

Social media fatigue: A focused study on Gen Z Sosyal medya yorgunluğu: Z nesli üzerine bir inceleme

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ABSTRACT: Social networking sites have emerged as dominant communication tools, offering opportunities for interaction, self-presentation, and leisure, particularly among Generation Z. As the amount of time spent on these platforms continues to increase both globally and within Türkiye, the discussion surrounding social networking sites has expanded to include not only their benefits but also the negative consequences they may have on users. One such adverse effect, often referred to as “social media fatigue,” represents a state of burnout experienced by internet users. This study aims to examine the aspects of social media that may lead to social fatigue among users belonging to Generation Z and their effects. To achieve this, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 university students who are active users of social networking sites in Türkiye. The findings indicate that while the majority of participants reported feeling disengaged from social media interactions and experiencing social media fatigue, they expressed an inability to disconnect due to the anxiety associated with “fear of missing out” (FoMo). Furthermore, social media platforms were found to exacerbate feelings of anxiety in users, stemming from social comparison, information overload, and the prevalence of misinformation. These factors collectively contribute to a sense of fatigue and burnout, particularly within Generation Z. The present study highlights the growing need for a deeper understanding of the psychological impacts of social media usage, particularly as they pertain to younger, digitally-native populations.

Keywords: Social media, Social media fatigue, Digital culture, Gen Z

ÖZ: Sosyal medya ve sosyal ağ siteleri, özellikle Z Kuşağı için iletişim, kendini tanıtmaya, vakit geçirme gibi olanaklar sunarak günümüzde başat iletişim araçları arasında yer almaktadır. Sosyal paylaşım siteleri; kullanım süreleri arttıkça hem Türkiye’de hem de dünyada, sunduğu fırsatlar kadar kullanıcılar üzerinde yarattığı olumsuz etkilerle de tartışılmaktadır. “Sosyal medya yorgunluğu” olarak bilinen tükenmişlik hissi internet kullanıcıları üzerinde görülen olumsuz etkilerden biridir. Bu çalışma, sosyal medyanın Z Nesline mensup kullanıcılar üzerinde sosyal yorgunluğa yol açabilecek yönlerini ve etkilerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma kapsamında, Türkiye’de üniversite öğrencisi ve sosyal paylaşım sitelerinin aktif kullanıcısı olan 20 katılımcı ile derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar, kullanıcıların çoğunluğunun sosyal ağ iletişiminden sıkıldığını ve sosyal ağ yorgunluğu yaşadığını ancak “bir şeyleri kaçırmaya korkusu” (FoMo) nedeniyle sosyal medyayı kullanmaktan vazgeçemediğini göstermektedir. Sosyal medya araçları aynı zamanda; kullanıcılarda bilgi bombardımanına uğradığı hissini yaratması, sosyal karşılaştırmaya yol açması ve sahte haberlerin yoğunluğu nedeniyle de kaygı yaratmakta, Z kuşağı üzerinde yorgunluk ve tükenmişlik hissine yol açmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sosyal medya, Sosyal medya yorgunluğu, Dijital kültür, Z nesli

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Literatür taraması

Sosyal medya araçları ve sosyal ağ siteleri, günümüzün başat iletişim araçları halini almış durumdadır. Son yapılan araştırmalara göre Türkiye, sürekli artan dijital nüfusu ile tüm ülkeler arasında 15. sırada yer almaktadır. 25-34 ve 16-24 yaş gruplarına ait gençler, Türkiye'deki en aktif dijital nüfusu oluşturmaktadır (Dierks, 2024). Dünya genelindeki sosyal medya kullanımında 15-24 yaş grubundaki ortalama yüzde 79 olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır (Petrosyan, 2024). Bu yaş grubundaki bireyler (1997 ve 2012 yılları arasında doğanlar), literatürde Z Nesli olarak tanımlanmaktadır ve bu nesil, dijital yerliler olarak, küçük yaştan itibaren internete, akıllı telefonlara ve sosyal medyaya yaygın erişimle büyüyen ilk nesildir (Prensky, 2001; Dimock, 2019). Global Web Index istatistiklerine göre, kullanıcıların internette geçirdiği ortalama süre 6,5 saat iken, 16-24 yaş aralığındaki bireyler 55-64 yaş aralığındakilere kıyasla çevrim içi ortamda günlük 2,5 saat daha fazla zaman geçirmektedir. Dünyada internete erişim söz konusu olduğunda, 15-24 yaş aralığındaki kişilerin yüzde 75'i internete erişebilirken, 25 yaş ve üzerindekilerde bu oran yüzde 65'tir (Pelchen, 2024).

Söz konusu istatistikler, Z Neslinin sosyal medyada nüfusun diğer kesimlerine kıyasla daha çok vakit geçirdiğini, dolayısıyla sosyal ağ sitelerinin olumlu yanlarından daha çok faydalanırken, olumsuz yönlerine daha fazla maruz kaldığını göstermektedir. Sosyal medya araçları kullanıcılara; iletişim kurma, içerik üretme, vakit geçirme, kendini sunma gibi fırsatlar sunmaktadır. Öte yandan, sosyal medyada geçirilen süre her geçen gün arttıkça sosyal paylaşım sitelerinin sunduğu fırsatlar kadar, kullanıcılar üzerinde yarattığı olumsuz etkiler de tartışılmaktadır. “Sosyal Medyanın Karanlık Yüzü” olarak da tanımlanan bu olumsuz yönler; “bir şeyleri kaçırma korkusu”(fomo), “sosyal medya kıskançlığı”, “yalan ve sahte haberler”, “özel hayatın gizliliği ile ilgili endişeler”, “siber zorbalık”, “trolleme” ve “linç kültürü” gibi kavramlar ile araştırmaların başlıca gündemini oluşturmaktadır (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Przybylski vd., 2013; Pai ve Arnott, 2013; Krasnova vd., 2013; Buckels vd., 2014; Taddicken, 2014; Acquisti vd., 2015; Phillips, 2015; Tandoc vd., 2015; Abel vd., 2016; Allcott ve Gentzow, 2017; Lazer vd., 2018; Vosoughi vd., 2018; Clark, 2020). “Sosyal medya yorgunluğu” olarak tanımlanan tükenmişlik hissi de son dönemde, sosyal medya araçlarının kullanıcılar üzerinde olumsuz etkilerinden biri olarak öne çıkmaktadır (Maier vd., 2015; Lee vd., 2016; Bright ve Logan, 2018; Dhir vd., 2018).

Psikoloji alanında yapılan çeşitli araştırmalar, insanların zihinsel kaynaklarının sınırlı olduğunu, bilgiyi işleme kapasitelerinin sınırsız olmadığını ve bu kapasiteyi aşan bilgilerin performansın düşmesine yol açabileceğini öne sürmektedir (Kahneman, 1973; Sweller, 1988; Paas vd., 2003; Lavie, 2005; Eppler ve Mengis, 2004). Sosyal medya bağlamında ise, kullanıcı kendini çok sayıda mesaj karşısında bunalmış hissederek mesajı işlemek için yeterli bilişsel kaynak ayıramayabilmektedir. Sosyal medyada uzun süre vakit geçiren bireyler aşırı yoğun bir içerik ve enformasyon akışına maruz kalabilmekte, bu da sosyal medya yorgunluğuna yol açan etkenlerden bir olarak kabul edilmektedir. Bunun dışında, sosyal medya tarafından dayatılan güzellik algısı, etrafta olup bitenleri kaçırma kaygısı, mahremiyet ihtiyacı, yalan haberlerin yaygınlaşması gibi unsurlar da kullanıcıların kendini “sosyal ağ yorgunu” olarak hissetmelerine neden olabilmektedir.

Bu araştırma, uzun süreli sosyal medya kullanımının yol açtığı psikolojik ve duygusal zorluklara işaret etmesi açısından önemlidir. Literatürde özellikle Z Kuşağı arasında sürekli çevrim içi bağlantının uzun vadeli sonuçlarını anlamada önemli boşluklar bulunmaktadır. Mevcut literatür genellikle genel sosyal medya kullanımına odaklanmakta, “sosyal medya yorgunluğu”, “enformasyon yüklenmesi” ve “bir şeyleri kaçırma korkusu” gibi sorunlardan farklı şekillerde etkilenen genç nesillerin özel deneyimlerini göz ardı etmektedir (Dhir vd., 2018; Zheng ve Ling, 2021). Araştırmanın Türkiye ve Ankara Üniversitesi özelinde yapılması, konuya farklı bir kültürel bağlam katması açısından alana katkı niteliğindedir. Aynı

zamanda, Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu'nun "İstatistiklerle Gençlik 2022" araştırmasına göre, Türkiye'de 15-24 yaş grubundaki gençler nüfusun yüzde 15,2'sini oluştururken (TÜİK, 2023a) bu yaş grubunun sosyal medya kullanımı yüzde 85,7 oranındadır (Türkiye Raporu, 2019). Dolayısıyla Z kuşağı olarak değerlendirilen bu yaş grubu, araştırmanın örneklem grubu olarak tercih edilmiştir.

Yöntem

Bu çalışma, sosyal medyanın kullanıcılar üzerinde sosyal yorgunluğa yol açabilecek olumsuz yönlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Türkiye'de sosyal medyayı en yoğun ve etkin kullanan yaş grubu olduğu için Z kuşağına mensup kullanıcılar, araştırmanın örneklem grubu olarak tercih edilmiştir. "*Z kuşağının sosyal ağ kullanım alışkanlıkları ile sosyal medya yorgunluğu arasında nasıl bir ilişki vardır?*" araştırma sorusu ile yola çıkılmıştır. Çalışma kapsamında Türkiye'nin önde gelen üniversitelerinden Ankara Üniversitesinde öğrenim görmekte olan 20 üniversite öğrencisi ile derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılması planlanmış, katılımcılara yöneltilecek sorular için kapsamlı bir literatür taraması ve hazırlık yapılmış ve görüşmeler için açık-uçlu mülakat soruları hazırlanmıştır. Çalışmanın Ankara Üniversitesi öğrencilerine odaklanması, araştırmanın sınırlılıklarının kapsamını belirlemektedir. Bu tercih, araştırmacının Ankara Üniversitesinde akademisyen olması ve üniversitenin çeşitli fakülteleri kapsayan heterojen yapısına dolayısıyla yapılmış, katılımcıların tamamı en az beş yıldır sosyal medya ve sosyal ağ sitelerini aktif olarak kullanan kişiler arasından seçilmiştir. Katılımcıların sekizi erkek, on ikisi ise kadındır; ancak cinsiyet, araştırmada bağımsız bir değişken olarak ele alınmamıştır. Ankara Üniversitesi Etik Kurul Başkanlığından Etik Kurul Kararı alınmıştır. Çalışma, 85434274-050.04/1440625 numaralı Ankara Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu tarafından 16/235 karar numarası ile 05.07.2024 tarihinde onaylanmıştır.

Yapılandırılmamış görüşmeler 45-50 dakika civarında sürmüş, sohbet havasında gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma sürecinde etik ilkelerle uyumlu bir çalışma yürütmek amacıyla, her katılımcıya araştırmanın amacı, yöntemi, katılımın gönüllülük esasına dayandığı ve istedikleri zaman ayrılma haklarının bulunduğu açık ve net bir biçimde anlatılmış, katılımcılara görüşme formları imzalatılarak yazılı onayları alınmıştır. Tüm katılımcılara mahremiyetlerinin korunacağı ve isimlerinin anonim kalacağı söylenmiş, görüşmeler katılımcılarının kendilerini rahat ve özgür hissedecekleri bir ortamda gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmacı, görüşmeleri yaparken önyargılardan uzak kalmaya ve sohbeti yönlendirmemeye dikkat etmiştir. Bazı yanıtların ardından, yanlış anlaşılmalardan kaçınmak adına katılımcıya cevapları tekrar edilmiş ve kendilerinden onay alınarak görüşmeye devam edilmiştir. Bulgular "sosyal medya yorgunluğu" ve "aşırı bilgi yüklemesi" ile ilgili kavram ve yaklaşımlar ışığında tartışılmış, veri analizi aşamasında tekrar eden kodlar ve kavramlardan yola çıkılarak anahtar ifadeler ve alt başlıklar oluşturulmuştur. Katılımcılar ile yapılan görüşmelerin çıktıları ve araştırmacının notları, "betimleyici analiz" yöntemiyle değerlendirilmiştir.

Bulgular ve tartışma

Katılımcıların çoğunluğu WhatsApp, Instagram ve YouTube başta olmak üzere sosyal paylaşım sitelerini kullandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Instagram üzerinden mesajlaşmayı tercih eden ve çoğu arkadaşlarıyla iletişim kurmak için WhatsApp gruplarını kullanan katılımcıların birçoğu, sosyal paylaşım sitelerini günde yaklaşık 3-4 saat kullandıklarını, yaz aylarında okul olmadığında bu sürenin uzayabildiğini ifade etmişlerdir. Birçok katılımcı sosyal medyayı kullanma konusunda eskiden daha hevesli olduğunu ancak artık biraz sıkıldığını ve bunun zaman kaybı olduğunu düşündüğünü ifade etmektedir. Bazı katılımcılar hesaplarını kontrol etmemeleri halinde tedirginlik yaşadıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Katılımcıların çoğunluğu sosyal medyaya birkaç yıl önceki gibi ilgi duymadıklarını, eskiden daha çok fotoğraf paylaştıklarını ve sosyal medyayı artık çoğunlukla alışkanlıktan dolayı kullanmaya devam ettiklerini dile getirmektedir. Bazı katılımcılar ise sosyal medyada dayatılan güzellik algısından rahatsız olduklarını söylerken, arkadaşlarının sürekli ne kadar güzel olduklarını gösteren paylaşımlarından rahatsız olduklarını belirtmişlerdir.

Sonuç ve öneriler

Sonuçlar, Z Nesline mensup sosyal medya kullanıcılarının büyük çoğunluğunun sosyal ağ iletişiminden sıkıldığını ve sosyal ağ yorgunluğu yaşadığını ancak bir şeyleri kaçırma endişesi nedeniyle sosyal medya platformlarını kullanmaktan vazgeçemediğini göstermektedir. Sosyal medya araçları aynı zamanda; kullanıcılarda bilgi bombardımanına uğradığı hissini yaratması, sosyal karşılaştırmaya yol açması ve sahte haberlerin yoğunluğu nedeniyle de kaygı yaratmakta, Z kuşağı üzerinde yorgunluk ve tükenmişlik hissine yol açmaktadır. İçinde bulunduğumuz dijital çağda bireylerin teknolojik araçlarla kuşatılması ve maruz kaldıkları bilgi akışı, sosyal ağların yarattığı yorgunluğu artırmakta ve birçok kullanıcı tıpkı bilinçli ürün tüketicileri gibi bilinçli internet tüketicisi haline gelmeye başlamaktadır. Bulgularımız literatürü doğrular şekilde; aktif kullanıcıların çok sayıda mesaj karşısında bunaldıkları ve bu mesajları işleyemediklerini, markaların gönderilerinden ve ayrıca yalan haberler ve kafalarını karıştıran sahte içeriklerden bunaldıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu noktada sosyal paylaşım sitelerinin hedef kitlelerinin dikkatini çekmek için geliştirdikleri yeni politikalar, bir araştırma alanı olarak görülmektedir. Sosyal medya yorgunluğunun farklı sosyodemografik özelliklere sahip bireyler üzerindeki zararlarını anlamaya yönelik nitel ve nicel araştırmaların yapılması da gelecek çalışmalar için değerlidir. Sosyal medyanın faydalı yanları kadar yarattığı yıkıcı etkilerin de ele alınarak karar vericiler tarafından değerlendirilmesi, özellikle toplumun temelini oluşturan genç kullanıcılar açısından önemlidir. Sosyal medyanın ve sosyal ağ sitelerinin farklı yaş grupları üzerindeki etkilerine yönelik çalışmalar, daha kullanıcı dostu ortamlar yaratma ve daha sağlıklı dijital alışkanlıkları teşvik etme konusunda üzerine rol düşen politika yapıcılara, eğitimcilere ve sosyal medya platformlarına bilgi sağlaması ve yön göstermesi açısından artırılmalı ve desteklenmelidir.

Introduction

Social media and networking platforms have emerged as dominant modes of communication, particularly among Generation Z, facilitating interaction, enabling self-expression, and providing avenues for entertainment. Yet, the increasing duration of their use has sparked significant discourse regarding their adverse effects alongside their benefits, both in Türkiye and on a global scale. One such negative outcome is the phenomenon termed “social media fatigue”, characterized by a sense of exhaustion and overwhelm among users. This study seeks to explore the detrimental dimensions of social media that may contribute to this emerging issue of social fatigue.

This study aims to examine the negative aspects of social media that may lead to social fatigue among users. It highlights the psychological and emotional challenges caused by prolonged social media use. The literature underscores significant gaps in understanding the long-term implications of constant online connectivity, particularly among Generation Z. Existing research typically focuses on general social media usage, often overlooking the specific experiences of younger generations disproportionately affected by issues such as “social media fatigue” “information overload” and “fear of missing out” (Dhir et al., 2018; Zheng & Ling, 2021). Conducting the research within the cultural context of Türkiye and specifically at Ankara University contributes a unique perspective to the field.

Internet, social media, and social networking sites, the dominant communication tools of our age, have become an indispensable element of daily life. As of January 2024, most popular social media platforms are listed as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok, according to their monthly active users (Dixon, 2024). Türkiye ranks 15th among all countries with its constantly increasing digital population. In recent years, the age groups 25–34 and 16–24 have constituted the most active segments of the digital population in Türkiye (Dierks, 2024). The statistics of Global Web Index show that, on average, people spend 6.5 hours on the internet every day. However, individuals between the ages of 16-24 spend an additional 2.5 hours more time online than those between the ages of 55-64. When it comes to having access to the internet around the world, 75% of those between the ages of 15-24 have internet access, compared to 65% of those ages 25 and over (Pelchen, 2024). On the other hand, daily time spent with both traditional and digital media is in a slight decline worldwide, marking an end to the rapid digital acceleration of the past few years, according to the Global Media Intelligence Report, which features insights from a survey of media and device usage across 47 countries. Some analysts described this attitude as a result of social media burnout. Adam Mosseri, Head of Instagram, notes that social media users are experiencing fatigue, which has prompted a shift toward direct messaging, closed communities, group chats, and private accounts (Yuen, 2023).

Social media tools are discussed with the negative effects they create on users, as well as opportunities such as display, communication, communication, self-presentation, and entertainment. At the same time, after the pandemic, it has also been recognised that social media use is decreasing and being a part of such popular and big social networking sites is not as popular as they were (Molla, 2021). This article aims to explore the phenomenon of social media fatigue among young users. . This study includes a concise literature review on the negative aspects of social media and social networking sites, alongside findings from qualitative research conducted with young students aged 18-21 who are active users of these platforms.

Literature Review

Negative Aspects of Social Media

“The Dark Side of Social Media” is a definition developed by commentators to describe the negative aspects of social media. The phrase “dark face” in terms of social media focuses on the negative phenomena such as “fear of missing out something” (FoMo), “social media jealousy”, “fake news”, “social media abuse”, “concerns about privacy”, “cyberbullying” and “trolling” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Przybylski et al. 2013; Pai & Arnott, 2013; Krasnova et al., 2013; Buckels et al., 2014; Taddicken, 2014; Phillips, 2015; Acquisti et al., 2015; Tandoc et al., 2015; Abel et al., 2016; Allcott & Gentzhow, 2017; Lazer et al., 2018; Vosoughi et al., 2018; Clark, 2020). The feeling of being known as “social media fatigue” is one of the negative effects of the event seen on users (Maier et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2016; Bright & Logan, 2018; Dhir et al., 2018; Zheng & Ling, 2021).

On social networking sites like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, etc., while users are constantly bombarded with information and sharing, this can sometimes lead to the fear of missing something (FoMo) and sometimes to the feeling of having to share something. Oh and Syn tested the factors of “enjoyment”, “self-efficacy”, “learning”, “personal gain”, “altruism”, “empathy”, “social engagement”, “common interest groups”, “reciprocity” and “reputation” to identify the main motivations of social media users and they determined that, each of the factors are effective sources of motivation in the use of social media. The findings of the research show that female users are more motivated than male users in terms of social participation, common interests, and personal development (Oh & Syn, 2015). Expressing that information sharing will continue to increase every year, Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook claimed; *“I hope that they will share twice as much information as they shared this year and that they will share twice as much information next year compared to the previous year”* and brought the approach defined as Zuckerberg's Law to the social media literature. He was inspired by Moore's Law, which Intel's creator Gordon Moore explained as *“The number of transistors on an integrated circuit doubles every two years”* (Hansel, 2008). On the other hand, various studies in psychology suggest that people have limited mental resources, limited capacity to process information, and information exceeding this capacity may lead to decreased performance (Lang, 2000; Hunter, 2004). According to Bright et al., in the context of social media, the user may feel overwhelmed by the large number of messages and may not allocate enough cognitive resources to process the message (Bright et al., 2022).

Sociologist Georg Simmel describes the state of exhaustion as a result of information overload in his 1903 article “The Metropolis and Mental Life”, which was later published in Wolff's translation and compilation *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Accordingly, in the modern urban world, people become insensitive, developing a tedium and boredom to cope with the flow of images, sounds, people, products, and experiences that the city produces. Simmel, as a result of this weary point of view which resulted in a kind of numbness, argues that everything for the city dweller has become similar in that it is “homogeneous, flat and gray in color, and neither is worth choosing over the other” (Simmel, 1950).

Internet and social media users also experience a similar feeling of boredom from time to time, and individuals who spend long periods of time on social media may be exposed to an excessively intense flow of knowledge and information. Recent studies show that 59 percent of the world population uses at least one of the social media tools, and users spend an average of 2 hours and 31 minutes on social media (Chaffey, 2023).

The concept of information overload was first developed by the American Bertram Gross in 1964 to refer to the situation where information input to any system exceeds its information processing capacity. Although the term in question is widely used, it is also expressed with concepts such as “data smoke”, “information overabundance”, “infobesity”, “information anxiety” (Bawden & Robinson, 2020).

The name that popularized the concept of “information overload”, which can be translated as information overload, was Alvin Toffler with his 1970 book “Future Shock”. Toffler stated that his thoughts and decision-making processes became inconsistent when he was overloaded with information. In a radio interview he gave shortly after the publication of his book, he remarked that there was a widespread sense of dissatisfaction in America, accompanied by a feeling of panic stemming from the perception that everything was moving too fast and becoming uncontrollable. He also asserted that there was little that could be done to counter this phenomenon (Novak, 2012).

Richard Saul Wurman, the creator of TED Conferences, on the other hand, explains the pressure we feel to maintain information awareness at a level in the face of the ever-increasing amount of information with the concept of “information anxiety”. Wurman, specifies five sub-components of information anxiety as; “not understanding the information”, “feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information to be understood”, “not knowing whether certain information exists”, “not knowing where to find the information” and “knowing exactly where to find the information but not having the key to access it” (Wurman, 1989). An individual who experiences information overload or information fatigue, experiences an inability to concentrate with increased pressure and a sense of urgency (Kiraz, 2021). These can also lead to a technological addiction. According to Kuss and Griffiths, internet addiction,

social media addiction, digital game addiction, and smartphone addiction can be considered as technological addictions in general (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Individual's addiction to social media use is emerged by having a significant interest in social media, having a strong motivation to impair social activities, interpersonal relationships, duties/work and/or well-being on health, and devoting a large amount of time and energy to using social media (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014).

Griffiths et al., who have extensively studied the definitions and causes of social media addiction, emphasize that smartphone addiction and the 'fear of missing out' (FoMO) may serve as risk factors for social media addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). FoMo causes people to spend a lot of time on social networks due to the fear of not being aware of developments in social networks. It has emerged as a new term with the involvement of the internet and smartphones in human life (Koçak and Traş, 2021). On the other hand, "nomophobia", which is the abbreviation of no mobile phone; takes place in the literature as a modern age disorder that reflects the anxiety disorder caused by the deprivation of smart devices such as mobile phones and computers. This disorder occurs in people who make a habit of using such tools, and is sometimes seen as a precursor of another psychological disorder (King et al., 2014).

In the study of Çömlekçi and Başol, which examines the relationship between social media use and social media addiction among young people, it has been observed that there is a significant relationship between usage purposes for entertainment and leisure time, such as sharing information, reaching people, etc., and social media addiction. On the other hand, it is revealed that there is no meaningful relationship between social media addiction and usage purposes such as listening to music, following the agenda, and accessing information (Çömlekçi & Başol, 2019). Social media companies must develop features that promote healthier usage, such as time reminders and less intrusive notification settings (Bright et al., 2018)

Social Media Fatigue

Social networking sites have been the subject of various researches with the pressure they create on users as well as the opportunities they provide. As the use of social media is quite common in today's world, the "loading" that individuals are exposed to is due to the fact that they do not know what to do with the information bombardment that surrounds them, apart from seeking knowledge. Continuously following social media posts has become a daily habit in life as a result of the individual's concerns about missing the personal agenda and the need to present their 'selves'. This situation creates a sense of obligation among users to share content regularly and keep up with daily developments within the social networks they belong to. Social networking sites, which direct users to constantly share or follow the shares, cause addiction and fatigue in long-term and intense cases of use. Apart from constantly feeling compelled to share content or being exposed to more information sharing, one of the factors that causes social media fatigue is the concerns about the violation of personal privacy, especially when using social networking sites (Bright et al, 2018; Xiao & Mou, 2019). Anxiety and negative experiences about privacy and cyberbullying can lead to emotional exhaustion, which is a major factor in social media fatigue (Manis, 2023).

The other factor that leads to the emergence of social media fatigue is the interaction of users with companies and brands on social media and the constant confrontation of the user, out of expectations, to promote new products of brands or to provide information about discounts. Users tend to step back from consumption when there is too much content in their social media feeds; they may be uncomfortable with personalized ads on social media platforms and the amount of personal information requested by the advertiser, and the more they know about the advertisers' strategies, the more they may be concerned about violations of their privacy. (Bright & Logan, 2018; Bright et al, 2022).

The common experiences of social comparison and fear of judgment among social media users are also examined, where individuals often compare themselves to others, leading to feelings of inadequacy or anxiety (Vogel et al, 2014; Fardouly et al., 2015). It can be said that the efforts of social media users to constantly have a happy and "ideal" appearance cause social media fatigue. Atar and Ulusoy examined the validity of the definition of "duck syndrome" developed by Stanford University researchers which states that, when we look at other people's lives from the outside, they look successful and happy without any effort, through their Instagram posts. It is seen that all participants participating in the research avoid

making posts that contradict the ideal standards and expectations (Atar & Ulusoy, 2020). According to Frison and Eggermont, the pressure of maintaining an idealized self-image and the constant exposure to others' curated lives can lead to negative psychological outcomes (Frison & Eggermont, 2015).

Han claims that social media fatigue can turn into burnout from time to time, and social media burnout occurs as a feeling of mental fatigue, depersonalization, and inefficiency in users. According to him, the individual experiencing social media burnout experiences a loss of energy emotionally and finds himself in indecision by not being able to evaluate the differences between the positive and negative results of social media (Han, 2018). Widespread use of working from home during the pandemic period, and the use of instant messaging platforms for 24/7 work tracking can be seen among the reasons for the digital burnout of individuals in recent years (Sayar & Yalaz, 2022). When the boundaries between online and offline environments cannot be drawn, users cannot easily realize that they have become tired of the digital world or social media. According to a study by Malik et al., among WhatsApp users aged 19-27, online social comparison and self-disclosure behaviors are also among the factors that cause social media fatigue. The findings of the study show that social media fatigue also affects the decrease in academic performance (Malik et al., 2020).

The consequences of social media fatigue appear as users get tired of the social functions, content, and activities provided by social networking sites, and as a result, they reduce their use of social media, their frequency of use, or simply give up on social networking sites (Lee et al., 2014). While some users gradually become "lurkers" (watchers) and prefer not to share actively, some users completely exit social media and cancel their accounts (Joo et al., 2011; Junco 2011, cited by Lee et al., 2014). Deleting a user's entire history and account on social networks and ending their existence on social networks is defined as "digital suicide". The site suicidemachine.org, which pioneered the trend of leaving Facebook in 2009, was established to provide this service to users with the slogan of "log out forever" (Karppi, 2011).

Research shows that a large part of the younger, more mobile and brand-conscious consumer group defined as "aspirers", which requires social media providers to make various innovations, is now getting bored with social media tools (Goasduff & Pettey, 2011). It is also a remarkable finding that the usage rates of social networking sites, which have increased during the pandemic, have started to decrease gradually. As of 2022, LinkedIn has lost 4.2 million users, Instagram 3.5 million, Facebook 1.6 million, and YouTube 500 thousand users. Data in Türkiye, on the other hand, shows that the number of social media users, which was 80.8 percent in 2022, decreased to 73.1 percent in 2023, which is seen as a return to real life from the pandemic period (Güleş, 2023). Chen states that social media is, in many ways, becoming less social. The kinds of posts where people update friends and family about their lives have become harder to see over the years. As the biggest sites have become increasingly "corporatized", it has become harder to see posts where friends and family share the updates from their personal lives. Now, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and Snapchat users generally view professionalized content from brands, influencers, and others that pay for placement. The change has implications for large social networking companies and how people interact with one another digitally. Some users have started seeking community-oriented sites and apps devoted to specific hobbies and issues. So, smaller and more focused sites are getting more popular (Chen, 2023).

Generation Z, often referred to as "Gen Z" includes individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012, though the exact years can vary slightly across sources (Dimock, 2019). As digital natives, they are the first generation to grow up with widespread access to the internet, smartphones, and social media from a young age. This has significantly influenced their communication styles, learning preferences, and worldview (Prensky, 2001). Gen Z is characterized by its comfort with technology, preference for visual content, and ability to adapt to fast-paced digital environments. They are also noted for their social and environmental awareness, often valuing inclusivity, diversity, and authenticity in both personal and professional spheres. Generation Z has grown up in a world where technology and social media are ubiquitous (Turner, 2015). Generation Z youth were classified as men who 'think more globally', 'can be distracted more quickly', 'are more social', 'are more entrepreneurial', and 'have greater expectations from life' compared to the previous generation. Keeping this generation separate from technology is

impossible (Beall, 2016). This generation's familiarity with digital technologies and their reliance on social media for communication, information-sharing, and even self-expression have become an integral part of their daily lives (Alruthaya et al., 2021). Gen Z is exposed to an overwhelming amount of content daily. Wang et al. highlight that constant scrolling and multitasking across platforms lead to cognitive fatigue, reducing productivity and overall mental well-being (Wang et al., 2020). Fatigue affects cognitive abilities, leading to poorer academic outcomes and diminished face-to-face social interactions (Zheng & Ling, 2021).

A global survey conducted by the McKinsey Health Institute (MHI) in 2022, which included over 42,000 respondents across 26 countries, explored the impact of social media on four dimensions of health: mental, physical, social, and spiritual. The findings reveal that Gen Z users are more likely to report negative emotions associated with social media compared to older generations. They also report higher incidences of poor mental health. However, the data underscores that the relationship between social media and mental health is not linear, as both positive and negative effects coexist. Interestingly, older generations, such as baby boomers and millennials, also report significant engagement with social media. Millennials, in particular, are the most active in posting content. The research demonstrated that while social media can serve as a platform for self-expression and the enhancement of social connections, it can also lead to adverse experiences, such as the fear of missing out (FoMo) and negative body image perceptions (Coe et al., 2023).

Methodology

This study aims to focus on the question of whether the increased use of social media, information load is associated with higher levels of anxiety and social media fatigue among young adults. According to the "Youth with Statistics 2022" research of TÜİK-Turkish Statistical Institute, 15.2 percent of the population was made up of young people in the 15-24 age group, in Türkiye (TÜİK, 2023a) and the social media usage rate of this age group is 85.7 (Türkiye Raporu, 2019). Therefore, this age group, considered to be part of Generation Z, was preferred as the sample group for the research. The study is based on the research question: "*What is the relationship between Generation Z's social network usage habits and social media fatigue?*" In order to understand the views of young social media users of Gen Z, the research is carried out with qualitative methods. Data collection in phenomenological studies is usually done using in-depth and multiple interviews with the participants (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the phenomenology design was used, and in-depth interviews were conducted. Before the interviews, an extensive literature review was conducted, and open-ended questions were prepared in the context of the subject. Then, ethics committee approval was received from Ankara University. This research has been approved by the 85434274-050.04.04/1440625 ethics committee of Ankara University with 16/235 number and 05.07.2024.

Within the scope of the study, 20 university students between the ages of 18-21 were interviewed. Snowball sampling was used to reach the participants. Students were chosen from the different faculties of Ankara University. 8 of them were from the Faculty of Health Sciences, 5 of them were from the Faculty of Communications, and 7 of them were from the Faculty of Applied Sciences. Eight of them are 18, nine of them are 19, two of them are 20, and one of the participants is 21 years old. The study's focus on Ankara University students defines the scope of its limitations. This preference is attributed to the researcher being an academic at Ankara University, as well as the university's heterogeneous structure across various faculties. All of the participants are chosen from the active users of social media and social networking sites for at least five years. Eight of them are male and twelve of them are female participants, but gender was not an independent variable in the research.

In this context, together with the questions and interview form prepared, the participants who had an appointment were met, and interviews were held mostly at the campuses and faculties of the participants. It was stated in advance that interviews would be recorded and the consent of the participant was obtained. The interviews lasted about 45-50 minutes and were conducted mostly in the form of conversations. In qualitative research, in the analysis of in-depth interviews, the focus is on

understanding the nuances, complexities, and deeper meanings embedded within participants' responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In-depth interviews are completed in an informal tone and more like a conversation. Researchers conducting in-depth interviews often use a semi-structured or unstructured approach, providing a loose framework for the conversation while allowing flexibility for participants to express themselves fully. These interviews typically take place in a one-on-one setting, allowing for a deep and personalized exchange between the interviewer and the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

After the in-depth interviews were completed and the audio recordings were deciphered, key themes and concepts were coded. Researchers assign codes to segments of the data, identifying key concepts, themes, or patterns. This can be done through open coding, where codes emerge directly from the data. Codes are grouped into broader themes or categories based on similarities and relationships. Themes represent the underlying ideas or concepts that are prevalent throughout the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Then, the notes of the participants and the interview notes of the researcher were evaluated by a descriptive analysis (structural description) method, which is a method used in research to systematically describe or summarize the characteristics, features, or patterns of a dataset or phenomenon. In qualitative research, descriptive analysis involves the systematic examination and interpretation of textual or visual data to identify themes, patterns, and trends (Neuman, 2014). The next section involves the findings and discussion part of the study.

Findings and discussion

In this section, the findings of the research will be discussed in different categories. During the data analysis phase, key expressions and subheadings were created based on recurring codes and concepts. The findings are discussed in the light of concepts and approaches related to social media fatigue and information overload.

Use of Social Media

The majority of participants reported frequent engagement with social networking platforms, with WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube emerging as their most commonly used sites. Instagram was predominantly favored for messaging, while WhatsApp groups served as a primary medium for maintaining communication with friends. Participants indicated an average daily usage of social networking sites ranging from 3 to 4 hours, though this duration significantly increased during the summer months, when academic responsibilities were absent.

P(3)

I use it for about 4 hours, I'm mostly on Instagram..

P (6)

I use Instagram and spend 2-3 hours there... I mostly freeze my account during the exam period.

P (18)

I mostly use Instagram, but for example, I closed it for a while before YKS (university exam). At that time, I was more interested in Twitter, I was spending more time on Twitter...

The findings reveal that the most commonly used social networking platforms among participants are WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter). Some participants also reported engaging with TikTok and Pinterest. These preferences align closely with the research of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), which identifies WhatsApp as the most widely used social networking platform in Türkiye, with an adoption rate of 84.9%. YouTube (69%) and Instagram (61.4%) rank as the second and third most popular platforms, respectively (TÜİK, 2023b).

Our study corroborates these national trends while highlighting that X and TikTok retain significant popularity among younger users. However, several participants noted a decline in the frequency of their

social media usage compared to previous years, suggesting shifts in engagement patterns that warrant further exploration.

A significant number of participants reported spending at least two hours per day on social media. It is aligning with statistics indicating that individuals aged 16–24 spend, on average, 2,5 hours more online compared to those aged 55–64 (Pelchen, 2024). Additionally, two participants mentioned shifting their focus to more niche social media platforms that cater to their specific interests and hobbies. This observation corroborates Chen’s (2023) argument that as mainstream platforms become increasingly “corporatized” featuring a proliferation of advertisements, branded content, and influencer posts and users are gravitating toward more specialized platforms that offer a more tailored and authentic experience.

Getting Bored

Many participants reported a shift in their engagement with social media, expressing that they were once more enthusiastic but now feel somewhat bored and view it as a waste of time. Participants P(1), P(2), P(5), P(6), P(9), P(12), P(16), P(19), and P(20) specifically mentioned experiencing feelings of boredom on social media platforms. Some also noted that if they do not check their accounts, they begin to feel nervous, highlighting the phenomenon of “social media anxiety”. A majority of participants stated that they are no longer as interested in social media as they once were a few years ago.

P(1)

I've been feeling tired of social media lately. Because I look at it all the time, it causes chemical changes in me. You are always happy or sad. I felt like I was getting tired. When I feel tired, it no longer has that appeal for me. Because I feel like it affects me negatively, so for me, it would be better if I look at social media when I feel like in the mood, not all the time.

P(9)

I started to see Instagram as more of a waste of time. Sometimes I close it and I feel like I no longer need it. Every now and then, I look at my teachers' posts, etc. I am generally active in WhatsApp groups..

It is also remarkable that; although the young users are getting bored of social media, many participants stated that they feel nervous and anxious when they couldn’t check their social media accounts, which leads us to the next theme. Many also reported posting fewer photos compared to the past, and most attributed their continued use of social media more to habit than genuine interest. This shift in usage patterns aligns with research on the decline of social media engagement especially among younger users, due to increasing concerns over mental well-being and social media fatigue (Bright et al., 2015).

Feeling Anxious and Overwhelmed

Many participants said that social media sometimes makes them feel anxious. The answers pointed out different reasons. For P2, it’s the other people’s thoughts that usually make her anxious.

P(2)

Social media generally makes me feel anxious and tired. For example, I see something, I'm sure of it.. I say this is what happened.. My friend says no, it is not like that.. Now I am confused about what to believe.. Everything accumulates so much.. You forget what you know to be true.. I think what people will think makes me anxious. During the day, my hands are there, I watch the story I posted over and over again.. I constantly check my Instagram account, my highlights.. my posts.. constantly..

P11 said that the root of his anxiety is about missing the agenda on social media.

P(11)

When I don't follow social media, I feel like I'm going to miss the news. It's like there's always a development and I'm going to miss it. Apart from that, I sometimes look at it just to watch what people are doing.

Most of the participants claimed that social media has negative impacts on their lives, despite its advantages.

P(8)

Good sides; it allows me to be aware of things more quickly. That's why it's positive, but on the other hand, it affects my eye health and disrupts my sleep pattern. I'm on the phone when I could spend time outside with my friends. That's why I ditched most of my friends. I made excuses.. but because I wanted to spend time entirely on the phone.. so it has a negative impact socially. I love spending time with friends, but sometimes social media takes my time more than enough..

P (13)

I'm starting to feel uncomfortable now.. I want to go away.. The comments contain a lot of hate, a lot of lynching.. After a while, people don't want to see them.. It makes me tired psychologically..

The answers show that some of the participants are suffering from FoMo (fear of missing out), which is indicated by past research. FoMo is comprised of irritability, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy, with these feelings tending to worsen when an individual logs on to social media websites (Wortham, 2011).

The majority of the participants claim that they feel overwhelmed by the social media messages, and from time to time, they are considering freezing their accounts, and some of them are actually doing it.

P(9)

Now, sometimes I wonder if I should turn it off or freeze it.. Sometimes it seems very boring to me, sometimes even that doesn't work. I think I'll find something else to pass the time, but I keep coming back to that place of social media.

P(12)

Actually, I'm so bored with social media. I want to freeze my account, but I know I can't do without it. Sometimes I freeze it, but it only lasts 1-2 days. I impose restrictions instead. There is a limitation in Instagram's time settings.

P(20)

I mostly freeze my account during the exam period.

These answers reflect the common experience of social comparison and fear of judgment, which are well-documented phenomena in the context of social media use (Vogel et al., 2014; Fardouly et al., 2015). These feelings of anxiety are frequently linked to the pressure of maintaining an idealized self-image and the constant exposure to others' curated lives, which can lead to negative psychological outcomes (Frison & Eggermont, 2015). Moreover, research has shown that users, particularly younger ones, are increasingly experiencing anxiety due to social media's role in amplifying social comparisons, insecurity, and "fear of missing out" (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013).

According to a study by Malik et al., social media fatigue also affects the decrease in academic performance (Malik et al., 2020). The results are parallel with that, as most of the participants stated that

they preferred to freeze their social media accounts -especially during exam periods- because it affected their success in exams, and they had difficulty studying. Han points out that social media fatigue can turn into burnout from time to time. Social media burnout occurs as a feeling of mental fatigue, depersonalization, and inefficiency in users. The individual, experiencing social media burnout, experiences a loss of energy emotionally and finds himself in indecision by not being able to evaluate the differences between the positive and negative results of social media (Han, 2018). The consequences of social media fatigue appear as users get tired of the social functions, content and activities provided by social networking sites, and as a result, they reduce their use of social media, their frequency of use, or simply give up on social networking sites (Lee et al., 2014). The participants also reported experiencing symptoms of social media burnout intermittently, expressing concerns over information overload, excessive content, and the prevalence of fake news.

Disturbed by fake content and too much information

Many of the participants (P1, P4, P7, P8, P10, P14, P16, P19, P20) stated that the content that disturbs them the most on social media are: fake news, unnecessary posts, and too much information.

P(1)

Even something that we would not normally perceive as such can have a different meaning on social media. Something else emerges from something that I see as innocent. And I don't like that...

P(4)

Fake posts bother me the most. Relatives' food posts are also disturbing. For example, I wake up every morning, I go to Instagram, see my relative's breakfast table, with such huge plates. Let's say, 6 people went to breakfast, I followed them all, they all have the same photos. It is so disturbing and inappropriate, not everyone has to see what you eat..

P (19)

There are times when I want to stay away from the news and posts for a while.. Things are overlapping.. It feels like I can't keep up with the flow of life and the flow of social media..

Our findings are parallel with the literature, which suggests that users often feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of messages, making it difficult to process the information (Bright et al., 2015), by the posts of brands (Chen, 2022), and by the abundance of fake news and misleading content, which leaves them confused. Studies indicate that misinformation spreads six times faster than factual information on social networks (Vosoughi et al., 2018). According to Rossini et al. (2021), individuals are more likely to trust content shared by people they know and trust, compared to information from unfamiliar sources. Our findings corroborate this, as the majority of participants reported that they only trust content shared by their friends or family.

Additionally, four participants expressed being disturbed by the beauty standards imposed on social media, citing discomfort with the posts from friends who continually highlight their appearance and show “how beautiful they are”.

P(16)

There is an issue that I criticize on social media. For example, the issue of the perception of beauty. For example, if your nose is curved or you have small eyes or small lips, you do not look beautiful..

Social media often portrays idealized versions of people's lives, showcasing primarily the positive and exciting aspects. This selective representation can distort perceptions of reality, leading individuals to feel as though they are missing out on desired experiences. While social network communication allows individuals to present themselves in carefully curated ways, such flexibility is not typically available in

face-to-face interactions (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006 as cited in Vogel et al., 2014). Consequently, individuals frequently engage in social comparisons when using social networks (Vogel et al., 2014).

One concept that has gained prominence through the use of platforms like Instagram is “digital dysmorphia” a term introduced by Coy-Dibley. Digital dysmorphia refers to the gap between the beauty standards imposed by social media and an individual’s real appearance. It manifests as the transformation of perceived imperfections through tools like Photoshop and the sharing of digitally altered photographs on social media platforms (Coy-Dibley, 2016). The findings from this study align with the literature, revealing that young social media users are often disturbed by the unrealistic beauty standards and digitally altered images propagated online.

Results and recommendations

The findings of this study reveal that many social media users experience significant fatigue and burnout due to the overwhelming nature of digital platforms. Despite these feelings, users often find it challenging to disconnect, largely because of a pervasive fear of missing out or being socially excluded. Social media contributes to these issues by fostering information overload, encouraging social comparison, and spreading misinformation, which collectively amplify anxiety. Privacy concerns also play a critical role, as many users are highly cautious about their settings and often resort to maintaining anonymous profiles to safeguard their personal information.

Social media’s pressures, including excessive brand advertisements, work-related digital demands, and exposure to misinformation, further exacerbate the sense of burnout. While internet usage peaked during the pandemic, a gradual decrease has been observed as users become more mindful of the negative effects of overexposure. This shift aligns with the emergence of “conscious internet consumption” a behavioral trend that mirrors broader consumer mindfulness.

Addressing these challenges requires multifaceted strategies. Users need to be educated on managing their digital presence effectively, and social networking platforms must implement policies that alleviate cognitive and emotional strain. Exploring the development of tools for digital detox and fostering a culture of balanced online engagement could further help mitigate these issues. Future research should delve deeper into the long-term effects of social media fatigue across diverse populations, providing insights that could guide the creation of healthier and more sustainable digital environments.

It has been recognized that the feeling of insensitivity, tiredness, and burnout created by social media occurs concerning situations that cause discomfort to the users, such as exposure to information overload, privacy anxiety, social media addiction, fear of missing something, or being without a mobile phone. Anxiety at different levels can push individuals away from social networks. Disturbing sharing of brands and advertisements, having to spend lots of time on the internet and in the digital world due to work, can also be counted among the reasons that make users stay away from social networks.

The findings of this study indicate that many Generation Z social media users in Türkiye are increasingly disengaged from social network communication but find it difficult to completely disconnect. This reluctance often stems from a fear of missing out (FoMo) or concerns about social exclusion. Social media platforms contribute to users' anxiety through mechanisms such as social comparison, information overload, and the proliferation of fake news, which lead to fatigue and burnout. Privacy concerns also play a significant role, as many users exhibit heightened awareness and take precautions by managing privacy settings carefully. Notably, users often maintain multiple accounts, including anonymous profiles where they conceal their real identities.

In today’s digital era, the omnipresence of technological tools and constant exposure to information flow exacerbate social network fatigue. However, there is a growing trend among users toward becoming more mindful and deliberate internet consumers, akin to the concept of conscious product consumption. Investigating the evolving policies of social networking platforms aimed at retaining user engagement could yield valuable insights. Additionally, employing quantitative research to explore the

effects of social media fatigue across diverse demographic groups is essential for shaping effective interventions and promoting healthier digital practices.

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Ethical approval

This study has been approved by the 85434274-050.04.04/1440625 ethics committee of Ankara University with 16/235 number and 05.07.2024

Conflict of interest

There is no potential conflict of interest in this study.