

REVIEW ARTICLE / DERLEME YAZISI

The Relationship Between Social Media Addiction and Depression: A Systematic Review

Sosyal Medya Bağımlılığı ve Depresyon Arasındaki İlişki: Bir Derleme Çalışması

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Abstract:

This compilation study aims to examine the relationship between social media addiction and depression in line with the existing literature. Nowadays, the widespread use of social media influences individuals' behaviors in many areas, from communication to identity construction. However, excessive and uncontrolled use of social media leads to deterioration in individuals' psychological well-being. Social media addiction is characterized by features such as inability to control usage time, disruption of daily life activities, using social media as a coping tool to escape negative emotions, and experiencing restlessness when usage is reduced. The literature indicates that social media addiction increases low self-esteem, loneliness, social comparison, and feelings of inadequacy; these factors, in turn, can intensify depressive moods. Within the scope of this study, 27 scientific research articles published between 2015 and 2024 were reviewed, and it was concluded that there is a positive, significant relationship between social media addiction and depression. However, some studies also show that social media can increase perceived social support and reduce depression. The findings suggest that managing social media use in a balanced, conscious, and limited manner is essential for psychological health.

Keywords: Addiction, Social Media Addiction, Depression.

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Öz:

Bu derleme çalışmasının amacı, sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile depresyon arasındaki ilişkiyi mevcut literatür doğrultusunda incelemektir. Günümüzde sosyal medya kullanımının yaygınlaşması, bireylerin iletişimden kimlik inşasına kadar pek çok alanda davranışlarını etkilemektedir. Ancak sosyal medyanın aşırı ve kontrolsüz kullanımı, bireylerin psikolojik iyilik hallerinde bozulmaya yol açmaktadır. Sosyal medya bağımlılığı, kullanım süresinin kontrol edilememesi, günlük yaşam aktivitelerinin aksaması, olumsuz duygulardan kaçmak için sosyal medyanın bir başa çıkma aracı olarak kullanılması ve kullanım azaltıldığında huzursuzluk yaşanması gibi özelliklerle tanımlanmaktadır. Literatürde, sosyal medya bağımlılığının düşük benlik saygısı, yalnızlık, sosyal karşılaştırma ve yetersizlik duygularını artırdığı; bu faktörlerin ise depresif duygu durumu güçlendirebildiği belirtilmektedir. Bu çalışma kapsamında 2015–2024 yılları arasında yayımlanan 27 bilimsel araştırma incelenmiş ve sosyal medya bağımlılığı ile depresyon arasında pozitif yönlü anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bununla birlikte bazı araştırmalar, sosyal medyanın sosyal destek algısını artırarak depresyonu azaltabileceğini de göstermektedir. Elde edilen bulgular, sosyal medya kullanımının dengeli, bilinçli ve sınırlı şekilde yönetilmesinin psikolojik sağlık açısından önemli olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bağımlılık, Sosyal Medya Bağımlılığı, Depresyon.

Introduction

Today, social media has become an integral part of daily life and has established an important place. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok are used for information exchange, maintaining social relationships, and entertainment. However, excessive and uncontrolled use of social media can negatively affect individuals' psychological health (Taşkıran, 2025). These adverse effects particularly manifest as negative emotions, unhappiness, and depressive symptoms (Balcı and Baloğlu, 2018).

Social media addiction is characterized by symptoms such as excessive use, inability to control the desire to use, neglect of daily activities due to excessive use, harm to social relationships, using it as a means of escape from negative emotions and life stress, and difficulty reducing the duration and amount of use (Balcı et al., 2019). This situation causes individuals to constantly compare themselves to others, triggering feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem (Özmen and Çelik, 2024). According to DSM-5, depressive feelings such as persistent low mood, pessimism, and loss of interest and desire contribute to the development of depressive emotions, which are among the core symptoms of depression (APA, 2013). Additionally, insufficient or negative feedback from likes and comments on social media can reinforce feelings of worthlessness and may lead to depressive symptoms (Nesi and Prinstein, 2015). Research has shown a positive correlation between excessive social media use and depression symptoms among young adults (Kross et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2016). However, social media also has positive aspects for older individuals, such as maintaining intergenerational communication and strengthening social bonds (Taşkıran, 2025). Therefore, the effects of social media can vary depending on factors like age group and purpose of use. This review aims to examine the relationship between social media addiction and depression.

Social Media Addiction

With the development of internet technologies and mobile devices, the use of internet services has increased, and second-generation internet services, called Web 2.0, have facilitated user interaction, communication, access to

information, and content creation and sharing (Balakrishnan and Griffiths, 2017). This situation has led to the emergence and widespread adoption of social media, which is built on Web 2.0 technology that enables users to produce and share content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media allows users to create and share uncensored content, collaborate freely, and express their ideas without time and space limitations. Additionally, by fostering a culture of communication and sharing, social media enables individuals to reach large audiences quickly and easily (Çalışkan and Mencik, 2015).

The constant evolution of social media and the ease of communication continue to attract society's interest (Bat, Vural, and Bat, 2010). The ability for users to comfortably express themselves and for others to view their profiles increases the importance of social media tools (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Large audiences prefer social media because it offers rapid communication and socialization opportunities, thereby strongly supporting interpersonal interaction. The increase in social media use on mobile devices has led society toward these platforms and changed people's habits (Longstreet and Brooks, 2017). However, the uncontrolled growth of the internet and social media use has raised concerns about addiction, and research in this area has focused on the negative effects of social media addiction (Byun et al., 2009).

Addiction is the loss of control over a behavior, object, or substance, which leads to emotional, mental, and physical reactions, making impulse control difficult (Byun et al., 2009). Social media addiction is characterized by excessive use and uncontrollable engagement with social media, resulting in neglect of daily activities, damage to social relationships, and use as a means of escaping negative emotions (Balcı et al., 2019). Although it is not included in the DSM-5, signs of social media addiction resemble those of Gambling Disorder (Andreassen et al., 2016). These signs include a constant desire to spend time on social media, an uncontrollable urge to use, damage to social relationships, using as an escape from negative emotions, experiencing negative feelings when not

spending enough time on social media, overreacting, negative impacts on family and work life, and difficulties fulfilling responsibilities. The easy accessibility of social media and the constant opportunity for interaction can lead to increased usage, especially among young people, thereby raising the risk of addiction (Van den Eijnden et al., 2016). In Turkey, internet and social media usage rates are high: 92% of internet users and 90.3% of social media users spend an average of 2 to 3 hours daily on social media (Akpınar and Karakoç, 2022).

Depression

Depression is a common mood disorder characterized by negative effects on an individual's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, with symptoms such as sadness, despair, and loss of interest and desire (Patel et al., 2018). According to DSM-5, depression is defined by persistent low mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt, low energy, problems with attention and focus, irregularities in appetite and sleep, psychomotor slowing or agitation, and recurrent thoughts of death (Kafes, 2021). These symptoms can significantly impair an individual's functioning, leading to decreased life satisfaction and happiness, social and occupational losses, and mental suffering (Segal et al., 2013). Depression, which can also accompany various medical and mental health conditions, is classified into three levels: mild, moderate, and severe. In mild depression, patients can continue their daily tasks; in moderate depression, social relationships diminish, and work ability is limited; and in severe depression, work, social, and home life are seriously affected (Tlach and Hampel, 2011).

Theoretical explanations regarding depression address the origin and maintenance of the disorder from different conceptual perspectives. Ellis (1994) states that feeling worthless and inferior is one of the main factors of depression, while Beck (1995) emphasizes that depressive tendencies can be hereditary as well as resulting from challenging life events. According to Beck's (1995) cognitive model, depression arises from a triad of negative beliefs about oneself, the world, and the future, along with cognitive distortions and negative schemas developed during childhood (Çelik and Karaağiz, 2024). The behavioral approach associates depression with reinforced passivity and learned helplessness mechanisms (Shofu-Akanji et al., 2025), while the psychoanalytic approach suggests that deficiencies in early caregiver relationships create ongoing emotional voids in adulthood, laying the groundwork for depression (Kafes, 2021). These theories demonstrate that depression has a multidimensional structure, emerging from the interaction of cognitive, behavioral, and psychodynamic processes.

Epidemiological data indicate that depression is a significant public health issue worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, depression affects approximately 5% of adults globally and is among the leading causes of disability-related health problems (WHO, 2021). The lifetime prevalence of depression is

around 17%, making it one of the most frequently diagnosed psychiatric disorders (Townsend and Morgan, 2018). Additionally, it is reported that the prevalence of depression in adolescents ranges from 5.5% to 7.7% and ranks second among disorders that cause impairment in functioning (Global Burden of Disease, 2015).

Social Media Addiction and Depression

The increasing popularity of social media has brought the concept of social media addiction to the forefront. Studies focus on the negative effects of this addiction. Social media has become an important communication tool worldwide. Continuous use of social media by individuals leads to unconscious usage habits, creating a significant public health issue (Kelly et al., 2018).

The widespread use of social media applications has resulted in communication occurring more in virtual environments rather than face-to-face, which has led to individuals becoming more isolated and experiencing increased stress and depression (Balcı and Baloğlu, 2018). The level of addiction to social media also raises depression levels. Additionally, the perceived lack of social support is seen as a significant factor in depression. Individuals with depression tend to seek more social support on social media, but this situation further damages real-life relationships and increases loneliness.

Method

Research Model

In this study, the 'review' method was used. Review studies are works that systematically collect, evaluate, and synthesize existing literature related to a specific topic. These types of research are conducted to create a broad knowledge base, summarize existing information, identify research gaps, and suggest directions for future research (Palmatier et al., 2018).

Data Collection

To determine the studies to be included in the compilation, searches were conducted in Turkey and in the academic peer-reviewed journal hosting and editorial process management service, DergiPark, as well as in the Google Scholar database. During the search, the initial keywords used were 'social media, addiction, depression, social media addiction, and depression.' Subsequently, the quantitative and qualitative structures of the studies accessed were examined, yielding a total of 42 studies. Then, the studies to be included in the review were evaluated against inclusion and exclusion criteria, and 27 studies were included in the review.

Within the scope of the research, the findings were analyzed, synthesized, and evaluated across the stages of the review method.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Study

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Study

Inclusion Criteria for the Study	The coexistence of social media addiction and depression concepts
	Having the characteristics of a scientific study
	Having quantitative and qualitative research features
	Covering the years 2015-2024
Exclusion Criteria for the Study	Having permission for the full text of the research
	Being a book or compilation
	The absence of either the concepts of social media addiction or depression
	Not having the characteristics of a scientific study
	Being published before 2015
	Lack of full-text access to the research

Data Analysis

In compilation studies, the six-step analysis of data does not refer to a specific prevalence or a general methodology. However, it is generally observed that such analyses typically consist of certain stages (Noblit and Hare, 1988). In this research, the analysis was conducted by considering the steps outlined below:

- Stage 1 Data Collection and Compilation: The studies in the relevant literature are collected and compiled. At this stage, appropriate studies are identified and selected in line with the research question or objectives.
- Stage 2 Data Summarization and Coding: This step involves summarizing and coding the selected studies. Important information obtained from each study is systematically summarized and coded. This prepares the data for subsequent analysis stages.
- Stage 3 Thematic Analysis: The content of the collected data is analyzed. Thematic analysis involves classifying and grouping the data according to specific themes or patterns. At this stage, similarities and differences between the studies are identified.
- Stage 4 Findings Synthesis: The results of the thematic analysis are synthesized in relation to the research questions or objectives. At this stage, the meaning and significance of the collected data are revealed. The findings are interpreted by comparing them with existing knowledge in the literature.
- Stage 5 Reporting the Results: The analysis results are systematically presented in the compilation report. The findings are organized to answer the research questions or objectives. Additionally, the clinical or theoretical significance of the findings is discussed and related to relevant literature.

Findings

Prolonged use of social media can negatively affect healthy sleep and lead to depressive symptoms (Kelly et al., 2018). Fear of missing out on updates on social media increases anxiety and stress levels by disrupting users' sleep patterns. Even just five minutes of use on platforms like Facebook and Instagram can make it difficult to transition into deep sleep and may cause fatigue the next day (Miller, 2018). The increase in social media use reduces face-to-face communication, leading to emotional dissatisfaction, and is associated with depression. According to research, the prevalence of depression among those who spend excessive time on social media sites ranges from 13% to 66%. Sixty percent of young people check their phones before sleeping, and this

behavior, influenced by blue light, makes falling asleep more difficult (Kovan and Ormanç, 2021).

Individuals experiencing depressive symptoms prefer social media, which offers a more accessible communication platform compared to face-to-face interaction (Sidani et al., 2016). Research shows that depressed individuals use social networks more frequently to express their feelings and that there is a positive relationship between social media addiction and depression (Toraman, 2019; Kelly et al., 2018). It has been found that social media addiction is a significant predictor of depression (Yaşar Can, & Kavak Budak 2021). Additionally, women with social media accounts tend to have lower self-esteem and higher depressive moods, and social media deprivation may be related to stress and depression (Elhai et al., 2017).

The increase in social media usage raises the likelihood of experiencing experiences that can negatively affect people's mental and emotional health. The ease of sharing content and its visibility can lead individuals to become victims or perpetrators, resulting in negative effects on their mental and emotional well-being (Fahy et al., 2016). A study emphasizes that increasing self-esteem and life satisfaction levels are important in reducing depressive symptoms associated with social media use (Seabrook et al., 2016). In a study conducted by Çayırılı (2017), it was determined that there is a positive relationship between social media use and depression. As depression levels increase, social media usage also increases. Additionally, users who share depressive content and clearly display depressive symptoms were found to be more likely to be diagnosed with depression. In a study conducted by Lin and colleagues (2016), a significant relationship was found between social media use and depression, and individuals who used social media more frequently were found to have higher levels of depression.

It has been observed that individuals with depression use social media more frequently to seek approval and social support (Dikmen, 2021). However, it has also been found that social media use can increase life satisfaction and perceived social support levels, thereby reducing depression symptoms (Balci and Kaya, 2011). A study also supports the idea that negative emotions experienced by individuals with depression are reflected in their social media posts (Akkın Gürbüz et al., 2017).

Discussion

Studies in the literature indicate that the relationship between social media addiction and depression is multidimensional and that these two variables can influence each other reciprocally (Haand and Shuwang, 2020; Toraman, 2019; Kelly et al., 2018). Most of the examined research shows that social media use, especially

when uncontrolled or excessive, increases factors such as sleep disorders (Kovan and Ormanlı, 2021), social isolation, loneliness (Balci and Baloglu, 2018; Sidani et al., 2016), as well as low self-esteem and negative social comparisons, which in turn elevate depressive mood (Elhai et al., 2017; Toraman, 2019). Fear of missing out emerges as a significant determinant of social media addiction and contributes to the intensification of depressive symptoms by disrupting individuals' sleep patterns (Elhai et al., 2017).

Some studies suggest that depression can increase social media use; others indicate that excessive social media use can trigger depression (Toraman, 2019; Kelly et al., 2018). This finding suggests that the relationship is not one-sided and may involve bidirectional causality. Social comparison theory and cognitive models explain that individuals exposed to idealized content on social media may feel inadequate, which can intensify depressive symptoms. Additionally, the constant need for approval and acceptance is considered a mechanism that increases psychological vulnerability, especially among young users (Nesi and Prinstein, 2015; Elhai et al., 2017).

Some of the studies examined in the review indicate that social media can sometimes have a protective effect. Factors such as social connectedness, emotional sharing, and peer support can help reduce feelings of loneliness and increase life satisfaction, as well as alleviate depressive symptoms in some individuals (Bessière et al., 2010; Valenzuela et al., 2009; Seabrook et al., 2016). These conflicting findings suggest that the effects of social media use can vary significantly depending on the purpose of use, usage patterns, individual psychological characteristics, and social environment conditions.

The fact that most studies in the literature are based on cross-sectional designs makes it difficult to reach definitive conclusions about the direction and causal relationship between social media addiction and depression. Future research should include longitudinal designs, experimental setups, and cross-cultural comparisons to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship. Additionally, variables such as personality traits, levels of loneliness, self-esteem, and social support should be examined more comprehensively for their mediating or moderating roles.

Conclusion

This study reveals that there is a significant relationship between social media addiction and depression, and that excessive, uncontrolled, and purposeless social media use particularly negatively impacts individuals' mental health. The findings indicate that social media use can trigger depression through mechanisms such as disrupting sleep patterns, increasing feelings of loneliness, weakening real-life relationships, decreasing self-esteem, and intensifying the need for approval. However, there are also studies showing that social media can reduce depressive symptoms by providing social support, facilitating connections, or enabling emotional sharing. These findings demonstrate that the effects of social media use vary depending on context and individual differences.

In conclusion, social media use cannot be said to be entirely negative or entirely positive. The main determining factors are the purpose of use, the manner of use, and the individual's psychosocial needs. Conscious, controlled, and balanced social media use is believed to lead to more positive outcomes for psychological health. Therefore, increasing digital awareness education among young people, monitoring social media usage habits, and strengthening psychological support mechanisms are particularly important.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Participation Approval

Not applicable.

Publication Permission

Not applicable.

Availability of Data and Materials

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

LK prepared the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations sections of the article, while AT prepared the introduction, and DE contributed to the identification of studies to be included in the research.

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