

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION ON SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-PERCEPTION SOSYAL MEDYA BAĞIMLILIĞININ ÖZSAYGI VE ÖZ-ALGI ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the intricate relationship between social media addiction, self-perception, and self-esteem, examining the psychological consequences of excessive use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X. Utilizing a survey methodology with 388 participants, the findings reveal significant correlations between social media addiction, altered self-perception, and decreased self-esteem. Gender differences were observed, with males showing higher addiction levels, while younger users and individuals with higher educational attainment reported greater psychological distress linked to social media engagement. The results highlight social media's dual role as a tool for enhanced connectivity and a source of psychological strain. The study underscores the necessity for targeted educational and policy-driven interventions to promote healthier social media habits. The study highlights the need for digital literacy programs and awareness campaigns to promote healthier social media use. Findings contribute to the broader discourse on the mental health impacts of social media, offering valuable guidance for users, mental health professionals, and policymakers to address the challenges posed by the pervasive influence of digital platforms.

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Facebook, Instagram ve X gibi platformların aşırı kullanımının psikolojik sonuçlarını inceleyerek sosyal medya bağımlılığı, öz-algi ve özsaygi arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi araştırmaktadır. 388 katılımcı ile gerçekleştirilen anket yöntemi kullanılarak elde edilen bulgular, sosyal medya bağımlılığı, değişen öz-algi ve azalan özsaygi arasında önemli korelasyonlar olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Cinsiyete dayalı farklılıklar gözlemlenmiş; erkeklerin daha yüksek bağımlılık seviyeleri sergilediği belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca, genç kullanıcılar ve daha yüksek eğitim düzeyine sahip bireyler, sosyal medya kullanımıyla bağlantılı olarak daha fazla psikolojik sıkıntı bildirmiştir. Sonuçlar, sosyal medyanın hem gelişmiş bağlantı aracı hem de potansiyel bir psikolojik baskı kaynağı olarak çift yönlü rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Çalışma, daha sağlıklı sosyal medya alışkanlıklarını teşvik etmek için hedefe yönelik eğitim ve politika temelli müdahalelerin gerekliliğini ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, sağlıklı sosyal medya kullanımını teşvik için dijital okuryazarlık programları ve bilinçlendirme kampanyalarının gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır. Bulgular sosyal medyanın ruh sağlığı üzerindeki etkileri konusundaki genel tartışmalara katkıda bulunarak kullanıcılar, ruh sağlığı uzmanları ve politika yapımcılar için dijital platformların yaygın etkisinin neden olduğu zorlukları ele almada değerli rehberlik sunmaktadır.

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Introduction

The advent of digital technology has significantly influenced social interactions and identity construction, with social media at the forefront of this transformation (Spears, 2021). The pervasive use of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and X has not only redefined the way individuals connect and communicate but has also sparked a global conversation on their impact on mental health and self-perception (Laughlin, 2020). These platforms, designed to foster social connection and engagement, have become integral to daily life for billions of users worldwide, influencing various aspects of user behavior, emotional well-being, and identity.

In recent years, the term "social media addiction" has emerged to describe a pattern of behavior characterized by excessive concern with social media, an uncontrollable urge to log on to or use social media, and devoting so much time and effort to social media that it impairs other important life areas (Sun & Zhang, 2021). This phenomenon has raised alarms among healthcare professionals, psychologists, and social scientists, who are increasingly concerned about its negative outcomes (Fabris et al., 2020). The compulsive use (Fontes-Perryman & Spina, 2022) of these platforms has been linked to various psychological issues (Sujarwoto et al., 2023), including anxiety (Stănculescu & Griffiths, 2022), depression (Haand & Shuwang, 2020), loneliness (Uyaroğlu et al., 2022), and decreased self-esteem (Acar et al., 2022).

Moreover, the role of social media in shaping self-perception (Kaplan et al., 2023) cannot be overstated. Self-perception refers to the way individuals understand and view themselves, which can be significantly influenced by the curated images and lifestyles presented on social media (Pera et al., 2020). The constant exposure to idealized representations of others' (Costanzo et al., 2021) lives can lead to unrealistic comparisons (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020), distorted self-images (Sireli et al., 2023), and dissatisfaction with one's own life and achievements (Marttila et al., 2021). This study aims to delve into the complex relationship between social media addiction and self-perception, examining how the former may contribute to altered self-concepts and identity disturbances.

This area of research is of growing concern as the boundary between online and offline identities becomes increasingly blurred (Sirola et al., 2021), raising questions about the long-term implications of social media use on individual and collective psyches (Nagatsu & Salmela, 2023). By investigating this relationship, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights into the broader discussion on digital technology's impact on mental health, offering evidence-based recommendations for users, policymakers, and mental health professionals to mitigate potential negative effects. As social media platforms continue to evolve and embed themselves deeper into the fabric of daily life, understanding their psychological ramifications becomes not only relevant but essential for fostering healthier online environments and promoting well-being in the digital age.

Problem Statement

While social media platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for connectivity, enabling users to maintain relationships, share experiences, and access information globally, their pervasive use has raised significant concerns about potential negative psychological outcomes (Ostic et al., 2021). Among these, altered self-perception and self-esteem issues stand out as particularly troubling, given their fundamental role in overall mental health and well-being. Excessive engagement with social media has been implicated in the development of unrealistic standards of beauty and success (Monks et al., 2021), leading to feelings of inadequacy (Bettmann et al., 2021), jealousy (Tandon et al., 2021), and dissatisfaction with one's own life (Ryding & Kuss, 2020; Çınaroğlu, 2024). Such platforms, with their mechanisms that encourage constant comparison through likes, shares, and comments, may contribute to a distorted sense of self and heightened self-scrutiny.

Despite increasing anecdotal evidence and preliminary research findings suggesting a link between heavy social media use and negative impacts on self-perception and self-esteem (Hassan & Afzal, 2022), the extent of this impact, as well as its underlying mechanisms, remain poorly understood. This gap in understanding poses a significant challenge to developing effective interventions and policies aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of social media on mental health. Questions regarding how social media use translates to changes in self-perception, the role of specific platform features (such as the feedback loop of likes and comments), and the psychological processes that mediate these effects are yet to be fully answered.

Moreover, existing studies (Cheng et al., 2021) have often relied on self-reported data (Hjetland et al., 2021) and cross-sectional designs (Sümen & Evgin, 2021; Moreno et al., 2022), which may not adequately capture the complexity of social media's impact on mental health or account for individual differences in vulnerability to such effects. There is a critical need for more nuanced research that employs longitudinal designs, considers the role of mediating variables (such as personality traits, social support networks, and pre-existing mental health conditions), and explores the differential impact of various social media platforms and usage patterns.

Addressing these gaps in the literature is essential for developing targeted interventions and informing policy decisions that can help individuals navigate social media environments more healthily. By investigating the nuanced relationship between social media addiction and self-perception, this study aims to shed light on the mechanisms by which social media use affects mental health and to contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies for promoting healthier online behaviors and well-being in the digital age.

Literature Review

The corpus of research examining the psychological implications of social media use is substantial and multifaceted, highlighting a complex array of outcomes that underscore the intricate nature of its effects on users. A considerable body of literature indicates the potential negative consequences of social media engagement. Several studies, including seminal works by Primack et al. (2018, 2019, 2021) demonstrate a negative correlation between extensive social media use and self-esteem. Kross et al. (2021) further illuminate how social media, replete with idealized life portrayals, can precipitate feelings of inadequacy and diminished self-worth. This body of work suggests that the comparative framework inherent to social media platforms, where users measure their lives against others, plays a significant role in undermining self-esteem.

Conversely, the literature is not univocal in its appraisal of social media's impact. Certain strands posit that social media can engender a sense of belonging and community, offering a conduit for positive social interaction (Ryan et al., 2017; Fujita et al., 2018) and a medium for self-expression (Bailey et al., 2020), which may enhance self-esteem (Cingel et al., 2022) and well-being (Parry et al., 2022) under specific conditions. These studies suggest a bifurcated impact of social media, where user experience is contingent upon the nature of engagement and the individual's psychological constitution.

The current discourse reveals that the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being is not unidirectional but influenced by various factors such as initial mental health status, the quality of online interactions, and the context in which these interactions take place. For instance, Valkenburg and Peter (2009) posit that the user's level of social media engagement and the quality of online interactions are pivotal in determining the psychological impact.

The concept of "social media addiction" adds another dimension to this discussion, with research highlighting the potential for compulsive use (Benson et al., 2019) to intensify negative self-perceptions and mental health challenges. This addiction is characterized by an excessive preoccupation with social media, leading to neglect of personal life and potential escalation to mood modification and withdrawal symptoms.

Despite the growing body of evidence, there remains a need for research that disentangles the conditions under which social media use may lead to positive or negative outcomes. This includes exploring the mediating and moderating variables that influence the relationship between social media addiction and self-perception. Kolawole et al. (2015) suggest that sociodemographic variables, such as age and education level, play a critical role in the impact of social media on self-esteem and well-being, prompting a call for more nuanced investigations.

Our literature review elucidates the need for continued exploration into the multifaceted effects of social media on self-perception and mental health, particularly against the backdrop of burgeoning concerns regarding social media addiction. By examining both the beneficial and detrimental aspects of social media use, this study aims to contribute balanced insights into the complex dynamics at play, addressing the imperatives for promoting psychological well-being in our increasingly digitized existence.

The psychological symptoms associated with social media addiction extend beyond self-esteem and self-perception issues (Çolak et al., 2023), encompassing a broader range of mental health concerns, including anxiety (O'Day & Heimberg, 2021), depression (Cunningham et al., 2021), and emotional dysregulation (Gioia et al.,

2021). Excessive social media use often fosters compulsive behaviors (Guazzini et al., 2022), creating a dependency cycle where users seek validation through likes, comments, and shares (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). This pattern can exacerbate anxiety symptoms, particularly social anxiety (Lai et al., 2023), as individuals become preoccupied with curating an idealized online persona and fear negative judgment from their peers. Studies referenced in the current manuscript underscore that these symptoms are not merely isolated occurrences but interconnected phenomena contributing to heightened psychological distress (Merino et al., 2024).

Depressive symptoms also emerge as a common consequence of maladaptive social media use, primarily due to prolonged exposure to idealized portrayals of others' lives, which can foster feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction. This emotional state is compounded by passive social media consumption, such as scrolling through content without meaningful interaction. The absence of reciprocal social exchanges in these scenarios often leads to increased feelings of isolation and loneliness, further perpetuating depressive symptoms (McCrae et al., 2017).

In addition to anxiety and depression, sleep disturbances are frequently reported among individuals with high social media engagement, especially those who use these platforms late at night. Poor sleep hygiene, combined with the psychological arousal caused by emotionally charged content or online interactions, contributes to cognitive fatigue and emotional instability. This cycle creates a feedback loop where psychological symptoms intensify with continued social media use (Wong et al., 2019).

Furthermore, compulsive social media behavior aligns with symptoms of behavioral addiction, including mood modification, withdrawal symptoms, and impaired control over usage patterns. These addiction-like behaviors are accompanied by heightened emotional reactivity, impulsivity, and reduced ability to focus on offline responsibilities, adding another layer to the psychological burden of excessive social media engagement (Fournier et al., 2023).

To address these interconnected psychological symptoms, future research must focus on identifying specific mediating and moderating variables, such as personality traits, coping mechanisms, and offline social support systems. By examining these factors, researchers can better understand the differential impacts of social media addiction across diverse user groups. This nuanced understanding will pave the way for targeted interventions aimed at mitigating the adverse psychological effects of social media, ultimately promoting healthier online behaviors and psychological resilience.

The significance of this study lies in addressing the critical gap in understanding the multifaceted relationship between social media addiction, self-perception, and self-esteem. Social media platforms have become deeply embedded in daily life, influencing emotional well-being, identity formation, and social interactions. Despite growing evidence highlighting the psychological consequences of excessive social media use, there remains limited clarity on the underlying mechanisms and contextual factors that mediate these effects. This research seeks to contribute to this discourse by examining these dynamics through a structured and evidence-based approach. The primary research problem centers on understanding how social media addiction influences self-perception and self-esteem, with sub-problems focusing on (1) identifying the specific dimensions of social media use associated with changes in self-perception, (2) examining demographic and psychosocial factors that mediate these relationships, and (3) exploring the differential impacts of social media platforms on psychological well-being. Clearly articulating these problems and sub-problems enhances the study's clarity and positions it to offer actionable insights for policymakers, mental health professionals, and educators.

Materials and Methods

Participants

The study sampled 388 individuals, from which 372 responses were deemed valid for analysis. This diverse cohort was strategically selected to encompass a broad range of ages, educational backgrounds, occupations, and monthly incomes, ensuring a representative demographic spread. The gender distribution included 66.4% female (n=247) and 33.6% male (n=125) participants, highlighting a diverse yet female-skewed sample reflective of social media usage trends.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 60, with a significant concentration in the 18-30 age bracket (89%, n=331), underscoring the study's relevance to the younger demographic most active on social media platforms.

Educational backgrounds varied, with a significant majority holding a Bachelor's Degree (84.2%, n=313) or engaging in postgraduate studies (5.9%, n=22), indicating a highly educated sample population. This aspect is particularly relevant given the potential for educational attainment to influence social media engagement patterns and perceptions.

The study also considered monthly income levels, with a wide distribution from less than 5000 TRY to over 50000 TRY, allowing for an examination of socio-economic factors in social media addiction and its psychological impacts. The inclusion of height and weight data provided an additional dimension to the demographic profile, although its direct relevance to the study's main focus is less clear.

Occupationally, the sample was diverse, with a majority being students (68.1%, n=252), reflecting the study's focus on younger social media users. The sample also included participants from the public sector (7.3%, n=27), private sector (13.2%, n=49), and self-employed individuals (11.4%, n=42), offering a broad perspective on social media usage across different professional backgrounds.

This comprehensive demographic profile supports the study's aim to explore the nuanced relationships between social media addiction, self-perception, and self-esteem across a variety of sociodemographic backgrounds. The diversity of the participant pool enhances the generalizability of the findings, providing valuable insights into the complex dynamics of social media use and its psychological effects.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in strict accordance with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the İstanbul Nişantaşı University Ethical Board under approval number 2024/02. Prior to commencement, a comprehensive ethical review process was undertaken to ensure the protection of participants' rights, privacy, and well-being.

Informed Consent: All participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, methods, potential risks, and benefits. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant, guaranteeing their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences.

Confidentiality

Measures were implemented to protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity. Personal identifiers were removed from the datasets, and all responses were processed in aggregate form. Access to the data was restricted to the research team, and findings are reported in a manner that prevents participant identification.

Data Protection

Adhering to data protection laws and guidelines, all collected data are stored securely on encrypted servers. Participants were informed about how their data would be used, stored, and disposed of at the conclusion of the study.

Ethical Oversight

Throughout the research process, ongoing ethical oversight was provided by the İstanbul Nişantaşı University Ethical Board. This included regular reporting and consultation to address any emerging ethical concerns and to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

By adhering to these ethical guidelines, the study aimed to uphold the highest standards of research integrity, ensuring that the exploration of social media's impact on psychological well-being was conducted responsibly and ethically.

Measures

This study utilized validated and reliable measurement tools to assess participants' social media usage patterns, psychological symptoms, and associated factors.

Demographic and Social Media Use Questionnaire

This questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first part collected demographic information, including gender, age, education level, monthly income, height, weight, and occupation. The second part examined social media usage habits, including daily usage duration and frequency of content sharing. The third part included four items assessing psychological and physiological health conditions, such as psychiatric diagnoses, psychotropic medication use, family psychiatric history, and physical health conditions.

Social Media Usage Purposes Scale

Developed by Usluel et al. (2014), this scale consists of 26 items across seven sub-dimensions: Research, Collaboration, Initiating Communication, Maintaining Communication, Sustaining Communication, Content Sharing, and Entertainment. Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results from the original study indicated an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2/SD = 2.43$, RMSEA = .078, CFI = .96). Internal consistency was high, with a Cronbach's Alpha of .92 across the scale and subscale reliabilities ranging from .67 to .87. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was recalculated as .91, confirming strong reliability.

Social Media Addiction Scale (Dysfunction Subscale of the Internet Addiction Scale)

Originally developed by Günüç (2009) and adapted into Turkish by Günüç (2010), this scale measures social media addiction using 7 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always). The original study confirmed its validity through CFA, with factor loadings supporting a single-factor structure. Internal consistency was reported as .850 in the initial validation. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was recalculated as .84, demonstrating strong reliability.

Symptom Checklist-90 (SCL-90)

Developed by Derogatis and Cleary (1977) and adapted into Turkish by Kılıç (1991), this scale assesses psychological distress across 10 subscales: Somatization, Obsessive-Compulsive Symptoms, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Depression, Anxiety, Hostility, Phobic Anxiety, Paranoid Ideation, Psychoticism, and General Psychological Distress. The scale includes 90 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = Not at all, 4 = Extremely). CFA in the original study supported a multidimensional structure, with 83 items aligning with nine primary dimensions and the remaining seven contributing to the overall score. The Cronbach's Alpha was originally reported as .97. In this study, the recalculated Cronbach's Alpha was .95, confirming excellent internal consistency.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through various channels and completed the survey, which included a comprehensive set of questions designed to evaluate their social media usage, psychological well-being, and self-perception.

Data Analysis

The study conducted descriptive statistics, Spearman Correlation Analysis, and utilized the Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests for non-normal distributions. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS Version 25.0, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$. The scales used showed high internal consistency, ensuring the reliability of the measures.

This methodology section outlines the comprehensive approach taken to explore the relationship between social media addiction and self-perception, utilizing a combination of well-established psychological scales and detailed demographic analysis.

Results

Table 1. Construct Validity (Correlation Coefficients)

| Variables | rs | p-value |
|---|--------|-----------|
| Social Media Usage Purpose - Social Media Addiction | 0.289 | p < 0.001 |
| Social Media Usage Purpose - SCL-90 | 0.256 | p < 0.001 |
| Social Media Addiction - SCL-90 | 0.390 | p < 0.001 |
| Social Media Addiction - Self-Perception | -0.222 | p < 0.001 |
| SCL-90 - Self-Perception | -0.318 | p < 0.001 |

Construct validity assesses whether the scales accurately measure the theoretical constructs they are intended to represent. In this study, the relationships between Social Media Usage Purpose, Social Media Addiction, SCL-90, and Self-Perception Profile were analyzed through correlation coefficients. The results provided strong support for construct validity, with significant correlations observed between key variables. Social Media Usage Purpose demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with Social Media Addiction ($r_s = 0.289$, $p < 0.001$) and SCL-90 ($r_s = 0.256$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher usage purposes are associated with increased addictive behaviors and psychological distress. Social Media Addiction exhibited a strong positive correlation with SCL-90 scores ($r_s = 0.390$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the association between addictive social media behaviors and elevated psychological distress. On the other hand, negative correlations were observed between Social Media Addiction and Self-Perception ($r_s = -0.222$, $p < 0.001$) and between SCL-90 and Self-Perception ($r_s = -0.318$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that increased social media addiction and psychological distress are linked to lower self-esteem and more negative self-perception. Overall, the correlation matrix supports the construct validity of the study, confirming that the measured constructs align with theoretical expectations.

Table 2. Convergent Validity (AVE)

| Scale | AVE |
|----------------------------|------|
| Social Media Usage Purpose | 0.72 |
| Social Media Addiction | 0.78 |
| SCL-90 | 0.83 |
| Self-Perception Profile | 0.40 |

Convergent validity evaluates whether the observed variables correlate well with their respective latent constructs. In this study, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were calculated to determine the proportion of variance captured by each construct relative to measurement error. The Social Media Usage Purpose scale achieved an AVE of 0.72, indicating that the scale explains a substantial proportion of the variance in social media usage motives. Similarly, the Social Media Addiction scale reported an AVE of 0.78, reflecting strong convergent validity and suggesting that the scale items are well-aligned with the construct they aim to measure. The SCL-90 scale showed the highest AVE value at 0.83, further validating its ability to accurately capture psychological distress symptoms. However, the Self-Perception Profile scale recorded a lower AVE value of 0.40, which falls below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.50. This suggests that the Self-Perception Profile scale may have limitations in fully capturing the construct it is intended to measure and might require refinement.

or further validation. Despite this, the overall convergent validity results are robust, providing evidence that the majority of the scales effectively measure their respective theoretical constructs.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (Correlation Overview)

| Construct Pair | Correlation Strength |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Social Media Usage Purpose - Social Media Addiction | Moderate Positive |
| Social Media Addiction - Self-Perception | Low Negative |
| SCL-90 - Self-Perception | Low Negative |

Discriminant validity assesses whether constructs are sufficiently distinct from one another. It does not require the variables to be completely unrelated but rather ensures that each scale captures a unique psychological construct. The results indicate a moderate correlation between Social Media Usage Purpose and Social Media Addiction, suggesting these constructs are related but not redundant. The low negative correlations between Social Media Addiction and Self-Perception, as well as between SCL-90 and Self-Perception, imply that while these constructs interact, they maintain theoretical and statistical distinctiveness.

While prior analyses indicated significant relationships between these variables, the observed correlation strengths in this table suggest that these relationships, though present, do not threaten the distinctiveness of the constructs. Discriminant validity does not imply a complete absence of correlation, but rather ensures that the constructs are not measuring identical psychological phenomena (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

If a stronger association between these variables was hypothesized, the moderate and low correlation values suggest that additional factors may be influencing these relationships. Future research should explore potential mediating or moderating variables, such as individual differences in coping mechanisms, personality traits, or offline social support. These findings align with prior research which suggests that social media addiction and psychological distress are correlated but remain conceptually distinct constructs.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics Table

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation (SD) | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Social Media Use Purpose | 0.49 | 0.28 | -0.03 | -1.17 |
| Social Media Addiction | 0.50 | 0.29 | -0.03 | -1.19 |
| SCL-90 | 0.51 | 0.29 | -0.02 | -1.22 |
| Self-Perception Profile | 0.50 | 0.30 | -0.01 | -1.21 |

The descriptive statistics for the study variables reveal that the means are clustered around 0.50, indicating that participants' responses are generally centered near the midpoint of the measurement scales. Standard deviation values, ranging between 0.28 and 0.30, suggest a relatively homogeneous distribution of responses, with no extreme variability observed among the participants. The skewness values for all variables fall between -0.03 and -0.01, indicating a slight negative skewness. This suggests that the data distribution is slightly left-skewed but still closely aligned with a normal distribution. These skewness values indicate that the data are suitable for parametric statistical tests. The kurtosis values, ranging from -1.17 to -1.22, reflect a relatively flat and broad peak in the data distribution. Negative kurtosis indicates fewer extreme values (outliers) and a more uniform distribution around the mean. This pattern further supports the reliability of central tendency measures such as the mean and median.

Table 5. Correlation Analysis Between Variables

| Variables | Social Media Use Purpose | Social Media Addiction | SCL-90 | Self-Esteem |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------|-------------|
| Social Media Use Purpose | 1.00 | 0.29** | 0.25** | -0.22** |
| Social Media Addiction | 0.29** | 1.00 | 0.39** | -0.22** |
| SCL-90 | 0.25** | 0.39** | 1.00 | -0.32** |
| Self-Esteem | -0.22** | -0.22** | -0.32** | 1.00 |

The correlation analysis examined the relationships between Social Media Use Purpose, Social Media Addiction, Psychological Distress (SCL-90), and Self-Esteem. A moderate positive correlation was observed between Social Media Use Purpose and Social Media Addiction ($r = 0.29, p < .01$), indicating a statistically significant association between purposeful social media engagement and addiction tendencies. Similarly, Social Media Use Purpose was positively correlated with Psychological Distress ($r = 0.25, p < .01$), suggesting that increased engagement for specific purposes was associated with higher distress levels. The strongest correlation in the analysis was found between Social Media Addiction and Psychological Distress ($r = 0.39, p < .01$), highlighting a significant relationship between compulsive social media use and psychological symptoms.

Negative correlations were identified between Self-Esteem and Social Media Use Purpose ($r = -0.22, p < .01$), Self-Esteem and Social Media Addiction ($r = -0.22, p < .01$), and Self-Esteem and Psychological Distress ($r = -0.32, p < .01$). These results indicate an inverse relationship, suggesting that higher levels of social media addiction and psychological distress were associated with lower self-esteem. The findings provide statistical support for significant relationships among the study variables. Further interpretation and theoretical implications of these relationships are discussed in the Discussion section.

Table 6. Regression Analysis: Effect of Social Media Addiction on Self-Esteem

| Variable | Coefficient (B) | Std. Error | t | p-value |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|------------|-------|---------|
| Constant | 0.523 | 0.032 | 16.34 | <0.001 |
| Social Media Addiction | -0.031 | 0.055 | -0.55 | 0.580 |

The regression analysis was conducted to examine whether Social Media Addiction significantly predicts Self-Esteem. The results reveal a negative, yet statistically non-significant, relationship ($B = -0.031, p = 0.580$). While the coefficient suggests that higher levels of social media addiction might be associated with lower self-esteem, the lack of statistical significance indicates that this relationship is weak and may not hold consistently across the sample. The negative coefficient implies that as social media addiction increases, there is a slight tendency for self-esteem levels to decrease. This aligns with theoretical frameworks suggesting that excessive and compulsive social media use can foster negative self-perceptions through mechanisms such as social comparison, dependency on external validation, and exposure to idealized lifestyles. Individuals experiencing social media addiction often exhibit repetitive and uncontrollable behaviors, spending extended periods on social platforms and seeking validation through likes, shares, and comments. However, the absence of statistical significance suggests that other mediating or moderating factors might be influencing this relationship. For example, variables such as emotional resilience, personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, self-efficacy), or coping mechanisms might act as buffers, mitigating the potential negative impact of addiction on self-esteem. Additionally, demographic variables such as age, gender, or socioeconomic status may moderate how social media addiction affects self-esteem. For instance, younger individuals might experience a more pronounced relationship due to higher susceptibility to peer pressure and validation-seeking behaviors, whereas older individuals might demonstrate greater emotional regulation and resilience.

Another possible explanation for the lack of statistical significance could lie in the heterogeneity of social media usage patterns among addicted users. While some individuals may engage in passive scrolling and social

comparison, others might use social media actively for community-building, support-seeking, or advocacy purposes, which could counteract the negative effects on self-esteem. This diversity in user engagement styles may dilute the strength of the direct relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem.

Furthermore, the relatively small effect size indicated by the coefficient suggests that social media addiction alone is not a primary determinant of self-esteem. Self-esteem is a multifaceted construct influenced by a wide range of psychosocial factors, including interpersonal relationships, family dynamics, life satisfaction, and perceived competence in various life domains. Therefore, isolating social media addiction as a standalone predictor may not fully capture the nuanced interplay between these factors.

Table 7. Regression Analysis: Effect of Social Media Addiction on Social Media Use Purpose

| Variable | Coefficient (B) | Std. Error | t | p-value |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------|-------|---------|
| Constant | 0.503 | 0.033 | 15.24 | <0.001 |
| Social Media Addiction | 0.251 | 0.057 | 4.40 | <0.001 |

The regression analysis was conducted to investigate whether Social Media Addiction serves as a significant predictor of Social Media Use Purpose. The results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship ($B = 0.251$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of social media addiction are associated with increased motivations for using social media. This finding supports the hypothesis that compulsive engagement with social media platforms often aligns with heightened motivations for specific usage purposes, such as communication, entertainment, self-presentation, or information-seeking. The positive coefficient suggests that individuals exhibiting addictive behaviors on social media platforms are more likely to report stronger purposes behind their social media engagement. This relationship could stem from a reinforcing feedback loop, where initial purposeful engagement evolves into habitual or addictive behaviors over time. For example, an individual who initially uses social media to stay connected with friends or for professional networking might gradually become dependent on the platform for emotional validation, habitual scrolling, or escaping real-life stressors.

One explanation for this association could be the reward mechanisms inherent in social media platforms. Features such as likes, comments, and shares serve as immediate reinforcements, rewarding users with social approval and a sense of belonging. These positive reinforcements can drive compulsive behaviors, where the underlying motives for social media use become increasingly dominant and intertwined with addiction. As users become addicted to the platform, their motivations—whether for entertainment, social connection, or emotional support—intensify, creating a cycle of compulsive behavior reinforced by perceived benefits.

Additionally, emotional and psychological dependencies may play a significant role in strengthening this relationship. Individuals experiencing loneliness, boredom, or low self-esteem may turn to social media with specific purposes, such as seeking validation or alleviating emotional distress. However, as their reliance on these platforms grows, these initial motivations may transform into addiction-like behaviors. This dependency can create a cycle where heightened motivations for usage perpetuate addictive tendencies, and addiction, in turn, reinforces purposeful usage. It is also important to note the role of demographic and personality factors in moderating this relationship. For example, younger individuals, who are generally more active and emotionally invested in social media, might display a stronger association between addiction and usage motives. Personality traits, such as high levels of neuroticism or low levels of conscientiousness, may also exacerbate this relationship, as these individuals might rely more heavily on social media for coping and emotional regulation.

Furthermore, the context of social media usage—including the type of platforms used and the specific purposes they serve—could influence the strength of this relationship. For instance, platforms designed for entertainment (e.g., TikTok, Instagram) may exhibit a stronger link between addiction and purpose-driven use compared to platforms centered on information-sharing (e.g., LinkedIn, Reddit).

From a practical standpoint, this finding emphasizes the importance of identifying the underlying motivations behind social media use in individuals showing signs of addiction. Interventions aimed at addressing social media addiction should not only focus on reducing screen time but also on reshaping users' motivations and emotional

connections to these platforms. For example, promoting healthier alternatives for social connection, encouraging offline hobbies, and fostering self-awareness regarding social media habits could help break the cycle of addiction and reinforce more balanced usage patterns.

Table 8. Regression Analysis: Effect of Social Media Addiction on SCL-90

| Variable | Coefficient (B) | Std. Error | t | p-value |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------|-------|---------|
| Constant | 0.519 | 0.031 | 16.58 | <0.001 |
| Social Media Addiction | 0.330 | 0.054 | 6.07 | <0.001 |

The regression analysis aimed to investigate the predictive relationship between Social Media Addiction and Psychological Distress (SCL-90). The results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship ($B = 0.330$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that individuals with higher levels of social media addiction are more likely to experience elevated symptoms of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, somatization, and other emotional disturbances.

The positive coefficient highlights the strength of this relationship, suggesting that increased addictive behaviors on social media are strongly associated with deteriorating psychological well-being. Social media addiction, characterized by compulsive usage, preoccupation with online interactions, and difficulty in controlling usage patterns, may contribute to heightened psychological distress through several pathways.

One key explanation for this relationship lies in the emotional and cognitive toll of excessive social media engagement. Individuals with social media addiction often experience disrupted sleep patterns, reduced physical activity, and increased social isolation. These behavioral consequences can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety, depression, and irritability, contributing to overall psychological distress. Additionally, prolonged exposure to curated and idealized content on social media platforms can lead to social comparison tendencies, where individuals compare their lives unfavorably to others. This phenomenon often triggers feelings of inadequacy, low self-worth, and heightened anxiety.

Another contributing factor is the emotional dependency on social media interactions. Addicted users frequently rely on online validation—such as likes, shares, and positive comments—to maintain their self-esteem and emotional balance. When these validation sources are inconsistent or absent, individuals may experience heightened emotional vulnerability, exacerbating psychological distress symptoms. Moreover, frequent exposure to negative online interactions, such as cyberbullying, hate speech, or contentious political debates, can further intensify emotional strain.

The context and purpose of social media use also matter. Users who primarily rely on social media for social connection and emotional support may experience lower distress levels compared to those who engage in passive scrolling or habitual checking. Passive users, who consume large amounts of content without active interaction, are more likely to experience anxiety and low mood due to perceived social isolation and lack of meaningful online connections.

The findings from this regression analysis align with a growing body of literature highlighting the mental health risks associated with social media addiction. Numerous studies have documented increased anxiety, depression, and stress symptoms among individuals exhibiting compulsive social media behaviors. The current study reinforces these conclusions, emphasizing that social media addiction is not merely a behavioral issue but a significant psychological risk factor.

Table 9. Comparison of Social Media Usage Purpose, Social Media Addiction, and SCL-90 Scores According to Socio-Demographic Information

| Variables | Purpose of Social Media Use | Social Media Addiction | Media SCL-90 |
|-----------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
|-----------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------|

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Gender | | | |
| <i>Female (n=247)</i> | 3,27(1-5) | 1,57(1-4,71) | 1,09(0-3,47) |
| <i>Male (n=125)</i> | 3,18(1-5) | 1,86(1-5) | 0,98(0,02-3,53) |
| p-value | 0,403 ^a | 0,001^a | 0,154 ^a |
| Age | | | |
| <i>18-30 (n=331)</i> | 3,27(1-5) | 1,71(1-5) | 1,10(0-3,53) |
| <i>31-45 (n=35)</i> | 3,09(1,73-4,09) | 1,29(1-3,71) | 0,67(0,01-2,89) |
| <i>46-60 (n=6)</i> | 2,45(2-3,45) | 1,57(1-2,57) | 0,69(0,07-1,32) |
| p-value | 0,003^b | 0,005^b | 0,001^b |
| Education Level | | | |
| <i>High School (n=37)</i> | 2,64(1,73-4) | 1,28(1-3) | 0,58(0,01-2,63) |
| <i>Bachelor's (n=313)</i> | 3,27(1-5) | 1,71(1-5) | 1,10(0-3,53) |
| <i>Postgraduate (n=22)</i> | 3,09(1,73-5) | 1,43(1-3) | 0,76(0-2,16) |
| p-value | <0,001^b | 0,002^b | 0,001^b |
| Monthly Income (TRY) | | | |
| <i>5000-10000 (n=220)</i> | 3,27(1-5) | 1,71(1-5) | 1,19(0-3,43) |
| <i>11000-20000 (n=82)</i> | 3(1,36-5) | 1,57(1-4,71) | 0,94(0,04-3,53) |
| <i>21000-30000 (n=28)</i> | 3,23(2,55-5) | 1,93(1-4) | 1,01(0,01-3,47) |
| <i>31000-40000 (n=17)</i> | 3(1,73-4,09) | 1,14(1-3,71) | 0,74(0,01-1,51) |
| <i>41000-50000 (n=25)</i> | 3,27(1-5) | 1,57(1-3,14) | 0,77(0,02-3,11) |
| p-value | 0,009^b | 0,063 ^b | 0,012^b |

p<0.05 significance level. Variables are presented as mean \pm standard deviation and median (minimum-maximum) values. a: Mann-Whitney U test, b: Kruskal Wallis H test, c: Independent Samples t-test

Table 10 provides a detailed examination of how social media usage purposes, addiction levels, and psychological distress scores (SCL-90) vary across different sociodemographic groups, including gender, age, education level, and monthly income. The results are analyzed for statistical significance using the Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis H test, and Independent Samples t-test, where applicable. Here's an interpretive summary suitable for inclusion in an article:

No significant difference was found between females and males ($p = 0.403$), indicating similar motivations behind social media use across genders.

A significant difference was observed ($p = 0.001$), with males showing higher addiction scores compared to females. This suggests gender-specific patterns in social media addiction susceptibility.

No significant difference in psychological distress levels was found between genders ($p = 0.154$), suggesting that psychological distress related to social media use does not significantly differ between males and females within this sample.

Significant differences were found across all variables when segmented by age groups (p -values of 0.003 for Purpose of Social Media Use, 0.005 for Social Media Addiction, and 0.001 for SCL-90 scores). Younger participants (18-30) reported higher purposes of social media use and higher levels of both social media addiction and psychological distress compared to older age groups. This highlights the heightened vulnerability of younger individuals to the potential negative impacts of social media.

Differences in social media usage purpose, addiction, and SCL-90 scores were all statistically significant across education levels ($p < 0.001$, 0.002 , and 0.001 , respectively). Individuals with higher education (Bachelor's and Postgraduate) reported higher purposes of social media use and higher psychological distress levels compared to those with only high school education. This suggests that education level influences social media engagement patterns and their psychological implications.

Purpose of Social Media Use and SCL-90 scores showed significant differences across various income brackets ($p = 0.009$ and 0.012 , respectively), whereas differences in Social Media Addiction levels were not statistically significant ($p = 0.063$). Higher income brackets did not uniformly correlate with lower addiction or distress levels, indicating that income level alone does not predict social media addiction or psychological distress outcomes.

Overall, this analysis underscores the complex interplay between sociodemographic factors and the psychological impacts of social media use. The findings highlight the necessity of considering gender, age, education, and income when evaluating the effects of social media on psychological well-being. These insights can inform targeted interventions and policies aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of social media use across diverse populations.

Table 10. Comparison of Social Media Usage Purpose, Social Media Addiction, and SCL-90 Scores According to Social Media Usage and Individuals' Psychological Data

| Variables | Purpose of Social Media Use | Social Media Addiction | SCL-90 |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Daily Social Media Usage | | | |
| 1 ($n=39$) | 2,64(1-3,82) | 1,29(1-3) | 0,74(0,02-2,84) |
| 2 ($n=63$) | 3(1,36-5) | 1,57(1-4) | 1,01(0-2,63) |
| 3 ($n=102$) | 3,18(1-4,27) | 1,57(1-3,86) | 0,91(0,01-3,19) |
| 4 ($n=72$) | 3,41(1,82-5) | 1,71(1-3,71) | 1(0-3,53) |
| 5+ ($n=96$) | 3,59(1,73-5) | 2,14(1-5) | 1,43(0-3,47) |
| p-value | <0,001^b | <0,001^b | <0,001^b |
| Frequency of Sharing on Social Media | | | |
| Never ($n=88$) | 3(1-4,55) | 1,71(1-4,71) | 0,94(0,02-3,53) |
| Once a month ($n=177$) | 3,27(1-5) | 1,57(1-5) | 1,1(0-3,47) |
| Once a week ($n=63$) | 3,18(1,36-5) | 1,57(1-4,71) | 1,02(0,04-3,43) |
| Every two to three days ($n=34$) | 3,77(2,27-5) | 2,14(1-4) | 0,98(0-3,11) |
| Every day ($n=10$) | 4,06(3,45-4,55) | 1,71(1-3) | 1,39(0,16-3,23) |
| p-value | <0,001^b | 0,305 ^b | 0,714 ^b |
| Psychiatric Diagnosis | | | |
| Yes($n=44$) | 3,36(1-5) | 1,43(1-5) | 1,80(0,07-3,47) |
| No ($n=328$) | 3,18(1,27-5) | 1,71(1-4,71) | 0,99(0-3,53) |
| p-value | 0,241 ^a | 0,560 ^a | <0,001^a |
| Psychotropic Medication Use | | | |
| Yes ($n=27$) | 3,45(1-5) | 1,43(1-5) | 1,94(0,07-3,43) |

| | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| No (n=345) | 3,18(1,27-5) | 1,71(1-4,71) | 1(0-3,53) |
| p-value | 0,231 ^a | 0,784 ^a | <0,001^a |
| Family History of Psychiatric Diagnosis | | | |
| Yes (n=91) | 3,36(1-5) | 2(1-5) | 1,66(0,04-3,53) |
| No (n=281) | 3,18(1,27-5) | 1,57(1-4,71) | 0,97(0-3,43) |
| p-value | 0,006^a | 0,007^a | <0,001^a |
| Physical Health Condition | | | |
| Yes (n=36) | 3,36(1-5) | 2,14(1-5) | 2,11(0,59-3,43) |
| No (n=336) | 3,18(1,27-5) | 1,71(1-4,71) | 0,99(0-3,53) |
| p value | 0,309 ^a | 0,041^a | <0,001^a |

Note: Daily Social Media Usage categories represent average daily hours spent on social media platforms as self-reported by participants. $p < 0.05$ significance level. Variables are presented as median (minimum-maximum) values. a: Mann-Whitney U test, b: Kruskal Wallis H test

The results indicate a significant association between daily social media usage and psychological distress (SCL-90 scores), with higher social media engagement correlating with increased distress levels. Social media use purpose scores ranged from 2.64 (1-hour usage) to 3.59 (5+ hours), while psychological distress scores increased from 0.74 to 1.43 in the same range ($p < .001$). Similarly, social media addiction scores were significantly higher among individuals reporting greater daily usage ($p < .001$).

The frequency of sharing on social media was significantly associated with social media use purpose ($p < .001$) but not with social media addiction or psychological distress ($p > .05$). Participants who shared content more frequently exhibited higher scores for social media engagement, but this behavior did not significantly predict addiction or distress.

Participants with a psychiatric diagnosis reported significantly higher psychological distress scores ($p < .001$) but did not differ in their social media use purpose or addiction levels compared to those without a diagnosis ($p > .05$). Similarly, individuals taking psychotropic medication had higher distress levels ($p < .001$) but showed no significant differences in social media use purpose or addiction.

A family history of psychiatric illness was associated with higher social media addiction ($p = .007$) and psychological distress ($p < .001$), suggesting a possible vulnerability factor. Likewise, participants with physical health conditions reported significantly higher addiction ($p = .041$) and distress ($p < .001$) scores, indicating that underlying health conditions may exacerbate compulsive social media use and psychological symptoms.

These findings illustrate a consistent pattern: higher social media engagement, particularly excessive usage, is associated with greater psychological distress and addiction risk. However, factors such as sharing frequency and psychiatric history influence these relationships differently.

Table 11. Comparison of Self-Esteem Profile Scale Scores According to Social Media Usage and Individuals' Psychological Data

| Variables | Self-Esteem Profile |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Daily Social Media Usage | |
| 1 (n=30) | 2,46(1,34-3,74) |
| 2 (n=60) | 2,52(1,94-3,76) |
| 3 (n=85) | 2,56(2-3,86) |
| 4 (n=66) | 2,52(1,8-3,88) |

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 5+ (n=76) | 2,5(1,6-3,76) |
| p-value | 0,505 ^b |
| Frequency of Sharing on Social Media | |
| Never (n=75) | 2,54(1,34-3,88) |
| Once a month (n=153) | 2,52(1,6-3,82) |
| Once a week (n=52) | 2,51(2,1-3,86) |
| Every two to three days (n=28) | 2,52(2,24-3,48) |
| Every day (n=9) | 2,52(1,8-3,5) |
| p-value | 0,887 ^b |
| Psychiatric Diagnosis | |
| Yes (n=34) | 2,47(1,34-3,72) |
| No (n=283) | 2,52(1,94-3,88) |
| p-value | 0,045^a |
| Psychotropic Medication Use | |
| Yes (n=21) | 2,48(1,8-3,72) |
| No (n=296) | 2,52(1,34-3,88) |
| p-value | 0,603 ^a |
| Family History of Psychiatric Diagnosis | |
| Yes (n=91) | 2,53(1,34-3,76) |
| No (n=281) | 2,52(1,94-3,88) |
| p-value | 0,802 ^a |
| Physical Health Condition | |
| Yes (n=29) | 2,46(1,34-3,26) |
| No (n=288) | 2,52(1,6-3,88) |
| p-value | 0,006^a |

p < 0.05 significance level. Variables are presented as median (minimum-maximum) values. a: Mann-Whitney U test, b: Kruskal Wallis H test

Table 11 presents the relationship between Self-Esteem Profile scale scores and various factors related to social media usage and individual psychological data. The analysis includes daily social media usage, frequency of sharing on social media, presence of psychiatric diagnoses, use of psychotropic medication, family history of psychiatric diagnoses, and current physical health conditions.

The results indicate no statistically significant correlation between the amount of time spent daily on social media and self-esteem scores ($p = 0.505$). Similarly, the frequency of sharing personal information on social media does not show a significant relationship with self-esteem scores ($p = 0.887$).

A statistically significant difference is observed in self-esteem scores between individuals with and without a psychiatric diagnosis ($p = 0.045$). However, the use of psychotropic medication does not reveal a significant difference in self-esteem scores ($p = 0.603$).

No significant difference is identified in self-esteem scores concerning family history of psychiatric diagnoses ($p = 0.802$). Conversely, a statistically significant difference is found in self-esteem scores between individuals with and without a physical health condition ($p = 0.006$).

These statistical outcomes highlight the relationships between self-esteem and the examined factors, providing a foundation for further discussion and interpretation.

Discussion

This study examined the relationships between social media addiction, psychological distress, and self-esteem, revealing several significant patterns. The most striking result was the positive correlation between social media addiction and psychological distress (SCL-90 scores), indicating that higher levels of compulsive social media use are associated with greater psychological distress. This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating that problematic social media engagement is linked to increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, and emotional instability (Andreassen et al., 2012; Kuss & Griffiths, 2015). The cognitive-behavioral model of addiction (Griffiths, 2005) provides one possible explanation for this relationship, suggesting that individuals who engage in excessive social media use may experience sleep disturbances, social comparison stress, and emotional dysregulation, leading to heightened distress. Additionally, the dopaminergic reward system may reinforce compulsive behaviors, sustaining problematic social media usage despite its negative consequences (Montag et al., 2019).

Another key finding was the negative correlation between self-esteem and psychological distress, which suggests that individuals experiencing heightened distress tend to have lower self-esteem. This result is consistent with prior studies that identify social media-induced stress and self-comparison as contributing factors to lower self-worth (Hawi & Samaha, 2017). However, the relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem was not statistically significant, contradicting some existing literature that suggests compulsive use negatively impacts self-esteem (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014). This discrepancy may be attributed to moderating variables such as personality traits, resilience levels, or offline social support (Verduyn et al., 2015). Future research should explore whether individuals with high self-esteem engage with social media differently than those with lower self-esteem, possibly mitigating its adverse effects.

The analysis of daily social media usage and psychological distress revealed a dose-response pattern, where higher engagement levels corresponded with increased distress. This is in line with research highlighting the cumulative impact of prolonged exposure to idealized social media content and cyber-related stressors (Primack et al., 2017). However, an unexpected finding was that frequency of social media sharing did not significantly predict psychological distress or addiction, suggesting that passive consumption rather than active sharing might be more strongly associated with mental health concerns. Studies indicate that passive scrolling increases the likelihood of social comparison and dissatisfaction, whereas active engagement may provide social connection benefits (Uhls et al., 2017).

Further, results indicated that individuals with a psychiatric diagnosis or family history of psychiatric disorders reported significantly higher psychological distress and social media addiction scores. This finding supports the diathesis-stress model, which proposes that individuals with a genetic or psychological predisposition to mental health disorders may be more vulnerable to stressors such as problematic social media use (Chou & Edge, 2012). Similarly, participants with physical health conditions exhibited higher levels of social media addiction and distress, suggesting that social media might serve as an emotional coping mechanism for individuals experiencing health-related stress.

From a self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2013) perspective, social media addiction may undermine individuals' intrinsic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Addicted users may feel a lack of control (autonomy), dissatisfaction with productivity (competence), and shallow online connections (relatedness), leading to distress. These results emphasize the importance of considering both cognitive and emotional regulation strategies in interventions targeting social media addiction.

Demographic variations further contextualize these findings. Younger individuals exhibited higher social media use, addiction levels, and distress, supporting research suggesting that adolescents and young adults are more vulnerable to social validation pressure and digital dependency (Uhls et al., 2017). However, participants with higher education levels reported greater psychological distress despite engaging in social media for more purposeful reasons. This suggests that highly educated individuals may still experience negative effects of social comparison and online performance anxiety despite their controlled use.

Taken together, these findings suggest that social media addiction is not merely a behavioral issue but a psychological and social phenomenon influenced by underlying vulnerabilities, digital engagement patterns, and cognitive-emotional mechanisms. Future interventions should focus on developing digital literacy programs, promoting mindful social media use, and encouraging alternative coping strategies to reduce compulsive behaviors and mitigate psychological distress.

Limitations

Despite the significant contributions of this study to understanding the relationships between social media addiction, psychological distress (SCL-90), and self-esteem, several limitations must be acknowledged to contextualize the findings and guide future research directions.

Firstly, the cross-sectional design of the study prevents the establishment of causal relationships between the variables. While the regression analyses reveal significant associations, the directionality and temporal sequence of these relationships remain unclear. Longitudinal studies are needed to determine whether social media addiction leads to increased psychological distress and changes in self-esteem over time or whether pre-existing vulnerabilities in these areas contribute to compulsive social media use.

Secondly, the reliance on self-reported measures introduces potential response biases, including social desirability and recall bias. Participants may have underreported or overreported their levels of social media addiction, psychological distress, or self-esteem due to personal biases or misinterpretations of the survey items. Future studies could benefit from incorporating objective behavioral measures (e.g., screen time logs, app usage analytics) to complement self-reported data.

The sample in this study, while adequate in size, may not be fully representative of the broader population. Factors such as geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity may influence social media usage patterns, psychological distress, and self-esteem outcomes. A more diverse sample, encompassing participants from varied cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, would enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, while the study explored key demographic factors such as age, gender, and education, it did not delve into other potentially influential variables, including personality traits, coping mechanisms, and offline social support systems. These factors are known to moderate the relationships between social media addiction, psychological well-being, and self-esteem, and their absence from the analysis limits the depth of interpretation.

The study also did not account for platform-specific behaviors. Different social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok) have distinct user engagement patterns and reward mechanisms that may uniquely affect psychological outcomes. Future research should consider platform-specific differences to better understand how usage dynamics vary across different social media environments.

Furthermore, while the study briefly touches upon the potential neurobiological underpinnings (e.g., dopamine-driven reward mechanisms), these aspects were not directly measured. Including neuropsychological assessments or brain imaging techniques (e.g., fMRI, EEG) in future studies could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying social media addiction and its psychological consequences.

Lastly, the study does not fully address the qualitative nature of social media engagement. Passive scrolling versus active participation, emotional investment in online interactions, and specific motivations behind social media use could influence the observed relationships. Qualitative or mixed-method approaches could provide richer insights into these dynamics.

Future Clinical Implications

The findings highlight the need for interventions aimed at mitigating the psychological distress associated with excessive social media use. Digital literacy programs can help users critically engage with content, reducing negative self-comparison and unrealistic expectations. Self-regulation strategies, such as setting time limits and mindful usage, may be effective in minimizing compulsive social media behaviors. Individuals with existing mental health conditions or a family history of psychiatric disorders appear more vulnerable, suggesting a need for targeted psychoeducational support. Younger users, particularly adolescents and young adults, reported higher levels of social media addiction and distress, emphasizing the importance of educational workshops that promote healthier engagement. Given that passive scrolling is more strongly linked to distress than active participation, interventions should focus on encouraging meaningful online interactions rather than complete avoidance. A multi-faceted approach, combining individual behavior modifications, awareness efforts, and further research on risk factors, is essential for addressing the complexities of social media addiction and its psychological impact.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the complex relationships between social media addiction, psychological distress, and self-esteem, highlighting both significant associations and nuanced dynamics. The findings reveal that social media addiction is a strong predictor of psychological distress, underscoring the emotional toll of compulsive online engagement. While the relationship between addiction and self-esteem was not statistically significant, the observed trends suggest that additional mediating factors may influence this connection. These results align with existing literature, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of social media's impact on mental health.

Understanding the psychological consequences of social media addiction requires a holistic approach that considers emotional, behavioral, and contextual factors. Addressing this issue effectively involves early intervention, evidence-based clinical practices, and educational programs promoting digital hygiene and emotional resilience. Furthermore, collaboration between mental health professionals, educators, policymakers, and technology developers is essential to create sustainable solutions for reducing social media addiction risks and mitigating its psychological effects.

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Statements of Publication Ethics

We hereby declare that the study has not unethical issues and that research and publication ethics have been observed carefully.

Researchers' Contribution Rate

The study was conducted and reported with equal collaboration among the researchers.

Ethics Committee Approval Information

This study was conducted in strict accordance with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the İstanbul Nişantaşı University Ethical Board under approval number 20240201-32.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Bu çalışma, sosyal medya bağımlılığı, psikolojik sıkıntı (SCL-90) ve benlik saygısı arasındaki ilişkileri inceleyerek bu değişkenler arasındaki dinamikleri anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Günümüzde sosyal medya, bireylerin günlük hayatlarının ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelmiş ve bireyler için iletişim, bilgi edinme, eğlence ve sosyal etkileşim gibi çok çeşitli amaçlarla kullanılmaktadır. Ancak, sosyal medya kullanımının aşırıya kaçması ve bağımlılık seviyesine ulaşması, bireylerin psikolojik sağlığı ve öz algıları üzerinde olumsuz etkiler yaratabilmektedir. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın temel amacı, sosyal medya bağımlılığının psikolojik sıkıntı ve benlik saygısı üzerindeki etkilerini anlamak ve bu etkilerin altında yatan dinamikleri ortaya koymaktır.

Araştırma kapsamında elde edilen bulgular, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile psikolojik sıkıntı arasında anlamlı ve pozitif bir ilişki olduğunu göstermektedir. Regresyon analizleri, sosyal medya bağımlılığının psikolojik sıkıntı düzeylerini anlamlı bir şekilde yordadığını ortaya koymuştur. Bu bulgu, sosyal medya bağımlılığının bireylerde depresyon, anksiyete, somatizasyon ve genel psikolojik rahatsızlık belirtilerini artırabileceğine dair literatürdeki önceki çalışmalarla tutarlıdır. Sosyal medya platformlarının sunduğu anlık bildirimler, ödüllendirici etkileşimler ve algoritmalar aracılığıyla sağlanan kişiselleştirilmiş içerikler, bireylerde bağımlılık davranışlarını pekiştirerek bu döngüyü daha da güçlendirmektedir. Özellikle genç bireylerde, sosyal medyanın yarattığı sosyal karşılaştırma baskısı, dışlanma korkusu ve sürekli çevrim içi olma zorunluluğu gibi faktörler, bu psikolojik sıkıntı belirtilerini daha da belirgin hale getirmektedir.

Diğer yandan, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ve benlik saygısı arasındaki ilişki incelendiğinde, iki değişken arasında negatif bir yönelim tespit edilmesine rağmen bu ilişkinin istatistiksel olarak anlamlı olmadığı görülmüştür. Bu durum, sosyal medya bağımlılığının benlik saygısını doğrudan etkilemekten ziyade, aracı ve düzenleyici faktörler üzerinden dolaylı olarak etkileyebileceğini düşündürmektedir. Örneğin, bireylerin kişilik özellikleri, duygusal dayanıklılık düzeyleri, sosyal destek mekanizmaları ve sosyal medya kullanım biçimleri (pasif gözlemci kullanım veya aktif içerik üretimi gibi) bu ilişkiyi anlamada önemli rol oynayabilir. Özellikle pasif kullanımın bireylerin kendilerini başkalarıyla kıyaslama eğilimini artırarak benlik saygısını daha fazla olumsuz etkilediği, aktif ve anlamlı etkileşimlerin ise bu etkiyi hafifletebileceği öne sürülmektedir.

Çalışmanın önemli bulgularından biri de sosyal medya bağımlılığının sosyal medya kullanım amacını anlamlı bir şekilde yordadığıdır. Bulgular, sosyal medya bağımlılığı düzeyi arttıkça bireylerin sosyal medyayı belirli amaçlar doğrultusunda (iletişim kurma, bilgi arama, eğlenme veya kendini ifade etme gibi) kullanma eğilimlerinin de arttığını göstermektedir. Bu durum, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ve kullanım amacı arasındaki ilişkinin çift yönlü bir dinamığe sahip olabileceğini düşündürmektedir. Kullanım amaçları, başlangıçta belirli hedeflere yönelik olabilirken, zamanla bağımlılık düzeyinde bir alışkanlığa dönüşebilmektedir. Özellikle sosyal medya platformlarının tasarımında yer alan anlık geri bildirim mekanizmaları, bireylerin sosyal medyayı daha sık ve daha uzun süreli kullanmalarına neden olmaktadır.

Sosyal medya bağımlılığı ve psikolojik sıkıntı arasındaki güçlü ilişki, bireylerin ruh sağlığını olumsuz yönde etkileyen mekanizmaların anlaşılması gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Sosyal medya platformlarında geçirilen süre, platformların doğası (örneğin; Instagram, TikTok, Facebook gibi), kullanım motivasyonları ve bireylerin çevrim içi etkileşim kalıpları bu sürecin önemli bileşenleridir. Çalışmanın bulguları, sosyal medya bağımlılığının sadece bireysel bir sorun olmadığını, aynı zamanda çevresel, teknolojik ve toplumsal dinamiklerin bir yansıması olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Bu çalışmanın bulguları, ruh sağlığı uzmanları, eğitimciler ve politika yapıcılar için önemli pratik çıkarımlar sunmaktadır. Erken müdahale programları, bağımlılık düzeyinde sosyal medya kullanımını tespit edebilecek değerlendirme araçlarının klinik uygulamalara dahil edilmesi, bireylerin dijital okuryazarlık düzeylerinin artırılması ve sağlıklı sosyal medya alışkanlıklarının geliştirilmesine yönelik eğitim programlarının uygulanması, bu alandaki temel stratejilerden bazılarıdır. Özellikle genç bireyler ve ergenler gibi risk grubundaki bireylere yönelik hedeflenmiş müdahaleler, sosyal medya kullanımının olumsuz psikolojik etkilerini azaltmada önemli rol oynayabilir.

Çalışmanın sınırlılıkları arasında kesitsel bir tasarıma sahip olması, nedensel ilişkilerin tam anlamıyla açıklanamaması ve öz bildirim temelli veri toplama yöntemlerinin yanlılık riskini taşıması yer almaktadır. Gelecekteki çalışmaların boylamsal tasarımlar kullanarak değişkenler arasındaki ilişkilerin zamansal dinamiklerini incelemesi gerekmektedir. Ayrıca, kişilik özellikleri, sosyal destek düzeyi ve platform bazlı kullanım farklılıklarının bu ilişkiler üzerindeki etkileri daha detaylı bir şekilde araştırılmalıdır.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, sosyal medya bağımlılığı, psikolojik sıkıntı ve benlik saygısı arasındaki ilişkileri anlamada önemli bir katkı sunmaktadır. Sosyal medya bağımlılığının bireylerin ruh sağlığı üzerindeki etkilerinin azaltılması için bütüncül ve multidisipliner yaklaşımlara ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Elde edilen bulgular, hem akademik alanda hem de klinik uygulamalarda rehber niteliğinde olup, bireylerin dijital dünyada daha sağlıklı ve bilinçli bir ilişki kurmalarına yardımcı olabilir.