their interactions on social media platforms. While the vast majority of the participants spent digital labor on social media, they also thought their activity was beneficial for society and other individuals. Another important source of motivation in the usage of social networks was that most participants, constituting 72.8% of the sample, did not feel lonely on these networks. In addition to social gains, the emotional experiences of individuals on social media platforms were also determined to be a positive source of motivation. For the participants, social networks meant an environment in which they felt stress-free, happy, and optimistic. In this context, the results of the study confirmed the  $H_1$  hypothesis.

An important result of this study was about the knowledge levels of the participants regarding the usage of personal information shared on social media and their privacy. According to this result, while the participants were aware that their contributions to social media content provided profits for companies, they said they read the privacy policies of these platforms, and they were hesitant while sharing their personal information. Despite this, the active social media platform usage rates of the participants were very high. As a result of the activities of users on social media, algorithms create and refine data representing the relevant individuals. In this process, in addition to the active behaviors of individuals on social media such as liking and commenting, various types of data including the videos they watch and for how long they watch certain videos are recorded, and then, users are targeted via a

personalized pattern. In connection with this, all recommendations provided to the individual by social media are determined based on their interests and preferences. News stories that are included in the press about social media platforms, especially those about privacy violations, may have led individuals to become more informed on the issue and caused them to examine the privacy policies in question in more detail. Nonetheless, in the age of artificial intelligence, although individuals have knowledge of these policies, the way this information is collected may be different from their expectations. Thus, it is seen that although the participants said they knew the explicit statements in privacy policies about how (their) data is collected and processed, they continued to participate in production on social media, and the H<sub>2</sub> hypothesis was supported.

In the study, as a form of spending labor on social media, it was found that commenting on posts provided the participants with a suitable environment to express themselves. While the participants stated the activity of commenting did not have a positive effect on their sense of belonging to the community, they thought it was a tool for expressing themselves. It can be seen that, especially for the participants who believed they adopted a clearer and more friendly language by using emoji, commenting was an effective way to maintain their communication style on social media. The activity of commenting, as an effective tool in the formation and maintenance of social connections, constitutes a gain for the social capital of users.

Taking part in content production on social media platforms offers alternative routes for individuals to express themselves. Thanks to some advantages brought about by this environment, it becomes easier to express oneself even for individuals who are unsuccessful in self-expression in face-to-face relationships, and this constitutes an important source of motivation. In particular, the recent COVID-19 pandemic period has presented significant possibilities to observe the forms of expression provided by social ecosystems to individuals in a period when they are isolated at home with their families. In this period, in which face-to-face forms of relationship are rarer, while individuals have continued to share their lives with others via social media platforms, they have also maintained their self-expression regarding pandemic-related developments. While the pandemic period is a good example, social ecosystems also remain in an important position in the self-expression of individuals in the normal course of life. The members of society share their views about many important issues including international achievements, terrorist events, gender-related issues, and child abuse, and with the transformation of this process into a collective one in social ecosystems, some events come to the fore faster than they would be expected to. In addition to this, it is also seen that individuals maintain their styles of self-expression on social media in their relationships with people in their close and extended circles. A comment under a Facebook post and a like on an Instagram story are some examples of this. The results of this study also showed that the participants were able to share their thoughts and feelings with others effectively on social media platforms. The participants reported that they expressed themselves in a sincere and honest manner, and many participants used emoji to express emotions. It was seen that self-

expression was an important source of motivation in the production of content by the participants. This result supported the H<sub>3</sub> hypothesis.

According to the results of this study, individuals act based on different motivations and targeted outcomes in the production that they take part in on social media platforms. In the context of digital labor, which is a representation of immaterial labor in new media, commodities do not correspond to a financial gain for the user. Although social media platforms represent a system that is maintained by user content, the pieces of content in question do not offer a financial return to the user. This study aimed to explore the roots of the posts shared by individuals in these environments despite significant issues of digital safety in their unpaid labor. Consequently, the most important result of the study was that the participants acted out of “social” motivations rather than “material” motivations. Besides, the main motivations that were identified in the study included “relaxation/blowing off steam” and “self-expression”.

Studies to be conducted with smaller samples yet qualitative methods will prove useful results in terms of the revelation of in-depth patterns about this topic.

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