

Social Media Usage Among METU Students: From Necessity to Addiction

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ABSTRACT

As the influence of social media on daily lives of students increases, there arises questions and concerns regarding the necessity of using social media and the excessive use of social media for casual purposes. In this regard, the current trend of social media usage among METU students, and the score of social media addiction across different platforms and purposes has been examined. According to the results, there is a significant difference in the score of social media addiction across two purposes of entertainment and work/education. There was no significant difference across different platforms and also between males and females regarding the social media addiction score. In conclusion, the difference in social media addiction based on different purposes of using social media was the most significant outcome of this study, suggesting raising awareness regarding the prevalence of this addiction and the its adverse effects on mental health among students.

1. Introduction

The concept of social media could be considered as one of the most influential subjects of interest since 2004, when Facebook launched for the first time. As an important part of today's world, this technology has some key practical functions. Providing a possibility for people to communicate and exchange their ideas and a possibility for businesses to promote their products and services are two main functions of social media. However, the substantial amount of people's engagement with social media has created some recent concerns. The increasing use of terms like "social media addiction" and "problematic social media use" in research literature, is an indicator of the current alarming trend.

Social media has become an essential part of the daily lives of all individuals, transforming the way people communicate, share information, and engage with the world around them. University students are one of these different demographic groups, whom social media plays a central role in their academic, social, and personal spheres. Today, university students represent the age group and generation that has grown up during the rise of social media. Considering the influence of academic career in one's life, studying the contributing factors to academic succession or failure has great importance and significance.

As social media platforms continue to reshape interpersonal dynamics, the impact on the academic and social lives of university students is a subject of interest and potential concern.

This paper attempts to delve into the social media usage among students of Middle East Technical University, aiming to uncover current patterns and attitudes and explore the essential role of social media and the potential disadvantage of its excessive use. This paper offers a framework to contextualize the findings and contribute to the ongoing discourse on social media and its impact on university students. The study provides a detailed account of the research methods employed, the key findings derived from the survey data, and the implications of these findings for understanding the dynamics of social media usage among university students.

The data was collected through a survey administered to randomly selected students on the METU Ankara campus. The survey itself consists of 15 questions, starting with three questions about department, gender and age, followed by two questions about the most favorite platform and main purpose of using social media. The next nine questions are a social media addiction scale, which its questions have been designed and gathered carefully, considering the main criteria of addiction to social media. The last question is about the awareness on negative impact of using social media on mental health. In our analysis, the total score of questions 6 to 14 have been considered as the total score of addiction to social media. The answers were given on a spectrum of 4 steps: Never, Sometimes, Often, and Always. This allowed the respondents to answer the question in a manner different than strictly "Yes" or "No".

The samples of the study were gathered using Simple Random Sampling. The goal was to create an equal chance of participation for all students to have a dataset that could represent the entirety of the METU student population. The subjects were approached around the cafeteria and library, two most diverse places of the campus, by the authors of this research in a systematic way.

In this study, a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical methods has been applied to the datasets in order to analyze them and make relevant inferences. Considering the nature of variables, methods of two-sample t-test and one-way ANOVA have been implemented and the process of data control and data analysis completed through the use of R programming language in RStudio environment. In this study, a p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

1.1. Data description

The sample group of this study consisted of 262 subjects. The three main defining demographic features included in the questionnaire were the department of the respondent, their gender, and their age in a given range. The departments of all the respondents varied greatly, as there were 262 total respondents and 32 different departments with 13 individuals choosing to opt out of answering the question. Therefore, there was 262 total respondents and 33 different answers regarding department. As shown in Figure 1, the variety of the answers is clearly visible and all the proportions were relatively similar.

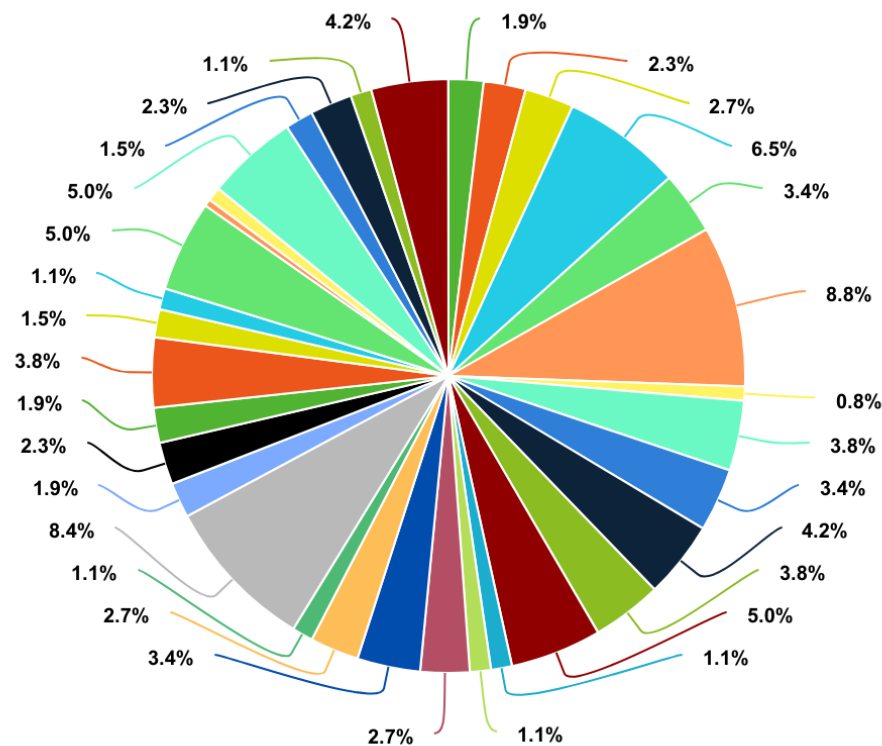


Figure 1. The variety of Department among respondents

The second demographic question was regarding gender. Most respondents answered and just four respondents chose the option “prefer not to say”. The final count was relatively equal, as shown in Figure 2.

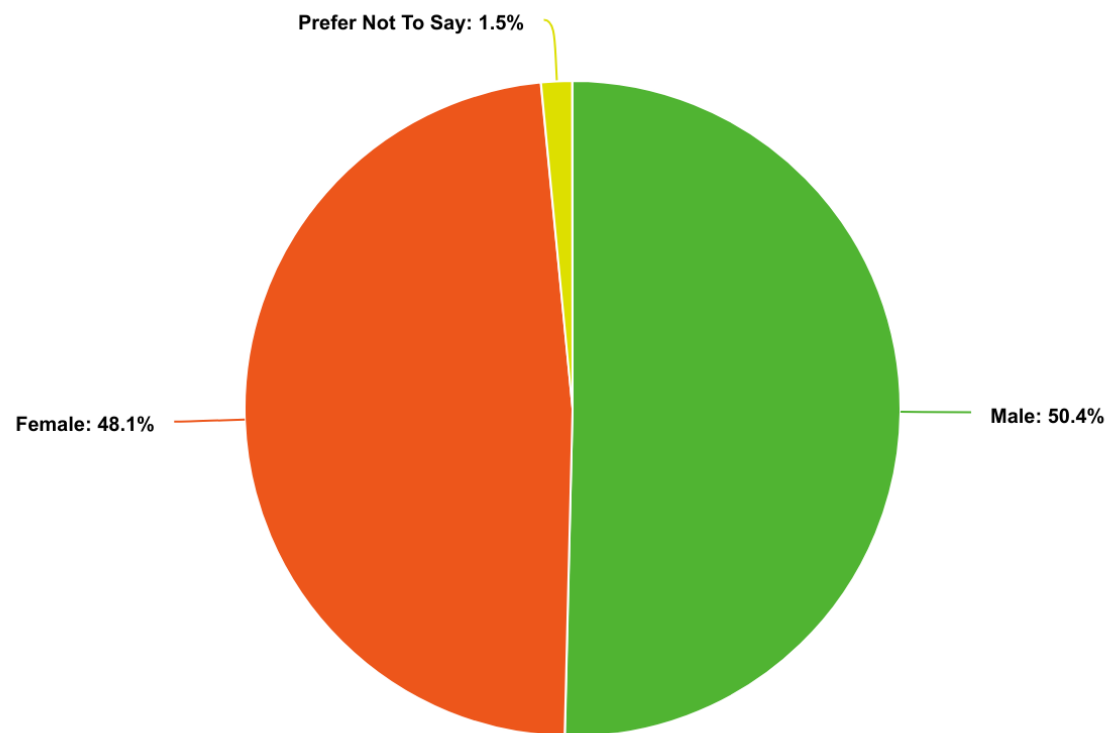


Figure 2. The variety of Gender among respondents

The third and final demographic question was regarding the age of the respondents. The age group that had the most individuals was the “20 to 24” age group, as shown in Figure 3.

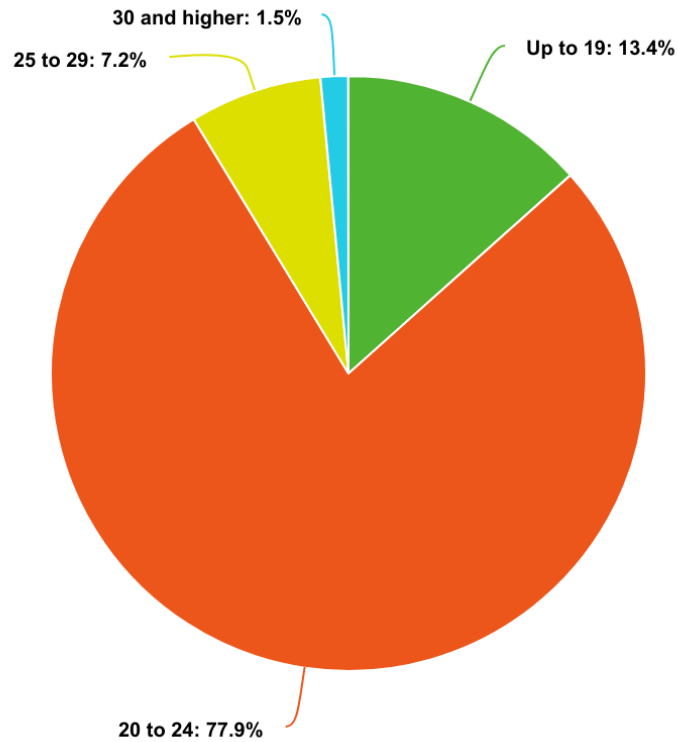


Figure 3. The variety of Age among respondents

1.2. Research questions

In order to have a clear understanding of the current trend of social media usage among METU students, five research questions have been considered and further examined:

1. What is the most favorite social media platform among METU students?
2. What is the main purpose of using social media among METU students?
3. Is there a significant difference in social media addiction score across different social media platforms?
4. Is there a significant difference in social media addiction score across different purposes of using social media?
5. Is there a difference between males and females in the amount of their social media addiction?

1.3. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate the amount of social media usage by METU students and determine their favorite platform and main purpose of use. This research aims to examine the presence and magnitude of a serious concern and its results are expected to be helpful to METU administrative team as an effective aid to increase the awareness of students related to the adverse consequences of social media addiction.

2. Literature Review

The term Social Media Addiction formed few years after the formation of Internet Addiction. Social media addiction has been defined as the state of being overly concerned about social media and spending great amount of time and energy to use social media to a degree that it causes impairment in one's social activity, interpersonal relationships, studies/jobs, and health and well-being (Sun & Zhang, 2021). Considering the adverse effects of social media addiction, it is expected to assume that such impairments would follow by mental health problems. Elphinston and Noller (2011) show that using Facebook is linked with relationship dissatisfaction and jealousy. Moreover Pantic (2014) states that online social networking associates with depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

Even though there are debates regarding using the term of addiction for excessive use of social media, Griffiths (2013) defines addictive behavior as any behavior that meets the six main components of addiction: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse. Therefore, if excessive use of social media fulfils the above six criteria, it can be defined as an addiction.

Furthermore, on the prevalence of social media addiction among university students, Simsek et al. (2019), in their study performed on Turkish students, report a moderate level of social media addiction which can take an alarming trend; they also found gender as an important factor and report that female students get higher scores on social media addiction scale than male students.

Considering the increasing trend of social media usage and the importance of spreading awareness on its negative impacts, a more up to date analysis of the current trend, especially among the students of a pioneer university in Turkey is essential, and this is the goal this study follows.

3. Results and Findings

3.1 Exploratory Data Analysis

As an answer to the first question, and as shown in Figure 4, Instagram is the most favorite social media platform among METU students, followed by Twitter, WhatsApp, and TikTok.

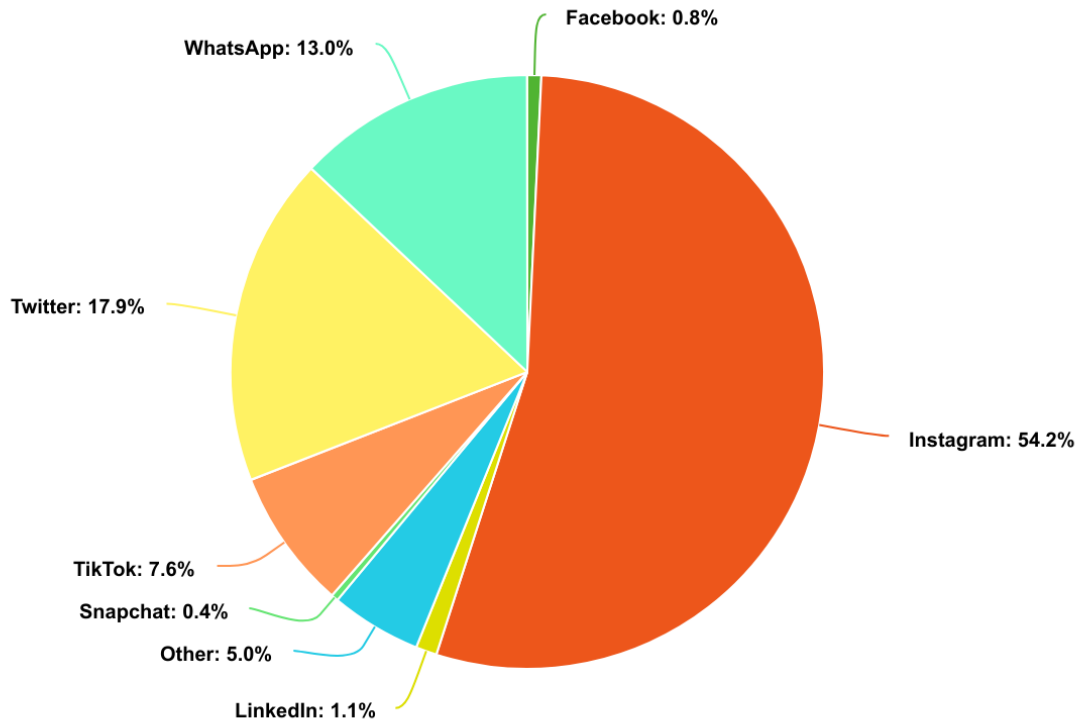


Figure 4. Most favorite social media platforms among METU students

As an answer to the second question, and as shown in Figure 5, the main purpose of using social media among METU students is Entertainment/Fun, followed by Communication/Socializing.

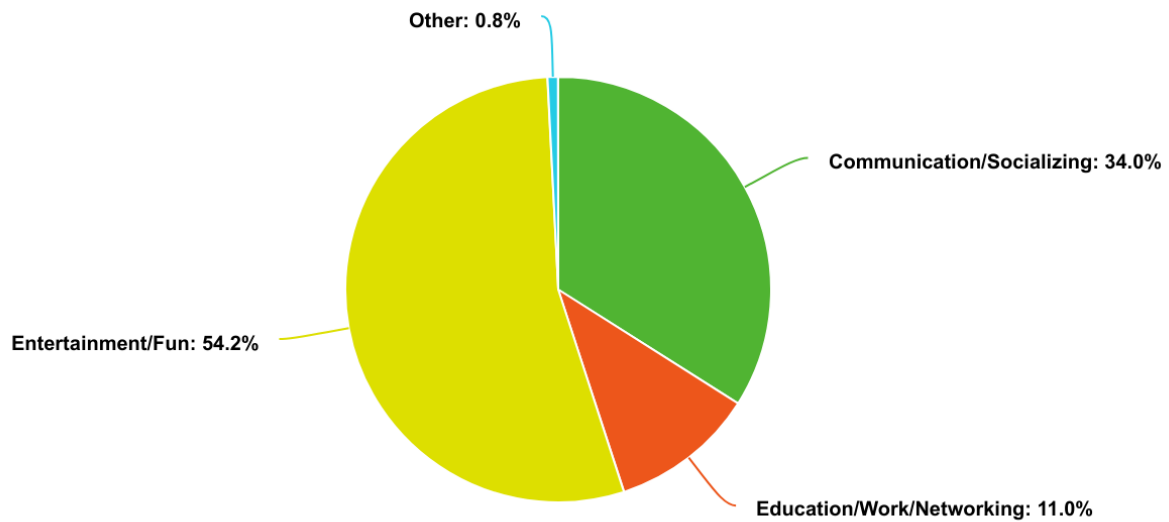


Figure 5. Main purposes of using social media among METU students

3.2 Confirmatory Data Analysis

In order to answer the third research question, the results of conducted one-way ANOVA suggested that there was no significant difference in the score of social media addiction across different social media platforms (Figure 6).

	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
Q4.MostFavorite	7	200	28.60	1.835	0.081
Residuals	254	3958	15.58		

 Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Figure 6. Result of one-way ANOVA to test the difference in the social media addiction score across different social media platforms

In order to answer the fourth research question, the results of conducted one-way ANOVA suggested that there was a significant difference in the score of social media addiction across different purposes of using social media (Figure 7). In follow-up, the result of Tukey post-hoc analysis showed that there was a significant difference between the pair group of Entertainment/Fun and Education/Work/Networking (Figure 8).

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          Df Sum Sq Mean Sq F value Pr(>F)
Q5.MainPurpose  2    136    67.98   4.358 0.0138 *
Residuals      257   4009    15.60
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Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

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Figure 7. Result of one-way ANOVA to test the difference in the social media addiction score across different purposes of using social media

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                                diff      lwr      upr      p adj
Education/Work/Networking-Communication/Socializing -0.883766 -2.8746464 1.107114 0.5482887
Entertainment/Fun-Communication/Socializing          1.141003 -0.1178206 2.399827 0.0845305
Entertainment/Fun-Education/Work/Networking          2.024769  0.1273948 3.922144 0.0333215

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Figure 8. Result of Tukey post-hoc test to study the significance of differences between pair groups

In order to answer the fifth research question, the difference of means in social media addiction score between two groups of males and females examined with two-sample t-test and the result showed no significant difference (Figure 9).

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data: male5$Smscale and female5$Smscale
t = -0.14652, df = 254.61, p-value = 0.8836
alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
95 percent confidence interval:
 -1.052323  0.906580
sample estimates:
mean of x mean of y
 21.53030  21.60317

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Figure 9. Result of difference of mean test between males and females in social media addiction score

4. Discussion or Conclusion

As the answers to first and second questions suggest, we can consider Instagram as the most favorite social media platform and Entertainment/Fun as the main purpose of using social media among METU students. Considering this current trend, it is safe to say that the role of social media in students' lives is beyond necessity and it progresses to excessive use of social media as a source of entertainment. This change of course could put the social media usage at a greater risk of turning to an addiction.

Current research could not gather enough evidence to show a significant difference of social media addiction score due to different favorite platforms. The difference of male and females in their score of social media addiction was also insignificant; this finding is contrary to the finding of Simsek et al. (2019), where they reported higher social media addiction among female Turkish students.

The most considerable finding of the current study is the difference of social media addiction scores among those who use social media for Entertainment/Fun purposes and those who use it for Education/Work/Networking. This shows that as the social media users go beyond the main beneficial functions of using social media, the risk of social media addiction increases. Moreover, in the last question of questionnaire, the majority of respondents state that they do not have negative impacts of social media on mental health in mind while using social media (52 percent chose “Never” and “Sometimes” and 42 percent chose “Often” and “Always”). Alongside with our main finding, this suggests that raising awareness about social media addiction is necessary for students. Moreover, the current trend of social media usage is an alarming one which can affect the productivity of university students.

Although the questions of social media addiction scale (questions 6 to 14) were chosen based on addiction criteria and other existing questionnaires, one limitation of this research was uncertainty in reliability and validity of social media addiction scale, which could have been addressed in a longer course of time.

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Appendices

Social Media Usage Questionnaire

1. Department:

2. Gender:

Female ☐ Male ☐ Prefer not to say ☐ Other:

3. Age:

Up to 19 ☐ 20 to 24 ☐ 25 to 29 ☐ 30 and higher ☐

4. What is your most favorite social media platform? (Choose only one)

Facebook ☐ Instagram ☐ Twitter ☐ LinkedIn ☐
TikTok ☐ Snapchat ☐ WhatsApp ☐ Telegram ☐ Other:

5. What is your main purpose of using social media?

Communication/Socializing ☐ Education/Work/Networking ☐
Entertainment/Fun ☐ Shopping ☐ Other:

6. How much time do you approximately spend on social media in one day? (on all platforms)

Less than 30 minutes ☐ Between 30 minutes to 1 hour ☐
Between 1 to 2 hours ☐ More than 2 hours ☐

7. Do you feel that social media has a negative impact on your job/studies?

Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always ☐

8. Do you feel that social media has a negative impact on your relationships?

Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always ☐

9. Have you ever considered to reduce the time you spend on social media?

Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always ☐

10. Have you ever considered to completely quit social media?

Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always ☐

11. Do you think about social media when you are not using it?

Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always ☐

12. Does the idea of not being able to access social media makes you feel distressed?

Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always ☐

13. Do you use social media in order to forget about daily problems?

Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always ☐

14. Do you lose track of time while using social media?

Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always ☐

15. Do you think about the negative impacts of social media on mental health (Depression, anxiety, ...)?

Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always ☐