

## **The Effect of Social Media Addiction on Students' Lives\***

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**Abstract:** Are being in a social media environment and using social media tools addictive? If so, under what conditions does such an addiction arise? How does it affect lives? In this study, the answers to these questions are explored from students' point of view, in terms of both theory and practice. It has been said that today's students spend the majority of their daily lives on social media. The possibility that this could have a negative effect on students is increasingly a cause for concern. In this study, we look at the circumstances and conditions under which social media tool usage can lead to addiction and the potential effects of such an addiction on student's daily lives. Based on focus group sessions carried out with students, we discuss which social media tools they use, what kind of environments they enter, their patterns of use and usage frequency. While the results obtained do justify concern, they also reveal hints of how this situation may be handled.

**Key words:** Effects of Social Media on Students • Social Media

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### **INTRODUCTION**

These days, in what has been called the "Information Age", each passing day brings an unbelievable amount of technological development, which in turn leads to a variety of advantages and disadvantages. Along with this technological development, recently a variety of social networking websites have arisen that have already begun changing the way people communicate and interact and even affected the traditional learning process.

The fact that students today spend a significant amount of their daily lives interacting with social media has led to much discussion. The potential negative effects of this situation on students is causing increasing concern. If social networks become the center point of our lives and we treat them as goals rather than as tools, we risk developing an addiction that negatively affects our lives. According to Köknal [1], addiction can be defined as any abnormal behavior that creates problems for an individual's physical, biological and spiritual functions and disturbs the individual's balance. Thus, we can say that addiction is exhibiting a behavior that is more regular and frequent than normal and results in a lack of balance in the individual's physical, psychological and social structures and functions. To give an example of this, the time that social network users spend on social networks has doubled or tripled since those networks first gained popularity. A variety of people from every age group have joined social networks for various reasons and the number of users grows every day.

In this study, we look at the effects of the use of social media networks on students, what conditions can lead to addiction and how an addiction affects the daily lives of the students.

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

For researching the issue addressed in this study, data were collected from students of the Gazi Çiftliği High School in Yenimahalle, Ankara. 48 students who volunteered to take part in the study were collected into focus groups. 18 of the students were in 9th grade, 15 in 10th grade and 15 in 11th grade. 25 were male and 23 were female and their ages varied between 14 and 17.

Based on the preferences of the students taking part in the study, we formed 4 focus groups with 12 students each and in the school year of 2011-2012, we met with each group a total of four times with breaks of 2 weeks between each meeting. At the first of the group meetings, which lasted for around 1.5-2 hours, social media tools and environments were explained and it was discussed whether the students use such tools. At the second meeting, their usage preferences, goals and timeframes were discussed. At the third meeting, it was discussed whether use of social media tools and being in social media environments leads to addiction and if so, which conditions promote this addiction. In the final focus group meeting, it was discussed how social media usage addiction experiences had affected the students' lives, the differences in behavior the students had observed in themselves while addicted and the possible effects of addiction on success in school.

At each meeting, a summary of the discussion from the previous meeting was provided and was taken as a starting point for the new meeting.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Being in Social Media Environments, Using Social Media Tools, State of Addiction:** In the focus group discussions carried out with students, it was found that all of the participants were in social media environments and used social media tools. No consensus could be reached regarding whether one could speak of an addiction in this respect and the subject was discussed at length.

All group members agreed in the course of the discussions that using social media for purposes other than “communication, research and news” could potentially lead to addiction.

**Self-Observed Changes in Behavior Based on Usage of Social Media:** In the focus group discussions, students said that they became angry when they were unable to access social media environments and tools and that they would then exhibit aggressive and disobedient behavior.

The students expressed that because of the time they spent on social media, they had less time to spend on other social activities. They said that even if they had time, they tended to want to use it for social media, spend less time together with their families and skip out on or put off personal responsibilities. In other words, they did not find it very important.

**The Social Media Tools Used, Their Goals and Frequency of Use:** In the group sessions, students indicated that the social media networks they used, in order of frequency of use, were “Facebook, Youtube, Wikis, Twitter, Dailymotion, Myspace and Flickr”. They indicated their goals of use as “fun, playing games, gaining information, communication, sharing and music”. As for their frequency of use, 35 students said that they are in social media environments every day, 10 students 3-4 times a week and 3 students 1-2 times a week.

Social Media Tools	Goal of Use	Frequency of Use	Period of Use (daily)
Facebook 35	Fun :35	Every Day: 35	1-3 hours :22
Youtube 22	Playing Games :20	1-2 times a week : 5	3-5 hours : 18
Wikiler 16	Research : 15	3-4 times a week: 8	5 or more: 8
Twitter 10	Communication:16		
Dailymotion 5	Sharing: 17		
Myspace 3	Music:15		
Flicker 2			

**The Effect of Social Media Environments and Tools on Life in General and Specifically on Success in School and Social Relationships:** One of the topics that was heavily discussed by the students was the effect of social media environments and tools on life in general and specifically on success in school and social relationships. We could not reach a group consensus on this subject that included all of the group members, several of the participants had would not accept the possibility that there could be an effect. It is notable that the participants who had trouble accepting this idea were also the ones in the group who used social media tools most frequently.

The other 28 students agreed that they didn't have enough time for classes, had postponed or failed to take care of their personal responsibilities, that their performance in classes had suffered and that their interaction with their families had dropped off so much that they had even stopped eating meals with them, but instead ate meals in front of their computers and were constantly in their rooms. They said that the situation had had a negative effect on their relationships with their families.

12 students said that being in social media environments and using such tools had a positive effect on their lives, that they were able to make more friends, gain a larger social network, socialize in a virtual environment, meet people first virtually and then later in person and that social media networks generally had positively contributed to their socialization. 12 others said that they had no opinion about this subject.

**Limitations on Social Media Use:** 31 of the participants said that their families had limited their use of social media and they expressed their reactions to this situation as follows:

"When they decided to restrict my use, I got angry and aggressive", "I'm not happy about this situation at all; they don't trust me", "When they restrict me, I fight back", "I don't listen to them, I argue, I take the offensive and force them to agree with me", "when they make me angry, we fight more, it makes me postpone my personal responsibilities and makes it so I can't do my homework", "I start doing other, unrelated things they don't want and that they won't like".

**If Students Did Not Spend Time on Social Media, Could They Be More Successful?:** When asked whether they thought they could be more successful if they had not spent time on social media, 25 of the students said yes, 15 said no. 8 of the students said that social media contributed to their success in school and that they found opportunities to discuss courses through social media. It should be noted that the group as a whole could not reach an agreement on this subject.

## CONCLUSION

In today's world, social media, which is frequently used by students for fun, playing games, doing research, communication, killing time and other purposes, can be seen as a significant new tool for socialization.

The results of the focus group discussions we carried out with students included one point of unanimous agreement: when social media is not used for "the purpose of communication, research and news", its use can lead to addiction. In the discussions that arose, students spoke of the various behavioral changes they underwent when they were unable to access social media environments and tools. When they did have access, they noted that family-internal communication and participation in activities with relatives decreased and that they postponed various personal responsibilities.

The results of the focus group discussions showed that students mostly used Facebook, Youtube, Wikis, Twitter, Dailymotion, Myspace and Flickr, in that order. A large majority of the group members indicated that they were in social media environments 1-2 hours per day. Though the group was not entirely in agreement on the subject, it was generally agreed that being in social media environments and using social media tools led to results like not having enough time for classes and postponing or failing to manage personal responsibilities. Students spoke of how this situation generally affected success in school and family relationships.

It was also learned that students have varied reactions to limitations set on their use of social media, including anger, aggression and argumentativeness. A significant number of the students also indicated that they thought they would be more successful if they had not spent time on social media.

#### **REFERENCES**

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