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Social Media Usage Experiences of Young Adults during the COVID 19 Pandemic through Social Cognitive Approach to Uses and Gratifications

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Abstract

Since social media is a powerful information transfer and sharing tool in this modern world, it has become more used especially during the pandemic. It may be important to examine the use experiences of individuals in order to understand the impact of social media on individuals during the pandemic period. For this reason, the aim of the study is to examine the experiences of social media use in the pandemic of young adults who use social media actively in detail with thematic analysis. The study group of the research consists of 52 young adults between the ages of 20 and 25 studying at the university. In line with the thematic analysis, four main themes are found: "reasons for using social media", "shares", "social comparison", "self-regulation and addiction". Each theme is explained in the context of the relevant literature.

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic that social isolation is mandatory, the fact that individuals have to stay in their homes due to curfew has caused them to spend more time on social media. Perez stated (2020a-2020b) that messaging on Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram increased by 70% during this period, Twitter use reached a record level and views in live broadcasts doubled. In this period, there is 61% of increase in the use of social media platforms to stay in touch with families, friends and colleagues (Holmes, 2020). Based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which is one of the approaches related to the use of social media, it is stated that individuals use social media to meet their needs such as being informed, knowing the social activities of their friends and the desire to self-presentation, communicating and having fun (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Piwek & Joinson, 2016). Another approach, social cognitive theory (SCT), determines the use of social media according to the expected outcomes follow from consumption. This affects media consumption behavior and even turns into what determines more media consumption. Moreover, it was emphasized that the socio-cognitive mechanism affects the satisfaction perceptions obtained from social media consumption (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). From this theoretical framework, especially during the pandemic period, it can be said that the expectations of people to meet their needs for getting information, interaction etc. can increase their participation in social media and it help individuals cope with the pandemic. In fact, it was stated in the studies (Masur et al., 2014; Walburg et al., 2016) that social media can become a coping mechanism adopted by individuals to temporarily escape from negativity. Suggestions made by World Health Organization (WHO) on what individuals can do to protect their mental health during the coronavirus pandemic (2020), it has been

emphasized that regular communication with close ones via telephone and online channels is important to maintain social communication. Similarly, in other studies, it was asserted that having social support on social media by both other individuals (Xavier, & Wesley, 2018) and governmental institutions (Cumiskey, & Hjorth, 2018; Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2014) decreased individuals' stress and depression levels. In addition, it was emphasized that helping other individuals had a positive effect on mental health (WHO, 2020), and the important effect of social media calls for solidarity and helping each other on this issue was mentioned (Cumiskey, & Hjorth, 2018). For this reason, examining the factors that cause a positive effect as a result of using social media during the pandemic may be important in terms of helping individuals to cope with the pandemic. However, it has been emphasized that staying at home for a long time might make attractive spending much more time on social media than usual, so it is necessary to maintain the right balance with offline activities in the daily routine (WHO, 2020). Because, this situation may lead to long-term social media use and the emergence of negative effects, and it may negatively affect the ability of individuals to cope with the pandemic. In the studies, it has been stated that during the pandemic period, the use of internet and social media has increased to meet the needs of individuals to learn more about COVID-19 and individuals are negatively affected by it (Wang et al., 2020a, 2020b). The reason is that social media is regarded to have the potential to spread misinformation and rumors, provoke fear and promote erroneous behavioral actions (Bradshaw, & Howard, 2019). The abundance of uncertain and false information during the pandemic has been reported to cause information overload and increased anxiety among individuals (Laato & et al., 2020). In previous studies (Verduyn et al., 2017; Huang, 2017; Tromholt, 2016) long-term social media use is associated with chronic stress, low emotional stability, depression, decreased life satisfaction and low psychological well-being, and it has also been stated that it can turn into an addiction (Casale & Fioravanti, 2018; Gao et al., 2017). In the pandemic of COVID-19, it was stated that long-term isolation has the danger of causing technology-related disorders because of the increase in technology-based activities (King, Delfabbro, Billieux & Potenza, 2020).

Another factor that causes negative effects on social media use was that individuals using social media tend to compare themselves with others in an unhealthy way (Fox & Moreland 2015; Vogel et al., 2014). When it is examined from the perspective of social cognitive theory, observing the experiences of others, namely indirect learning, has an important role in the formation of expectations about social media use (Bandura, 1999; Larose & Eastin, 2004). When expectations are formulated by indirectly observing the behavior of others, this may cause individuals to have tendency to social comparison on social media. Studies have emphasized (Fox & Moreland 2015; Vogel et al., 2014; Festinger et al., 2013) that individuals who use social media can compare themselves with other individuals who are superior to themselves and it may lead to qualifications such as low self-esteem and negative self-evaluations, and may reveal negative emotions. Moreover, it was stated that expectations were also shaped on the basis of self-efficacy (Larose & Eastin, 2004). Since self-efficacy is an individual's belief in the ability to organize and exhibit a certain behavior, it becomes important in gaining the necessary skills such as obtaining useful information and dealing with the discontents of online life, especially in the use of social media (Eastin & Larose, 2000; Larose et al., 2001). In a study conducted on this subject, it was emphasized that individuals' lacking of internet self-efficacy and self-regulation may lead to social media addiction (Hong et al., 2019).

It is highlighted in the literature that on one hand, the use of social media in crisis can become a coping mechanism; on the other hand, it may create situations that can negatively affect individuals. Examining the variables that cause the effect of social media use especially during the pandemic can provide awareness of the factors to be considered in using social media consciously. This may become more important for individuals in young adulthood among whom social media use is more widely preferred. In fact, studies have emphasized (Aparicio-Martínez et al., 2020; Ramesh et al., 2018) that social media addiction rates among young adults are increasing day by day. Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences of young adults who use social media actively participating in the research regarding the use of social media during the pandemic. For this purpose, the sub-questions of the research were determined as follows:

1. What are the reasons for social media use during pandemic?
2. What are the factors that cause the effect of social media use during pandemic?
3. What are the changes in the habits of social media use during pandemic?

Method

Study Group

Purposeful sampling method was used to determine the study group of this research. Criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling types, was used because of meeting the predetermined criteria (Patton, 2002). Young adults studying at the university who are active social media users and want to participate voluntarily were included in the study. Comprising the study group, the young adults were reached via distant education online newsletter, information about the research was given, and those who wanted to participate in the study were asked to reply by e-mail. Those who sent e-mail and stated that they would like to participate in the study voluntarily were included in the study group. The study group of this research consists of 52 young adults between the ages of 20 and 25, 40 of whom are female and 12 of whom are male.

Data Collection

The data were collected using an online qualitative survey including open-ended questions in this study. In online qualitative survey, participants give their answers by writing their own words instead of choosing from pre-determined answer options, so it provides access to rich explanations such as subjective experiences, narratives and discourses of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In this study, an online qualitative survey was used to examine the experiences of young adults who actively use social media during the pandemic. The advantage of online qualitative surveys is that they have the potential to capture various perspectives, experiences or interpretations of the participants on the subject being researched (Braun et al., 2020). Due to the nature of the subject, online qualitative survey research has given a voice to people who avoid face-to-face research or who cannot otherwise participate in qualitative research (Davey et al., 2019). This data collection tool was preferred because the young adults studying at the university were subjected to take the lessons on distance learning due to pandemic and since they lived in the different cities of Turkey, it was impossible to interview face-to-face. During the data collection phase, informed consent (online) was provided to whom stated that they wanted to participate by e-mail, and then the participants were asked to answer the online survey

questions. There was an instruction before the questions on the online survey. It was emphasized in the instruction that the participants were asked to write their own feelings and perspectives regarding the subject and there were no right answers of the questions. The questions in the online survey were as follows: "For what purpose did you prefer to use social media during the pandemic?", "What kind of changes did you notice in your feelings, thoughts and behaviors when you thought about your experiences after using social media during the pandemic?", "What would you say about social media shares of people you have been following during the pandemic?"; "What kind of changes did you notice in your habits of using social media during the pandemic?" and "Is there anything else you would like to mention?". The questions were formed by conducting a literature review and expert opinion was received in terms of the suitability of the research. The questions formed by the researcher were sent to the study group via e-mail, and the participants were asked to answer the questions.

Data Analysis

Young adults in the study group sent their answers via e-mail and a total of 52 Word documents, each containing their own answers, were transferred to Maxqda 12, a qualitative data analysis software tool. The reason why "Maxqda 12" computer program was used in the analysis and coding of the data is that it enables the establishment of relationships between themes with its data recall feature. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis stages were followed in the analysis of the data obtained. Thematic analysis is a flexible method to define, analysis and report themes in qualitative data. In addition, this method allows the psychological interpretation of the data. In the first stage of the thematic analysis, the answers given to each question by the researcher were read and then the answers given to each question were re-read respectively to form meaningful units. By creating meaningful units from the answers, data encoding and temporary labels were done. In order to find the themes from the codes and temporary labels, the answers were re-read and the codes were examined and developed. Themes were found from the created codes and transferability was ensured by including detailed descriptions of the found themes.

Results

Four main themes were found in accordance with the obtained data in this study. These were 1. The reasons for using social media, 2. Shares (supportive shares, donation and solidarity calls/helping each other, misinformation and frightening news/shares), 3. Social comparison and 4. Self-regulation and addiction. Each of the themes was explained by quoting directly the answers of the participants.

Theme 1. Reasons for Using Social Media

The sub-themes "getting information", "communicating and socializing" and "having fun" were found under the "reasons for using social media" theme obtained as a result of the analysis of the participants' expressions. Regarding "getting information", one of the participants stated that they used social media to follow the developments in our country and other countries since the first day of the pandemic. They emphasized the importance of getting information about developments in other countries, especially considering that it would

contribute to take precautions:

"From the first day that the pandemic has started to spread, we have seen the situation in all countries through social media and the effect of the disease on people, thanks to the videos taken by people who have experienced it. This situation caused us to take measures by ourselves before the pandemic had reached our country yet".

In addition, one of the participants stated that they paid attention to get information from reliable sources during the pandemic and followed up the process of pandemic with "Life Fits into Home (In Turkish, Hayat Eve Sığar - HES)" application they downloaded on their phone:

"Since the regular and transparent shares and notifications made by official sources contain the most reliable information about the process, I took care of getting information from these sources. I downloaded the application called Life Fits into Home (In Turkish, Hayat Eve Sığar -HES) and had the opportunity to instantly see the numbers and locations of infected patients in the place where I live. With a prudent and conscious approach, I think I got real and useful information by moving away from the chaos-containing pollution of social media".

In another sub-theme, "communicating and socializing", one of the participants stated that they preferred to use social media tools in communicating with his/her close ones due to social isolation. They emphasized that they realized how important it was to be able to communicate with close ones in order to overcome longing, especially in this period:

"As social isolation restricts our social relations, I tried to meet this need by using technology. Despite social isolation, I did not feel alone. I communicated with my family members and friends via the internet through options such as video chatting and messaging. We were in frequent contact and talked about how much we missed each other. There was only physical distance among us. This process reminded us how much we love each other; how important we are to each other".

In addition, it was emphasized that social media was preferred not only for communicating with the close ones but also with other people. One participant stated that social media is an important place to socialize and overcome loneliness for young people who are lonely or feeling lonely during the pandemic:

"In this pandemic period, I can say that social media is the only thing for us to grasp at straws. I think it is a place where lonely individuals forget their loneliness a little bit and it is an important channel for young people".

In the last sub-theme, "having fun", it was seen that the participants use social media for activities they can spend their free time. One of the participants stated that they started to use social media more especially for activities that can be done at home during this period:

"There were times when I started using social media intensively in content such as protection from coronavirus, patient and mortality rates as well as different types of food, games or fun activities that can be done at home or entertainment, sports exercises, etc."

In addition, one of the participants stated that they use social media for shopping in this period, moreover, they did shop because of seeing advertisements even though they did not need:

"I spend much more time on social media in this time. Since I am alone at home, I constantly use social media on my phone. Sometimes I get bored and log out the social media, after a few seconds, I realize that I log in again social media. The advertisement of shopping websites catches my attention and sometimes I find myself looking for something even though I do not need".

Theme 2. Shares

As a result of the analysis of the participants' expressions, the theme of " shares " and sub-themes of "donation and solidarity calls/helping each other", "supportive shares " "misinformation and frightening news/ shares " were found. Regarding "donation and solidarity calls/helping each other", the participants emphasized that such shares had a positive effect on individuals. One of the participants mentioned the effect of the solidarity calls shared through social media to support healthcare professionals by applauding from balconies and celebrate national holidays by singing the national anthem especially during this period. They emphasized that these calls created a positive effect in a difficult process by supporting the feeling of unity among individuals:

"For sure I have seen the unifying effect of social media once again in this pandemic period. I have witnessed an incredible solidary environment on social media via a lot of donation campaigns/calls. Calls for both applauding healthcare workers for three days and singing our national anthem on special days such as 23rd of April and 19th of May led people to unite. In fact, with these examples I have seen and understood that the phenomenon we call social media gives people the feeling of unity with patriotic feelings in such difficult times".

It was stated that seeing people helping each other on social media led to positive emotions and increased respect for people who help:

"During this period, I had a great respect for the people who really worked. As I saw people helping each other on social media or on TV, my hope, love and respect increased day by day".

They also mentioned their own experiences of helping older people particularly on "helping to the older people" sub-theme, alongside shares related to solidarity. One participant explained their own helping activities using a social media tool (WhatsApp) during the pandemic and the feeling of it:

"In this period, especially the elder people cannot go outside and they have some needs. We have a WhatsApp group for our apartment for 7 flats including ours. I am the youngest member of this group. I message the group whether they need anything before I leave for the market and if someone needs something they write there. Then I buy and deliver to them in person. There is a lady living alone in the apartment. On her paydays, my family and I go to the center by car and get and deliver her pay. Apart from it, I always knock her door when I go to the market asking whether she needs anything. I feel happy when I do these things".

In another sub-theme of "supportive shares", the effect of positive shares shared by other individuals in this

period on social media tools was mentioned:

"However, I must say that the good things also happened in this process. The supportive shares of people, tweets, and shares on Instagram made me feel comfortable and feel good".

However, in addition to the supportive shares of other individuals, in the sub-theme of "misinformation and frightening news/shares", the negative impact of the news and shares was frequently mentioned. One of the participants stated that misinformation and exaggerated shares on social media caused fear and panic among individuals.

"Although social media enables us to get information from the agenda and the world, on the other hand, it is an environment that tends to show its negative sides exaggeratedly while reflecting this news to us. I think not only during the pandemic, but also in normal times any event or situation is exaggerated on social media. This situation continued during the epidemic period as well. Many fake and exaggerated information was shared through social media that would cause fear and anxiety among people. This created negative emotions on me as well as on all people. Sometimes it caused me feel fear and panic".

Theme 3. Social Comparison

Another factor that causes the effect of using social media during the pandemic is "social comparison". One of the participants stated that being exposed to shares of other individuals who shared positive things about themselves caused others to question themselves and make comparisons. As a result of this comparison, they perceived themselves as incompetent:

"Yet, of course I was also affected by what I saw. Some of the shares I saw during the day had more negative effects on me. For example, I envied people who could spend time for regular sports, diet or hobbies. Frankly, I had a focus problem in this process, I can just overcome. But these shares made me feel exhausted and pushed me to think that I was very incompetent while I was struggling to focus".

Another participant emphasized that with the increase in the use of social media during this period, they were more exposed to shares of the influencers and celebrities they followed on social media. Their shares made the participant feel bad by comparing their opportunities with his/her own ones:

"I was not an active user of social media, it increased with the pandemic. Seeing the vast opportunities of various influencers and celebrities had whipped me up for my future goals. On the other hand, it made me feel bad for not being able to be like them".

Theme 4. Self-Regulation and Addiction

"Self-regulation and addiction" theme was found regarding the changes in the habits of using social media during the pandemic. One of the participants mentioned the change in the habit of using social media with the pandemic regarding self-regulation. The participant, who did not need to filter the news and information on social media before the pandemic, stated that they preferred to stay away from the news about the pandemic as they were affected by them in this period:

"I started to filter the contents on social media which I did not do before, maybe because I did not take them seriously until this time. I needed to filter the information flowing on social media more than ever, because I knew that the opposite would drive me to feel more anxiety and so my immune system would collapse".

Similarly, another participant stated that while watching every news at the beginning of the pandemic, they preferred to watch the news of the sources they trusted later and stayed away from the others:

"Primarily, I took care not to watch every news during the pandemic. I read the news of the sources I trust so that I can avoid confusion by information pollution. Of course, I could not always follow this. I am an active Twitter user; I saw many things there unintentionally and so my anxiety increased. Yet, I tried to stay away from them and I started not to read those news".

However, while being selective when it comes to getting news and information about the pandemic, the situation of not controlling the willpower was also emphasized using social media for different purposes.

"Although it is one of the things that is good for me, I accept that social media is a useless channel that constantly keeps me busy. But I still cannot control my willpower on this issue, especially in this period".

Regarding the changes in the habits of using social media during the pandemic, it was mentioned to start using social media more and turning it into an "addiction" level. One participant said that spending time on social media was good for them, on the other hand, they said that it negatively affected their communication with family members. They even emphasized the concern that this negative impact on communication would continue after the pandemic ends:

"Since I have been at home during the pandemic, I started to surf on the Internet more. Even though I encounter the pandemic news there, I still attach great importance to social media. Although I try to be busy with different activities during the day, I find myself surfing on social media. I know the time I spend on social media has increased too much. In my daily life, it keeps me distracted and so I have fun. It is enough just to surf on the social media. I don't understand how the hours has passed and it makes me become abstract at home. I think my communication with my family has decreased. Therefore, the increased social media use negatively affects me a lot. If life conditions return to normal, I think my communication with people will be less than before".

Another participant mentioned that they spent much more time on social media likewise other individuals in this period, and it affected their regular sleeping or eating routine negatively.

"In this pandemic period, I have been spending so much time on social media like other people. Then I realized that it affected my sleep routine, eating routine and I started to use social media in intervals".

Discussion

In this study, primarily, for which needs young adults prefer to use social media during the pandemic was examined. According to the findings, when the reasons for using social media were examined, which was the

first theme of this study, it was seen that young adults had reasons such as "getting information", "communicating and socializing" and "having fun". Supporting the finding "getting knowledge" of this research, according to the studies conducted by Wang et al., (2020a, 2020b), individuals wanted to get information about COVID-19 as a reason for the increase on internet and social media use. In the study, it was stated that more than 90% of the participants obtained their COVID-19 information from the internet and social media. It was reported that they tried to get information such as the transmission of COVID-19, drugs and vaccines, experiences of other countries, number of cases and prevention recommendations through social media. Supporting the finding "communicating and socializing", which was another finding of this research, it was mentioned in the studies (Drouin, McDaniel, Pater, & Toscos, 2020) that social media could be a channel where individuals connect with their friends. It was emphasized that individuals could use social media at higher rates in times of crisis when face-to-face social interaction was prevented. Therefore, it was pointed that the use of technology can increase in general in times of crisis and people might think that social media was very important to stay in touch with other individuals. It was also stated that social media was seen as a channel where the need for socialization could be met by getting approved in the form of positive comments and likes. In a study conducted by Nesi and Prinstein (2015), it was stated that people could share their information on social media to get attention and approval from others. In another study, it was emphasized that social media users who shared their information on social media actively created their self-images and it even might lead to addiction (Islam et al., 2019). Supporting another finding of this research, "having fun", it was emphasized in a study that the coronavirus epidemic significantly changed the daily normal activities of individuals and especially it increased the consumption of digital entertainment. It was mentioned that obligations of staying home and quarantines increased activities of digital entertainment consumption, especially online games, watching e-sports and video games (Javed, 2020; Perez, 2020). In a study conducted in the USA (Pantling, 2020), it was stated that there was 75% increase in online gaming activity at the time of the first stay at home call, and similarly, 70% increase on internet traffic related to Fortnite games in Italy (Lepido & Rolander, 2020).

Another finding obtained in this study was about the factors that caused the effect of using social media during the pandemic. Among the factors that caused positive effects were "donation and solidarity calls/helping each other" and "supportive sharing". When the literature was examined, supporting the finding of this research "donation and solidarity calls/helping each other", in studies it was seen that social media could be an important source of social support during a crisis. For example, it was emphasized that social media was used by government agencies as an appropriate platform for collecting and disseminating information to effectively manage disasters, for citizens to receive social support and to express their concerns about traumatic events (Yucesoy-Ozkan et al., 2020; Cumiskey, & Hjorth, 2018; Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2014). In this study, especially by emphasizing the effect of the solidarity call for helping elderly people by young adults, the positive effect of helping elderly people on their emotional states was mentioned. As a matter of fact, it was emphasized by World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) that providing support by helping others was important in terms of mental health.

In this study, the importance of "supportive shares" that caused positive effects was also mentioned. In line with the finding of this research, it was emphasized that in social media individuals could experience social support

through active interactions such as texting and talking to people as well as passive interactions such as receiving likes and comments on photos or videos and having their shares reposted by someone else (McCloskey et al., 2015). In a study, it was highlighted that getting social support by other individuals on social media reduced the stress, loneliness and depression levels of the individuals and increased their well-being (Xavier, 2018). However, "misinformation and frightening news/shares" that caused a negative effect as a result of using social media during the pandemic were also mentioned. Supporting this finding of the study, especially Li, Wu, Jiang, and Zhai (2018) stated in their study that social messaging during stressful life events had a positive effect on life satisfaction. Yet, despite these benefits, it was emphasized that use of social media in times of crisis had the potential to spread misinformation and false rumors, to provoke fear and encourage erroneous behavioral action (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). It was also stated that the abundance of uncertain and misinformation during the pandemic led to information overload, increased health anxiety and sharing misinformation (Laato et al., 2020). In the literature, it was pointed that there might be a significant amount of misinformation and misunderstanding on social media, individuals with more problematic social media use would be more exposed to COVID-19 information and therefore they would be more likely to have misunderstandings about the epidemic (Geldsetzer, 2020). However, if users had reasons to suspect that the quality of online news was low, it was stated that they were more critical towards this news (Kim & Dennis, 2019). Recent studies on this subject indicated that informing people to pay attention to the sources of the news they read would increase their critical point of view towards information and this would reduce their possibility of sharing fake news in the future (Kim & Dennis, 2019; Nekmat, 2020).

Another factor in the study that caused a negative effect as a result of using social media during the pandemic was "social comparison". Supporting the findings of the study, it was stated in the studies (Fox & Moreland 2015; Vogel et al., 2014) that individuals using social media tended to compare themselves with others in an unhealthy way and they might experience negative emotions as a result of it. Even, Festinger (et al., 2013) stated that individuals tended to use upward social comparison by comparing themselves with individuals who were superior to them, which could lead to characteristics such as low self-esteem and negative self-evaluations. It was emphasized that because of social comparison, people were more inclined to share only their best sides online, hide the negative and therefore creating a fake image to compare, which would lead to negative emotions (Vogel & Rose, 2016). Moreover, it was emphasized that when people used social media to promote themselves, they would need to keep the balance actively what they would share and what they would not in order to maintain their positive image. However, it was stated that in cases which was not easy to decide what information was reliable, such as COVID-19 pandemic, it became difficult and might cause cognitive load and social media fatigue in individuals (Whelan et al., 2020). In other studies (Lee, 2014; Chrisler, Fung, Lopez & Gorman, 2013, Chou & Edge, 2012; Vogel et al., 2014), it was highlighted that the more individuals spent time on social media sites (Facebook, Twitter etc.), the more probable they would experience the comparison behaviors and it would increase the probability of experiencing negative emotions.

The last finding obtained in this research was about the changes in habits of using social media. "Self-regulation and addiction" was included in these changes. The conducted studies were emphasized that social media might become a coping mechanism adopted by individuals to temporarily avoid pressures and negative self-

perceptions, yet it could lead to addictive social media use in the long term (Masur et al., 2014; Walburg et al., 2016). However, it was also stated that as individuals had higher sense of self-efficacy in social media use, they could cope with the discontents of online life (Eastin & Larose, 2000; Larose et al., 2001). It was expected that as social media users had higher sense of self-efficacy, the expectations would be increased (e.g., finding useful information) and their self-regulation would also be successful. When the literature was examined, self-regulation (Bandura, 1991) explained how individuals directed their own behaviors (self-monitoring), judged according to personal and social standards (judgment process), and how they applied their own reaction motives to soften their behaviors (self-response). It was emphasized that self-regulation in the use of social media was necessary in many aspects, from getting useful information to internet connection at homes and dealing with the discontent of online life, and it was especially important for novice users who did not acquire these skills yet (Eastin & Larose, 2000; Larose et al., 2001). Therefore, it was highlighted that when self-regulation failed, media consumption could be expected to increase (Larose, Lin & Eastin, 2003).

The limitations of this research were that the study was carried out using qualitative data collection method and the study group consisted of young adults who continued their university education. For future studies on this subject, quantitative and mixed methods may be preferred. It can also be conducted including different age groups. Studies can be formed by including different variables related to this subject. Despite of these limitations, the findings obtained from this study provide important data on the reasons and effects of young adults using social media during the pandemic. Our findings present that young adults prefer to use social media to meet some of their needs during the pandemic and the factors that may cause effects as a result of their use of social media.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Young adults who are university students prefer to use social media to meet their needs such as getting information, communicating, socializing, leisure activities and shopping during the pandemic. For this reason, as it has become important to obtain the right information from the right sources during the pandemic period, online trainings can be organized for young adults to acquire social media literacy. In order to contribute to communication and socialization with each other, online student communities can be formed and be supported to organize social activities. On the other hand, online guidance studies can be conducted to acquire the ability to plan online and offline leisure activities in a balanced way. In addition, awareness studies on shopping addiction can be included, and online psychological counselling can be provided to those who have problems on this issue. During the pandemic, donation and solidarity calls through social media have created a positive effect on individuals by causing a sense of unity. For this reason, it may be beneficial to increase these calls, campaigns and activities from reliable sources on social media. By organizing social responsibility projects especially for solidarity, participation of young adults who are university students can be encouraged.

However, with the increase in the use of social media during the pandemic, being more exposed to shares increases the possibility of social comparison as well. In order to prevent young adults from being unhappy by making upward social comparisons, it may be necessary to include studies to develop positive self-perception.

Online psychological counselling can be provided to realize their own possibilities and to set realistic and suitable goals for the future. Since the increase in the social media use due to being at home brings the danger of reaching the level of addiction, it may be beneficial to conduct studies on what social media addiction is to prevent it. Informative sessions on social media use during the pandemic and studies to develop self-regulation skills in social media use can help reduce the negative impact. In this context, it can be said that social media can turn into an important source of support for young adults to cope with this process by informing, educating and entertaining them during the pandemic.

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