



## The Analysis of Adolescents Attitude to Social Media and their Loneliness Level\*

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**Abstract.** The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the attitudes towards social media and loneliness levels of high school students who is studying in high schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Another aim of the study is to investigate whether there are significant differences between students' attitudes and loneliness levels towards Social Media in terms of various socio-demographic variables. The students participating in the study consisted of a total of 195 people, 59% of who were women and 41% were men. The data of the research were used Social Media Attitude Scale developed by Argin (2013) and UCLA Loneliness Scale, which was validated in Turkish by Demir (1989). The data of the study were analysed using One-way analysis of variance ANOVA, t-test and Bivariate Correlation analysis programs. No significant difference was found between the attitudes towards the use of social media according to gender. Significant differences were found between the family's moderate or high economic level, having any social media accounts, and their level of loneliness. As a result of the study, it was found that female students have higher levels of loneliness than male students.

**Keywords:** Social media attitude, loneliness, high school students

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### INTRODUCTION

Adolescents' addiction to social media and determining the positive or negative aspects of social media tools that affect these individuals are important due to many issues. Today, young people; they turn to social media with the desire to get away from daily stress and troubles, to share the developments in their lives with their friends and to create special areas for themselves (Düvenci, 2012). The search for identity, which has become increasingly important during adolescence, has become more and more important in the lives of young people with the spread of the internet and intense also easy access to social media (Saraç, 2014). Because of the Internet, checking e-mails, accessing and sharing social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.), watching movies, and making money transfers between banks has now become a commonplace. The development of the Internet has brought many innovations, conveniences and habits to people. It could be supposed that the most important of these is social media (Zorbaz, 2013).

With the fact that fast internet access, which is a product of the development of information communication technologies, is accessible in all areas of our lives has made social media an integral part of modern society. Social media are online applications that have developed independently of each other and enable consumers to reflect and share their own content with others (Gülsoy, 2009). Social media is one of the significant reasons of internet use today, with the use of the internet after the emergence of the internet. Social media is an online platform where people can share their personal experiences and sharing, feelings and thoughts with their friends and / or strangers all over the world, and users are allowed to produce and share their own shares (Baruh & Yüksel, 2009; Poynter, 2012). In Turkey approximately 72% of the Internet population, as 63% of the active use of social media. Turkey Statistics Institute gave when he

\* This study, of the first author, Prof. Dr. Nergüz Bulut Serin is a part of the thesis conducted under the supervision.

examined the statistical data of 43 million users Facebook, compared to men, women are more in the report that they use Facebook. On the other hand, there are 38 million users on Instagram and the number of male users is higher than female users in Instagram as in Facebook. LinkedIn, which is a professional business network, is also a platform that men use more intensely than women and has a number of 7.3 million users (Bayrak, 2019). The frequency of use of social media tools are listed as blog, forum, wiki and social bookmarking from most to the least (Kocadere & Aşkar, 2013). Touloupis and Athanasiades (2020), ICT teachers declared that they do not feel confident to manage students' online risk behaviors, regardless of their awareness and sensitization on the issue.

Nowadays, it is known that the individuals who use social media the most are young people. When that use is often excessive, it is considered as addiction (Kara & Coşkun, 2012; Yanık & Serin, 2020). Especially in some recent studies, it has been shown that the increase of individuals' interest in social media sharing sites and online-offline games unknowingly affects a large part of their daily lives (Tsai & Lin, 2004). The use of social media has increased by 50% especially in the last eight years, and the rate of using the internet for using social media and messaging has reached around 90% (TUIK, 2019). The rapid change in social media attracts people's attention and directs people to this area. In this context, it forces to make changes in order to meet the needs of individuals and address all areas (Alican & Sabah, 2013). It is thought that the attitudes of users towards social media tools (Instagram, Facebook, etc.) and their use of social media affect on each other, and studies are conducted between these two terms (Aydoğmuş, 2017; Serin, Serin, & Özbaş, 2015). In the study conducted by Hazar (2011), it was determined that 50.4% of the participants used social media for 2-4 hours a day, and 8.1% did not use social media. The most frequently used social media platform was Facebook with 76.2%, followed by Youtube with 7.3% and Twitter with 4%. It was found that the participants mostly used social media for purposes such as obtaining information, communicating, having fun, sharing photos and videos, and playing games.

More than half (56%) of adolescents use social media tools several times a day, and 12% report using them once a day, with only 6% reporting online weekly and 2% less online (Norton, 2018). Kelly, Zilanawala, Booker, and Sacker (2018) evaluated the impact of social media use on adolescents. The findings of the study highlight the possible dangers of long-term social media use for the mental health of young people. While the importance of social relations in human life is great, it is said that in recent years, with the effect of technological development and increasing industrialization, human relations have decreased and people have become unable to establish close relations with each other as before (Saraçoğlu, 2000). Since lonely individuals do not care about themselves and their health, their physical and mental states may also be negatively affected (Mahon, Yarcheski, & Yarcheski, 1998).

People who experience loneliness are defined as individuals with low self-esteem, withdrawn, react and unable to establish a relationship with the opposite sex (Karataş, 2018). Therefore, a person must maintain healthy relationships in order to survive (Ünlü, 2015). Internet addiction is known to be an important determinant in loneliness (Tohumcu, 2018). Neto, Golz, and Polega (2015) examined gender differences, loneliness and frequency of social media use among high school students. It was determined that students use the internet mostly for social networking and entertainment purposes through smart phones and access social media every day.

In this context, the fact that adolescents, especially at school age, spend a significant amount of their time on these networks raises the question of the level of their attitudes towards social media and their relationship with loneliness. The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the attitudes towards social media and loneliness levels of high school students studying in high schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Another aim of the study is to investigate whether there are significant differences between students' attitudes and loneliness levels towards Social Media in terms of various socio-demographic variables.

## **Problem Statement**

What is the relationship between high school students' attitudes towards social media and their loneliness? Do social media attitudes and loneliness levels differ significantly according to different socio-demographic variables?

## **Sub Problems**

1. Is there a significant difference between the social media attitudes and loneliness levels of high school students and gender and the socio-economic level of the family, whether they have social media sufferings, and their frequency of using social media sites?

2. What is the relationship between the social media attitude and loneliness level of high school students and the time they spend on the internet?

3. What is the relationship between high school students' social media attitude and loneliness?

## **METHODS**

This section contains information about the research model, population and sample, data collection and data analysis.

### **Research Model**

In this study, descriptive scanning model was used as it was aimed to determine the attitudes and loneliness levels of adolescents towards social media and whether their attitudes and loneliness levels towards social media differ according to various variables.

### **Population and Sample**

The universe of this research consists of high school students in the district centres of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Ministry of National Education in the 2018-2019 academic year.

### **Research Sample**

Within the scope of the research, students studying in high schools in the district centre in TRNC constitute the sample of the study. The students participating in the study consisted of a total of 195 people, 59% of who were women and 41% were men. Almost all of the students participating in the research are members of at least one social media site (96.9%). 68.2% of the students participating in the research use social media sites at least once every day. The purpose of these students to use the internet is mostly to follow social media sites (69.2%). Facebook (64.6%) and Instagram (92.8%) lead the students' social media platforms. Instagram (90.8) is the most used of these two.

### **Data Collection Tools**

**Personal Information Form:** It is a form that includes questions about students' school, gender, parents' socio-economic status information and use of social media.

**Social Media Attitude Scale:** It was developed by Otrar and Argin (2015). The scale consists of a total of 23 items, 6 of which are negative and 17 of which are positive, in five-Likert type, and consists of 4 factors (need for sharing, social competence, social isolation and relationship with teachers). Factors explain 52.65% of the total variance. In the analysis for internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated as  $\alpha = .85$  for the whole scale. Test-retest correlation coefficient was found to be significant ( $r = .83$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

**UCLA Loneliness Scale (UCLALS):** It was developed by Russell, Peplau and Cutrona in 1980 to measure people's loneliness levels. The reliability and validity of the scale studies in Turkey Iron (1989) was made. In Demir's (1989) study, 72 people were applied regarding the internal consistency of the scale and the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.96. The reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as .94 with the test-retest method. In this study, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be .84.

## Data Analysis

For the purposes of the study; Percentage breakdowns were analysed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), t, LSD tests, and Bivariate Correlation analysis programs.

## RESULTS

Regarding Social Media Attitudes and Loneliness Levels Sub-Problems of High School Students

**Table 1.** T-Test results regarding the differentiation of social media attitude and loneliness levels of participants by gender variable

	Group	n	Mean	SS	t	p
SMT	Female	115	69.25	14.77	.451	.335
	Male	80	70.20	13.95		
LONLINESS LEVEL	Female	115	43.50	14.77	2.431	.016*
	Male	80	40.25	13.95		

p<.05\*

As seen in Table 1, no significant difference was found between the gender of the participants and their social media attitudes ( $p > .05$ ). A significant difference was found between loneliness levels according to gender ( $F = 2.431, p < .05$ ).

**Table 2.** ANOVA test results regarding the difference of the social media attitude and loneliness levels of the participants according to the socio-economic level of the family

SMDS	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	F	p
Low	12	56.583	12.391	4.658	.011*
Medium	157	69.643	14.874		
High	26	65.884	16.376		
<b>UCLA Loneliness Scale</b>					
Low	12	41.000	6.728	4.754	.010*
Medium	157	42.643	9.032		
High	26	37.000	7.161		

p<.05\*

When Table 2 was analysed, a significant difference was found between the social media attitude of the participants and the socio-economic levels of their families. It was found that the significant difference between the groups was between students with low economic income and middle economic income of the family ( $F=4.658, p < .05$ ). A significant difference was found between the loneliness levels of the students and the socio-economic levels of their families. It was determined that the significant difference between the groups was between students with middle economic income and high economic income ( $F= 4.754, p < .05$ ).

**Table 3.** ANOVA test results regarding the differentiation of participants' social media attitude and levels of loneliness according to their membership to any social media site

SMDS	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	F	p
Yes, Existence	189	68.624	15.038	8.069	.005**
No, nonexistence	6	51.000	11.730		
<b>UCLA Loneliness Scale</b>					
Yes, existence	189	41.883	8.929	7.056	.009*
No, nonexistence	6	32.166	2.316		

p<.05\*

In Table 3, a significant difference was found between the participants' attitudes towards social media and their mean scores regarding whether they were a member of any social media site ( $F=8.069, p<.05$ ). In this context, it can be said that students with social media membership have higher average social media usage compared to students without any membership. There is a significant difference between the students' level of loneliness and their mean scores on whether they are a member of any social media website was determined ( $F = 7.056, p<.05$ ). In this context, it can be said that students with social media membership have higher average loneliness than students without any membership.

**Table 4.** ANOVA test results regarding the differences of social media attitudes and loneliness levels of participants according to their frequency of accessing social media sites

SMDS	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	F	p
I never use	5	48.800	11.649	.220	.927
Once a day	171	68.736	14.852		
Once a week	15	71.133	16.608		
Once a month	4	52.750	5.560		
<b>UCLA Loneliness Scale</b>					
I never use	5	32.800	1.923	2.653	.049*
Once a day	171	41.742	9.013		
Once a week	15	45.000	9.576		
Once a month	4	37.250	8.539		

$p<.05^*$

In Table 4, no significant difference was found between the participants' attitudes towards social media and their average score regarding their frequency of accessing any social media site ( $p>.05$ ). A significant difference was found between the loneliness levels of the participants and their mean scores regarding the frequency of accessing any social media site. Accordingly, it was observed that the loneliness level of those who do not have a social media membership is higher than those who use social media membership once a week ( $F=2.653, p<.05$ ).

**Table 5.** The relationship between social media attitude and loneliness levels of participants and time spent on the internet

	r	p
SMDS & Time Spent on the Internet	-.131	.068
UCLA Loneliness Scale & Time Spent on the Internet	.046	.524

As seen in Table 5, a moderately negative correlation was found between the social media attitude of the participants and the time they spent on the Internet ( $r = .131, p <.05$ ). Accordingly, there is a moderately negative relationship between the attitude towards social media and the time they spend on the internet, and a low level positive significant relationship was found between the level of loneliness and the time spent on the internet ( $r = -.131, p <.05$ ). Accordingly, as time spent on the internet increases, loneliness levels increase in the same direction.

**Table 6.** Correlation of participants' social media attitude and loneliness levels scales

	r	p
SMDS & UCLA Loneliness Scale	.110	.125

In Table 6, the correlation of high school students, SMDS and UCLA Loneliness Scale was compared with the bivariate analysis method. There was no statistically significant relationship between them.

## DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

No significant difference was found between the social media attitudes of the participants according to their gender. Görkemli (2017), Otrar and Arğın (2014), Koyuncu, Ünsal, & Arslantaş, (2014), Malak, Khalifeh, & Shuhaiber (2017), and Stavropoulos, et al. (2018) have reached similar results. It supports the findings of the current research. Some studies have found that males use the internet more than females (Alican & Saban, 2013; Ök, 2013) and it has been reported that there is a higher risk of internet addiction, which is attributed to the fact that males avoid females more in social interaction. (Li, Hou, yang, Jian, & Wang, 2019; Zhang, et al, 2014). In this study, a significant difference was found between the loneliness levels of the participants according to gender. The loneliness levels of females were found to be higher than males. There are studies supporting this finding in the literature (Özbek, 2017). However, against this finding, there are also some studies showing that males feel more lonely (Demir, 1990; Batıgün & Hasta, 2010; Özkaya, 2017). Despite this, there are some studies showing that loneliness is not significant as a female and a male, but is equal in both genders (Kılıç & Alver, 2014; Mutlu, 2018). Findings suggest that problematic Internet use shows significant variation depending on gender. Predictor variables loneliness meaningfully predict problematic Internet use (Bulut Serin, 2011).

A significant difference was found between the social media attitude of the participants and the socio-economic levels of their families. It was found that the significant difference between the groups was among students with low economic income and middle economic income of the family. There are studies stating that a high level of income facilitates access to some addictive factors (Gunawan, Hachiga, Tripoli, Alan, & Kearns, 2019). As the economic level decreases, social media attitudes scores also decrease (Lam, Peng, & Mia, 2009; Hur, 2006; Kafai & Sutton, 1999). At the same time, it is known that the level of income is high, adolescents do less work in extracurricular activities, and on the other hand, as the economic income decreases, they try to contribute to the working workforce in order to provide the family income (Barışık, Ege, & Şimşek, 2016).

However some studies support the findings of the present study (Malak, Khalifeh, & Shuhaiber, 2017; Ak, Korkulu, & Yılmaz, 2013) Contrary to these results, there are also studies showing that as the economic level of the family decreases, internet and social media addiction increases (Wu, et al. others, 2016). It has been determined that adolescents with low income have more positive attitudes towards social media than their peers in the high income group (Bor, 2018).

A significant difference was found between the loneliness levels of the participants and the socio-economic levels of their families. It was determined that the significant difference between the groups was between the students with middle economic income and high economic income. Income level is one of the important factors that determine the limits of movement in a person's daily life. Low socio-economic level prevents him from participating in some activities, and it is natural for an individual who cannot socialize to feel lonely (Demir, 2019). As the socio-economic level decreases, their self-confidence decreases and it can be said that they feel lonely due to the difficulty in expressing themselves, difficulties in interpersonal relations and failure (Bilgin, 2011). A significant difference was found between the participants' attitudes towards social media and their mean scores regarding whether they are a member of any social media website.

In this context, it can be said that students with social media membership have higher average on social media usage compared to students without any membership. A significant difference was found between the level of loneliness of the students and their mean scores regarding whether they were a member of a social media website or not. Accordingly, it can be said that students with social media membership have higher average loneliness than students without any membership. Internet use is said to lead people to loneliness over time, evaluate their time on the internet as if it were a real life, enjoy it over time, and increase it as long as they enjoy it like a vicious circle (Morahah-Martin, 1999). One of the most important reasons for this is; People who are not able to express themselves clearly and who cannot fulfil sufficient satisfaction in daily relationships with people can express themselves more comfortably and freely in the virtual environment (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, and Fox, 2012).

A moderately negative relationship was found between the participants' attitude towards social media and the time they spend on the Internet. Accordingly, there is a moderately negative correlation between the attitude towards social media and the time they spend on the internet. A low level positive significant relationship was found between the level of loneliness and the time they spent on the internet. While there was no significant difference between the scores the students got from the social media attitude and use scales and the loneliness scale; A statistically significant difference was found between social media use and attitude scale scores (Özsarı, and Karaduman, 2016). It has been found that as the frequency and duration of social media use decreases, the attitude towards social media is positively affected. One of the important results of the study is that in time the increase spent on social media decreases the social competence level of adolescents and increases their social isolation (Bor, 2018). A study reported that people spend more than 70 percent of their daily internet usage by following social media sites (Avcı, 2016). It is stated that the percentage of spent time in all over the world on social media is over 68% (Dijilopedi, 2018). Foreign (2019) found a negative relationship between social media attitude and loneliness level, which is different from the findings of this study.

While there was no significant difference between the social media attitudes of the participants according to their gender, loneliness levels of female students were found to be higher than male students. Social media attitudes of low-income students were found to be lower than middle-income students. The loneliness level of students with middle socio-economic level is higher than students with high socio-economic level. Social media usage average of students with social media membership was higher than students without any membership. The level of loneliness of students with social media membership is higher than students without any membership. Considering the finding that social media attitudes are at a moderate level, it can be suggested to raise awareness in schools on social media literacy in order to reduce internet addiction and negative use of social media usage. In order to reduce the loneliness and social media attitudes of the students, it is considered important to organize seminars and conferences, especially by guidance experts working in school guidance services at schools.

This research study was applied to 195 students in order to determine the social media attitudes and loneliness relationships of students in four major schools within the borders of the TRNC country. The generalization of these research results should be limited to students studying in these schools. In new studies on this subject, it may be suggested to work with students from different educational levels, with different variables, and students from different age groups. Knowing the students' attitudes towards social media and taking the necessary precautions according to their positive or negative effects will enable a more conscious use of social media. In this way, it is thought that adolescents can develop a positive attitude towards social media and contribute to the studies to be carried out on the loneliness levels of adolescents, will also shed light on the researches about the educational and academic use of social media networks, and collimating comparable studies on adolescents.

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