

Investigating University Students' Social Media Stalking Situations

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History Received: 29.12.2023 Accepted: 23.03.2024 Published: 31.03.2024</p> <p>Keywords: Stalking, Social Media, University Student, Persistent Tracking, Social Media Addiction.</p>	<p>While the increasing use of social media today provides advantages in various aspects of our lives, the problems that these platforms bring also come to light. One of these is "stalking", which is a situation where a person uses social media to access more information about other people's private lives or experiences. Excessive stalking and sending unwanted, disturbing messages can lead to social media harassment. In addition, constantly checking people's social media accounts can lead to severe social media addiction. This study aims to investigate the situation of university students' stalking on social media. In the research, phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods, is adopted. Within the scope of the research, 27 students were interviewed using a semi-structured interview form. In the analysis of the data, content analysis was used. Participants' views on the effect of social media on stalking were coded by content analysis and presented in seven different themes, and their experiences were visualized with word clouds. As a result of the research, it was seen that the participants mostly act with a sense of curiosity and frequently stalk their inner circle on social media, and that stalking is more popular due to the accessibility of social media. It was also observed that individuals subjected to stalking are more anxious in their daily lives, and this makes them uncomfortable. It was concluded that excessive stalking can lead to addiction and that precautions should be taken. Based on these results, different suggestions are made about stalking on social media. As an alternative, before stalking turns into an addiction, measures such as seeking psychological support, limiting the time allocated to social media and conducting various awareness activities can be taken. As for future research, the phenomenon of stalking can be investigated in students at the high school-level, and a case study can be developed.</p>

Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Sosyal Medyadaki Stalklama Durumlarının İncelenmesi

Makale Bilgileri	ÖZ
<p>Makale Geçmişi Geliş: 29.12.2023 Kabul: 23.03.2024 Yayın: 31.03.2024</p> <p>Anahtar Kelimeler: Stalking, Sosyal Medya, Üniversite Öğrencisi, Israrlı Takip, Sosyal Medya Bağımlılığı.</p>	<p>Günümüzde giderek artan sosyal medya kullanımı her ne kadar hayatımıza çeşitli yönlerden avantaj sağlasada, bu platformların beraberinde getirdiği sorunlar da gün yüzüne çıkmaktadır. Bunlardan biri olan "stalking", bir diğer adıyla ısrarlı takip, kişinin sosyal medyayı kullanarak insanların özel hayatları veya yaşantıları hakkında daha fazla bilgiye ulaşması durumudur. Stalklamanın aşırıya kaçması ve istenmeyen, rahatsız edici mesajlar gönderilmesi sosyal medya tacizine sebebiyet vermektedir. Ayrıca sürekli olarak insanların sosyal medya hesaplarını kontrol etmek ileri düzeyde sosyal medya bağımlılığına dönüşebilir. Bu araştırmanın amacı üniversite öğrencilerinin sosyal medyadaki stalklama durumlarının incelenmesidir. Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden olgubilim deseni benimsenmiştir. Araştırmada yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak 27 öğrenci ile görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen verilerin analizinde içerik analizi kullanılmıştır. Katılımcıların sosyal medyanın stalklamaya etkisi konusundaki görüşleri içerik analizi ile kodlanarak yedi farklı tema halinde sunulmuş, kendi tecrübeleri ise kelime bulutlarıyla görselleştirilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda katılımcıların en çok merak duygusuyla hareket edip sosyal medyada sıklıkla yakın çevrelerini stalkladıklarını ve sosyal medyanın erişim kolaylığı sayesinde stalklama eyleminin daha popüler olduğu görülmüştür. Ayrıca stalklamaya maruz kalan bireylerin günlük hayatlarında daha tedirgin oldukları ve bu durumun onlara rahatsızlık verdiği gözlemlenmiştir. Aşırı stalklamanın bağımlılığa yol açabileceği ve bunun hakkında önlemler alınması gerektiği saptanmıştır. Sonuçlara dayanarak sosyal medyada stalklama eylemi hakkında farklı öneriler getirilmiştir. Buna örnek olarak stalking bir bağımlılığa dönüşmeden önce psikolojik destek alınması, sosyal medyaya ayrılan zamanın sınırlandırılması ve çeşitli farkındalık çalışmalarının yapılması gibi önlemler alınabilir. Gelecek araştırmalar için stalking olgusu lise seviyesindeki öğrencilerle incelenebilir ve bir durum çalışması geliştirilebilir.</p>

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INTRODUCTION

In today's world, social media takes up an important part of daily life in our digitalized world with the rapid development of the internet. The definitions of this term are generally made within the framework of digital technologies that focus on the content created by users or interaction (Carr & Hayes, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Howard and Parks (2012) defined social media as platforms where personal messages, news, ideas, and cultural products are presented as content in a digital environment. Examples of these include platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Reddit, or Pinterest. The innovations brought by Web 2.0 have enabled people to use social media as a new communication tool. In addition, users can convey their feelings, thoughts, and actions to other users through these platforms without time or space limitations (Güleç & Köker, 2021). The impact of media, particularly social media, on individuals' perceived reality and their interactions with it shapes worldviews and everyday experiences (Sandal, 2023).

According to the January 2023 data from the Datareportal website, the number of social media users in Turkey is 62.55 million, which constitutes 73.1% of the population. Individuals' easy access to the internet and the ongoing development and widespread use of technology are also increasing the usage of social media platforms. Especially during the COVID-19 period, when face-to-face communication was restricted, social media has become an even more important tool for facilitating communication and sharing information (Lelisho et al., 2023). The escalation of this situation and its negative impact on people's daily lives also bring about a level of social media usage that resembles addiction, as it begins to affect individuals adversely (Hou et al., 2019).

Addiction in the digital world can be defined as an individual's unconscious and uncontrolled unlimited use of technology by losing control over the use of technology (Olcaý, 2018). Social media addiction can develop due to various reasons. These may include habits of spending time on social media, as well as concerns about the number of likes, followers, or social status and psychological factors such as mood disorders, loneliness, and boredom. As a result of this situation, individuals create a social identity for themselves and act within the framework of their social identity rather than their own identity (Esen & Yengin, 2021).

One of the main reasons for using social media platforms is to establish an interpersonal communication network. However, the fact that people obtain various information about others by observing and monitoring them (Fox & Moreland, 2015) forms the basis of the concept of "stalking", which has gained increasing interest recently. Although this term has entered the lives of many people through social media, it is also mentioned in the field of law. This term refers to intrusive and repetitive behaviors carried out by the perpetrator and unwanted by the victim (Meloy, 2007; Sheridan et al., 2001). In the context of social media, stalking can be defined as an individual monitoring others through social media platforms, continuously and unwantedly following or harassing them. This desire stems from the desire to access more information about people and to share this information (Bogolyubova et al., 2018). Social media stalking relies primarily on online access (Pang & Quan, 2024).

The concept of stalking includes behaviors such as repeatedly checking someone's profile or posts, sending unwanted messages or comments, and even creating fake accounts to access private information. The constant emergence of new technologies in the realm of social media makes the protection of data privacy increasingly challenging (Sales et al., 2024). In the literature, social media stalking is also referred to as social surveillance (Marwick, 2012), interpersonal surveillance (Tokunaga, 2015), and Facebook stalking (Lyndon et al., 2011). The widespread use of social media has made stalking easier and made it a tool for unwanted behaviors such as online harassment (Fox, 2016). In addition, people's desire to constantly monitor others' social media profiles and curiosity lead to impulsive participation in social media (Fox & Moreland, 2015). Pang and Quan (2024) emphasized that individuals with FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) more likely to participate in social media stalking.

Considering that students are the most active users of the Internet and have a high level of familiarity with and acceptance of new technologies (Sales et al., 2024), it can be inferred that social media usage is more prevalent among them. They prefer to choose a variety of social media platforms as their primary means of connecting with others (Zhu et al., 2023). Consequently, it can be argued that both engaging in social media stalking and being subjected to it are common occurrences among students. This situation can significantly impact students' educational lives, work, friendships and family relationships negatively. Based on this, this study aims to investigate the social media stalking situations of university students who are in a period when their awareness of responsibility for these relationships increases.

In the literature review, it was observed that there are a limited number of qualitative studies in which the participants are especially young people and their opinions about being subjected to stalking or practicing stalking behaviors. In this context, it is anticipated that investigating students' levels of engagement in stalking or being subjected to it and their opinions on the matter may serve as valuable insight for future research on how serious this situation may be among young people and contribute to the literature. In addition, it is aimed at raising awareness among the students participating in the study by taking into account the students' social media usage habits, various stalking behaviors, experiences of being subjected to stalking, and their views on this situation.

METHOD

Research Design

This study, which aims to investigate university students' social media stalking, is structured within the framework of the phenomenological design, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Phenomenology is an approach that aims to reach the essence of experiences, perceptions, or events and focuses on them in depth (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Phenomenology aims to measure, observe, and interpret the situations experienced by individuals using scientific methods.

Participants

The study was conducted with the participation of 27 university students selected using criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods. In criterion sampling, the researcher tries to reach the sample size by considering certain criteria in advance (Yıldırım, 2021). The criteria used in the selection of the sample group in this study can be listed as follows: students being between the ages of 18-25, having at least one social media, actively using social media, and voluntarily participating in the study. The demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS		STUDENTS	f
Gender	Female	S1, S3, S5, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S13, S14, S16, S17, S20, S23, S25	15
	Male	S2, S4, S6, S12, S15, S18, S19, S21, S22, S24, S26, S27	12
Most Used Social Media Platform	Instagram	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S7, S9, S10, S11, S13, S14, S15, S17, S19, S20, S21, S23, S24, S25	19
	Twitter	S6, S8, S12, S18, S22, S27	6
	Other (WhatsApp, Discord)	S16, S26	2
Daily Time Spent on Social Media	1-2 hours	S1, S2, S6, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S16, S18, S23, S24, S26, S27	14
	3-4 hours	S3, S5, S7, S8, S15, S17, S19, S21, S22	6
	5 hours and more	S4, S14, S20, S25	4
Ownership of Anonymous Account on Social Media	Yes	S4, S5, S6, S8, S14, S16, S22, S23	8
	No	S1, S2, S3, S7, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S15, S17, S18, S19, S20, S21, S24, S25, S26, S27	19
Engagement in Stalking on Social Media	Yes	S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S16, S17, S18, S19, S20, S21, S23, S24, S25, S27	22
	No	S2, S9, S15, S22, S26	5
Total			27

Research Instruments and Processes

A semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool in the research. A 10-question interview form was prepared to obtain detailed information regarding the investigation of students' stalking situations on social media. Before the interview form was administered, it was created based on a literature review and innovations that make it easier to follow people on social media platforms. The form was then reviewed by two experts in the field of educational technologies and finalized. Before starting the interview, the participants were informed about the study, and it was stated that the data would be used only for academic purposes and the names of the participants would be kept confidential.

As the first part of the study, demographic information questions were asked to determine the participants' gender, age, the most frequently used social media platform, the daily time spent on social media, whether they have an anonymous social media account, and whether they check the accounts of people they know or do not know on social media in the first section of the interview form. The second section of the form included questions about the stalking situation of the participants, whether they were subjected to it, and their views on stalking.

The interview questions asked in the second part of the study aimed to reveal the participants' own experiences regarding stalking, the emotions evoked by this situation, the reasons for engaging in stalking, the potential impact of stalking on people, its consequences, the effect of social media on stalking, and the measures that can be taken against it.

In the present study, the interviews were conducted by the researcher at a mutually agreed-upon time, considering the availability of the students. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom and Microsoft Teams platforms. Each interview lasted approximately 10–15 minutes. The students were informed about the research in advance, and their permission was obtained to record the interview via video or audio recording.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed by the content analysis method. While the participants' own experiences were presented as word clouds, the opinions on social media stalking were presented under seven different themes based on the codes made in three categories.

Before starting the data analysis process, the collected data were reviewed. Interviews with 27 participants were video recorded with the consent of the participants, and these recordings were converted into a Microsoft Word document by the researcher and transcribed word by word. Each participant was assigned names starting from S1 to S27. Participants with different demographic characteristics were included in the study to increase the external validity of the research. Since the data collection process was conducted online, the participants participated in the research in an environment where they felt comfortable.

Participants' views on stalking on social media were categorized under themes, and common expressions were grouped. Codes were first defined, and then themes were determined. The researcher tried to group the common views of the participants in a reasonable way.

The obtained data were compared with the interviews conducted with the participants to verify their accuracy. To ensure internal reliability, the data were described and presented without interpretation. In the findings section, direct quotations from the participants were included. In addition, the data were analyzed by both the researcher and another field expert. In order to increase validity and reliability, the interviews were video recorded and various notes were taken by the researcher. During the transcription process, each word was written meticulously. In order to support the reliability of the research, the findings were confirmed with various sources in the literature.

Ethic

Ethics Committee: Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Ethics Committee.

Date: 15/05/2023

Meeting number: 07

Decision number: 2023/07-10

FINDINGS

This study aimed to investigate university students' social media stalking situations. In presenting the findings of the study, the opinions on social media stalking were initially coded through content analysis. The results were categorized under three main themes: opinions on the impact of social media stalking on people, opinions on the impact of social media on stalking, and opinions on preventive measures against social media stalking. These themes were further divided into seven sub-themes: violation of personal life, becoming addicted, accessibility, normalization, privacy settings, personal measures, and official measures. Subsequently, participants' own experiences regarding stalking were visualized with word clouds, categorized under three themes: accounts they stalk on social media, reasons for engaging in stalking on social media, and feelings when subjected to stalking on social media.

Participants' Opinions on Social Media Stalking

In this part of the research, the opinions of the participants on what effect stalking on social media can have on people, the consequences of this, the effect of social media on stalking and the measures that can be taken against this situation are given. Different codes were obtained as a result of the interviews with the participants. Seven different themes were obtained by organizing these codes in the framework of predetermined categories. Themes and categories are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Categories and Themes Formed as a Result of Coding

Categories	Themes
1. Opinions on the Impact of Social Media Stalking on People	Violation of Personal Life Becoming Addicted
2. Opinions on the Impact of Social Media on Stalking	Accessibility Normalization
3. Opinions on Preventive Measures Against Social Media Stalking	Privacy Settings Personal Measures Official Measures

According to this table, the participants stated that stalking on social media invades people's personal lives and if it is excessive, it may cause addiction. Regarding the impact of social media on stalking, they mentioned that almost everyone has easy access to these platforms, leading to an increase in stalking. In addition, some participants mentioned that this situation is gradually becoming normalized. Regarding the measures that can be taken against stalking, the participants argued that privacy settings should be reviewed, and personal measures should be taken if necessary. Apart from these cases, people stated that official measures should also be taken against excessive stalking.

1. Opinions on the Impact of Social Media Stalking on People

In this category, the participants expressed their opinions on the impact of social media stalking on people. The total number of codes in this category is 47. Based on the codes, two themes were obtained under the names of "Violation of Personal Life" and "Becoming Addicted". The codes are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Impact of Social Media Stalking on People

Themes	Codes	Number of People	Number of Coding
Violation of Personal Life	Private Life	11	13
	Annoying	10	12
	Harassment	4	4
Becoming Addicted	Obsession	7	9
	Addiction	6	6
	Jealousy	3	3

Violation of Personal Life

The theme of violation of personal life focuses on the impact of social media stalking on people. Participants consider excessive stalking of individuals on social media a violation of their personal lives. They stated that individuals' private lives started to be scrutinized with the widespread use of social media, and this situation was annoying. S19 commented on this issue: *"Excessive stalking is a kind of harassment in my opinion, it is annoying that personal lives are followed to such an extent."* S16 said, *"I think that social media lives are more noticeable than real lives,"* while S15 stated, *"The fact that someone is constantly monitoring people prevents them from opening up their own lives."* and referred to the individuals who want to share on their social media accounts but think that they will face the negative effects of stalking.

Becoming Addicted

The participants stated that if individuals engage in excessive stalking, this situation may become an obsession and turn into an addiction. They stated that the main reason for this is a sense of curiosity, and that both the stalker and the stalked person will be negatively affected by this situation. The opinions of S13 and S5 on this subject are as follows:

S13: *"In excessive stalking, sometimes people exaggerate their curiosity too much, and it leads to addiction. The stalker can see that someone is posting from someplace and can constantly go there and chase after them in real life. They can be obsessed."*

S5: *"They may overestimate that person, placing them at the center of their focus. I think this can*

harm them both in their private lives and social lives."

2. Opinions on the Impact of Social Media on Stalking

In this category, the opinions of the participants on the impact of social media on stalking were stated. The total number of codes in this category is 49. Based on the codes, two themes were obtained under the names "accessibility" and "normalization". The codes are given in Table 4.

Table 4. *The Impact of Social Media on Stalking*

Themes	Codes	Number of People	Number of Coding
Accessibility	Easiness	17	26
	Reachable	10	13
Normalization	Widespread use	5	5
	Legality	4	5

Accessibility

It was stated by most of the participants that the fact that social media is more accessible today with the development of the Internet provides a great convenience for people to do stalking. The participants stated that the fastest and easiest way to access information about a person is social media, and as a result, the act of stalking is much simpler, and negative situations may arise.

S10: *"Before people were doing research themselves, they were even spying on others. Now there is no need to physically stalk someone. You can immediately find out what they are doing, where they are going, and who they are talking to, all at the touch of a phone."*

S27: *"The existence of social media already makes it easier; it happens even in the simplest things. Who is this person? What's their deal?"*

Some participants discovered the concept of stalking through social media and suggested that social media paved the way for stalking.

S14: *"I discovered the concept of stalking on social media; I did not know such a thing before. The fact that people can surf whenever they want, for example, makes access easier."*

S12: *"Thanks to the easy access to social media, stalking is already possible. Without social media, it is a little more like being a pervert."*

Participant S7 addressed the access brought by anonymity in social media with the comment, *"It has become an environment where people can be secretive; they can now do stalking easily. They can open fake accounts, and after looking at something, for example, stories, they can block the account so that it does not appear."*

Normalization

Some participants stated that this situation has become normalized due to the widespread stalking on social media, while others said that excessive stalking cannot be a completely normal situation. In this case, the participants again referred to the privacy of personal life. The comments of S6 and S9 on this matter are as follows:

S6: *"This is a kind of spying. Now, even a five-year-old child can do this behind your back, it has become normalized in society..."*

S9: *"I think it can limit people's personal space of freedom, it is not a normal thing, I would be uncomfortable with it. If the other person does not want it, it should be accepted by the other party."*

In addition, some of the participants mentioned that stalking has become a normal situation because it is legal in social media. S2's comment on this matter is as follows:

S2: *"The fact that everyone can follow or access anyone makes people uneasy. Since you cannot*

follow them on the street, this time they can follow them on social media. I think it is a very dangerous kind of legalization."

3. Opinions on Preventive Measures Against Social Media Stalking

In this category, the opinions of the participants on what measures can be taken against being stalked on social media were stated. The total number of codes in this category is 29. Based on the codes, three themes were obtained under the names of "Privacy Settings", "Personal Measures" and "Official Measures". The codes are given in Table 5.

Table 5. *Preventive Measures Against Social Media Stalking*

Themes	Codes	Number of People	Number of Coding
Privacy Settings	Account privacy	10	12
	Protecting personal information	4	10
Personal Measures	Be careful of posts	3	3
	Getting support	1	1
Official Measures	Law enforcement	2	2
	Companies	1	1

Privacy Settings

The majority of the participants stated that the most important measure that can be taken against social media stalking is for individuals to review their privacy settings on social media. According to the participants, using private accounts and not sharing personal information in the accounts can be a solution against stalking. They said that individuals who use a public account and constantly share their personal information cause being uncomfortable stalked by other people. The comments of S19 and S22 on this subject are as follows:

S19: *"It is an uncomfortable situation if the account is public and if appears on the Explore page, you can already find yourself in all social media networks, so you can be stalked more."*

S22: *"Especially location, address, email or phone numbers make it very easy and dangerous, it varies from person to person. Privacy settings should be adjusted so that your e-mail, address, or phone number cannot be viewed by someone else."*

Personal Measures

Some of the participants argued that privacy is not a solution alone and that other measures should be taken personally. For example, S17's comment *"Even when the account is private, these accounts can be accessed from different sites. I think it is necessary to pay more attention to the shared content rather than having a private account."* and S24's comment *"There are many people on social media whose mental health we are not aware of. People have their responsibilities; private photos should not be shared, or they can impose restrictions."* both highlight that individuals should be careful about the content they share. S20 made the following comment about individuals sharing their personal information: *"We can no longer protect our personal information; our lives are spreading more openly with technological developments. If an individual shares personal information, where he/she is or such things, I think that person could be subjected to stalking."*

In addition, S27 mentioned that excessive stalking may have negative effects and that support should be sought in this case; *"There are malicious people after all. If it turns into a negative situation like harassment and so, for the person being stalked, I think measures should be taken. Psychological support can be taken."*

Official Measures

Some participants stated that no matter how many measures are taken by individuals, the person who wants to stalk will try every possible way, so law sanctions should be imposed in this regard. There was also

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a participant who mentioned that social media companies should also take some measures to prevent stalking. S25's comment on the official measure is as follows;

"People can still open fake accounts like their own and stalk others, so how effective are the measures taken? Maybe law enforcement can be increased more."

Participants Experiences Regarding Social Media Stalking

In this part of the study, the participants' own experiences with social media stalking are included. The data obtained were visualized with word clouds by determining three categories the accounts that the participants stalked on social media, the reasons for stalking, and their feelings in case of being subjected to stalking.

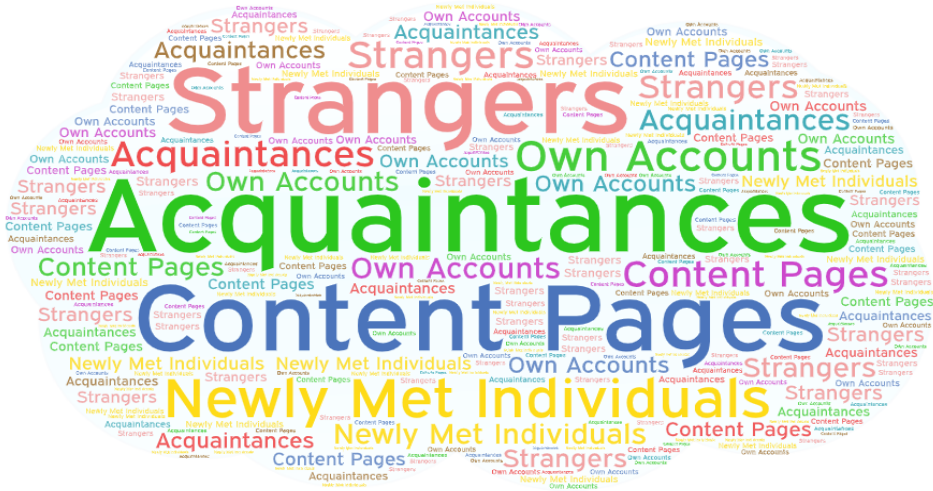


Figure 1. Accounts that the participants stalked on social media

As seen in Figure 1, the people that the participants stalk most on social media are acquaintances. These include friends, relatives, and close circles. Secondly, the accounts they stalk the most are content pages, news accounts, magazine, technology, or entertainment pages. On the other hand, some participants answered that they do not engage in social media stalking.



Figure 2. Participants' reasons for stalking on social media

In Figure 2, the reasons of the participants for stalking on social media can be seen. Most of the participants stated "curiosity" as the main reason. S6's comment on curiosity is as follows; *"After all, we reflect our selves on those social media accounts ... society is becoming more curious, they want to know*

things about everyone."

In addition, users who follow content pages also stated that they stalk these accounts for information exchange and fun.

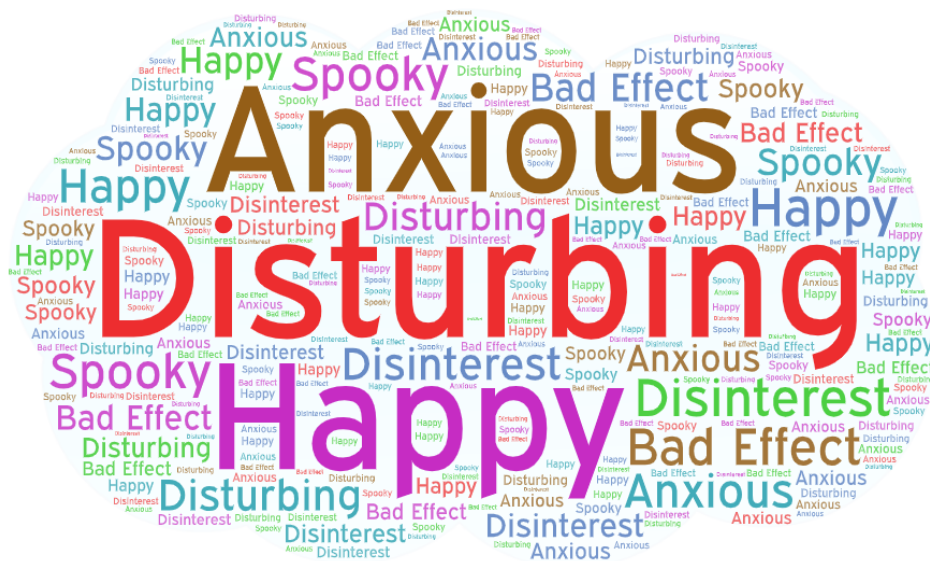


Figure 3. Participants' feelings in case of being subjected to stalking on social media

The emotions of the participants in case of being subjected to stalking on social media are given in Figure 3. Accordingly, while the participants frequently expressed that they were disturbed by this situation, they also stated that this situation made them feel anxious. S9 stated this situation as follows; *"I was constantly blocking an account and from about thirty-five, forty different accounts, the person was sending me requests again and again in a disturbing way. ... I had already blocked their account. Of course, it was disturbing because they were stalking me from a different account."*

On the other hand, the participants who are the social media managers of some pages and share the places they have travelled or their works on their accounts stated that they felt happy in case of stalking.

S4: *"Honestly, I feel happy, they have seen our works and they are inspired by us."*

S8: *"It makes me happy when people visit my profile and see that I have achieved something."*

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

One of the problems that have emerged with the digitalization of the world is the concept of stalking, which has recently gained popularity on social media. With the increasing spread of these platforms, accessibility and reach for personal information have also increased. The fact that mostly young people prefer social media means they are affected the most by the problems that may occur. Especially with the common prevalence of stalking among young people, it can become a serious problem. In this study, the stalking situations of university students and their opinions about them were analyzed.

Analyzing the participants' opinions on social media stalking, seven different themes emerged based on the codes made under three categories. While there are themes of violation of personal life and becoming addicted in the opinions of the participants about the impact of social media stalking on people, there are themes of accessibility and normalization in the opinions about the impact of social media on stalking. Finally, there are the themes of privacy settings, personal measures, and official measures in the opinions on the preventive measures against social media stalking. Participants believe that social media brings personal lives to the forefront and consider stalking to be against the privacy of personal life. Swenson-Lepper and Kerby (2019) also state that one of the biggest ethnic problems on social media is privacy. The privacy of individuals is becoming freely accessible to everyone in the age of surveillance and consumption (İsmayilzada & Topçu, 2019). In the theme of becoming addicted, the participants stated that excessive

curiosity can lead to stalking, and as a result, both sides can be negatively affected. If this situation cannot be prevented, the addiction may lead to problems such as anxiety disorder, depression, and insomnia in individuals (Hou et al., 2019). According to Dhir et al. (2021), it was revealed that the act of stalking other students between the ages of 18 and 25 caused excessive social media use, and this situation came to the point of addiction in individuals and negatively affected their sleep quality. The age of technology we live in offers easy accessibility, so interest in social media is increasing day by day (Özdemir, 2019).

In the study, the participants' opinions on the impact of social media on stalking show that the opportunity of access provides a great convenience, and therefore this convenience leads to the act of stalking. According to Fox and Moreland (2015), the "friends" tab on Facebook provides great convenience in discovering an individual's communication network. In addition, a participant stated that social media is the fastest and easiest way to obtain information about others, thanks to its accessibility, and that individuals can easily become anonymous. Swenson-Lepper and Kerby (2019) mentioned that the anonymization of individuals can be considered a major problem in the context of privacy and stalking. Some of the participants think that the concept of stalking has become normalized, or, in other words, legalized, with the introduction of social media into our lives. On the other hand, some participants believe that being stalked can limit a person's personal space of freedom and do not perceive this concept as normal.

Finally, the theme of privacy settings comes to the fore in the opinions of the participants on the preventive measures that can be taken against stalking on social media. Participants emphasized account privacy in preventing stalking. According to the participants, using a public account causes people to be stalked. In the research conducted by Güleç and Köker (2021), participants also mentioned that they stalked accounts that were not private. According to Koç's (2019) research finding, in which the phenomenon of digital security in Turkey is discussed, 43% of the participants stated that their social media accounts are public. Koç (2019) mentioned that the desire to be recognized and seen on these platforms is considered more important than the privacy of private life. In this study, the participants stated that it is also important to protect the personal information in the accounts. Haron and Yusof (2010) stated that the act of stalking has a positive aspect in promoting caution in sharing personal information on social media. In addition to privacy, participants stated that other measures should be taken against being stalked. These measures include being careful about the content shared and seeking support from the individual's trusted circle in case they experience negative effects. In cases where these measures are insufficient, participants stated that law enforcement should be initiated, and social media companies can also take measures against stalking.

Examining the participants' experiences regarding stalking on social media, it can be said that the majority stalked other accounts on social media, and these accounts mostly belonged to the participants' close circle or content pages. In addition, some participants stated that they also stalked individuals they had just met. The fact that individuals stalk a person they have just met shows that they use this behavior as a means of socialization and that they do it to increase the interactions between them (Güleç & Köker, 2021). Participants stated that they engage in stalking mainly out of curiosity, seeking information, inspiration, or entertainment motives. In a study conducted by Tokunaga (2011) with romantic partners, emotions such as insecurity and jealousy trigger individuals to collect information about what their partners are doing on social media, which leads individuals to stalk their partners regularly. In another study conducted in this context, individuals stated that they also used social media to obtain information about the lives of their ex-partners (Lyndon et al., 2011).

In addition to the fact that people stalk what they are curious about others on social media, individuals who are subjected to this situation may experience a sense of anxiety or insecurity or face problems such as privacy violations, discomfort, and security concerns. In this study, students stated that when they were subjected to stalking, they were mostly feeling disturbed and anxious, and that it had a bad effect on them. In another study, it was revealed that participants experienced anxiety, depression, and excessive alertness as a result of stalking (Haron & Yusof, 2010). In another study (Swenson-Lepper & Kerby, 2019), students expressed that they were concerned even about the possibility of university institutions examining students'

social media accounts. These results emphasize the potential harms of stalking young people. On the other hand, participants who share their work or use a business account stated that in cases of being stalked, they feel happy that people see their achievements. Receiving likes, comments, and shares on social media posts can increase self-confidence and give a sense of approval (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Tandon et al. (2021) mentioned that the sense of happiness arising from social media may cause another social media problem, and therefore, there is a need for research on this matter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the interactions on social media may go unnoticed, they serve as a kind of tool for the act of stalking, and it is difficult for individuals to avoid this act (Lyndon et al., 2011). Stalking is a serious problem, especially for the young generation, who are exposed to social media the most. The new features of social media platforms make it much simpler for individuals to engage in stalking. If this is not prevented, this action may turn into an addiction and have negative consequences for both parties. It can cause psychological and emotional problems for the individual subjected to stalking.

In this study, university students' stalking situations were investigated, and various suggestions were made on the subject. Stalking should be prevented before it reaches an addiction level, and individuals can receive psychological support in this regard. Restricting the time allocated to social media can also be a solution. In addition, various awareness-raising activities can be carried out for both the stalker and the individuals subjected to them. Individuals should revise their privacy settings and friend lists on social media accounts and be more cautious about people they do not know on social media. In addition, personal information should be limited. Individuals who experience emotional and psychological problems as a result of stalking should be supported by trusted people. If this situation is excessive, legal remedies should be applied if necessary. Apart from individuals, social media companies should also take various measures and provide users with methods to defend themselves against stalking.

For future research, stalking situations can be investigated in high school-level youth. Individuals' experiences of being subjected to stalking and the methods they follow in response can be examined within the framework of a case study.

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