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## Investigation of Social Media Addiction in Terms of Social Appearance Anxiety and Social Desirability

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## Investigation of Social Media Addiction in Terms of Social Appearance Anxiety and Social Desirability

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### Abstract

When the studies are examined, it is seen that social media addiction (SMA) increases in adolescents with high social desirability and social appearance anxiety (SAA). For this reason, the aim of this research is to examine SMA in adolescents in terms of SAA and social desirability and to determine at what level social desirability and SAA predict SMA. The research was designed as a descriptive study in the relational survey model. A total of 484 students, 338 of whom were girls (69.8%) and 146 (30.2%) were boys studying at secondary school institutions in the central districts of Hatay province, participated in the study using the convenience sampling method. The Social Media Addiction Scale, the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale, and the Social Desirability Scale were used as data collection tools. The T test and multiple regression analysis were used in the analysis of the data. As a result of the research, it was found that SMA and social desirability do not differ by gender, and it was also seen that SAA differed significantly according to gender, and girls were more concerned about their social appearance. In consequence of the research, it was also found that social desirability and SAA significantly predict SMA.

**Keywords:** social media addiction, social appearance anxiety, social desirability, gender

### Introduction

Social media are online applications where people communicate and share with each other without time and space restrictions, meet new people, share their ideas, and participate in discussions (Bat and Vural, 2010; Kim, Jeong, and Lee, 2010). According to Merriam-Webster (2021), social media are forms of electronic communication (such as microblogging, websites, and social networking) wherein users create online communities by sharing information, opinions, private messages, and other content (such as videos). The fact that social media makes it easier to communicate with people all over the world in real time has led to the point that it has become a prominent daily communication method for individuals of all ages around the world (Lopez-Lizaraga, 2021). The media company We Are Social, which conducts research on digital life and reports on it, pointed out that in 2023, people in Turkey spent about 7.5 hours on the Internet and almost 3 hours on social media (Kara, 2023). It is noteworthy that, with the increasing use of the Internet, social media usage is also more frequent, especially among adolescents.

Adolescents spend more time online compared to adults and use the Internet more often for social interaction (Valkenburg and Peter, 2009). At the same time, adolescents express themselves more easily on social media, think that they belong to a group, and are socializing; therefore, they have a tendency to use social media more than necessary (Yavuz, 2018). Researchers state that this condition can lead to internet and social media addiction (SMA), which is one of the behavioral addictions (Echeburua and Corral, 2010; Kuss and Griffiths, 2011; Young, 1996). The increasing interest adolescents are developing in technology, their intensive use of technology, and the lack of foundation they have about the pros and cons of it are putting them in a hazard group for developing social media and internet addiction (Ceyhan, 2008; Treuer, Fabian, and Furedi, 2001; Widyanto and McMurrin, 2004). The SMA is defined as "being overly busy with social media, having an intense desire to constantly stay connected, and spending as much time as to harm all other social activities, as well as education and work life and mental status" by Andreassen, Torsheim, and Pallesen (2014). On the other hand, He, Turel, Brevers, and Bechara (2017) suggested that SMA is a behavioral addiction that is characterized by the uncontrollable urge of an individual's social media usage to overshare important life events to the degree

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that his social and personal life is negatively affected. In a study conducted with adolescents by Doğrusever (2021), it was found that 20 percent of the participants in the study had SMA. In another study examining social media usage and SMA among adolescents, it was found that 34 percent of the adolescents showed a high level of SMA and that girls were more dependent on social media than boys (Guney and Tastepe, 2020).

In another study conducted by Bilgin (2018), it was pointed out that time spent on social media on a daily basis is positively and highly associated with SMA. Aslan and Yasar (2020) found that the three most frequently used social media networks are Instagram, Youtube, and Facebook, respectively. Girls use social media for keeping in touch with existing friends, listening to music, and sharing posts, while boys use social media to follow a group, play games, and meet new people. At the same time, it was found that boys have a higher tendency to develop SMAs compared to girls. It is seen that the studies on SMA differ depending on gender, and it is more preferred by adolescents to communicate and share on social media.

Social desirability, which is one of the variables in this subject, is defined as the desire to become acceptable in social or interpersonal relationships such as social acceptance, social approval, popularity, social status, and leadership (US National Library of Medicine, 2007; Transmitter: Kogar and Gelbal, 2015). The origin of the concept of social desirability derives from a common observation of pollsters, which dates back more than 70 years and implies that what respondents say may not be true or may not be completely true. It has been established that the response to questionnaires or scales shows a consistent deviation from reality, and the participants tend to show their own behavior positively (Johnson and Van de Vijver, 2003). Crowne and Marlowe (1964) suggested that the socially likable response is motivated by the "subjects' need to respond in culturally sanctioned ways." Apart from the people participating in the survey or scale, it has been observed that social desirability is also considered a personality trait (Erzen, Yurtcu, Ulu Kalin, and Kocoglu, 2021; Johnson and Van Vijver, 2003).

In this study, social desirability was considered a personality trait. It is stated that individuals with a high level of social desirability often tend to prefer the acceptable aspects of their social environment rather than their own thoughts (Phillips and Clancy, 1082; Transmitter: Erzen, 2021). Thus, individuals will reflect themselves with their positive aspects around them, trying to hide the undesirable ones. Therefore, the concept of social desirability shows parallelism with the concepts of approval seeking and positive evaluation (Ural and Ozbirecikli, 2006). It is believed that adolescents with high social desirability tend to meet their own needs in terms of social approval and acceptance by using social media more frequently. The adolescence period includes a period during which social development gains importance as much as the emotional, physical, and mental processes, and therefore the physical appearance of the adolescent becomes an important aspect (Harter, 1990; Akt. Soyulu, Atik, and Ocalan, 2017).

This situation is explained by the concept of body image. Body image is what a person feels and thinks, and how they perceive their own physical image based on their psychological experiences (Cash, 1989; Moe, 1999). If a person's perceptions about his body are positive, it can be said that he has a positive body image; if these perceptions are negative, it can be said that he has a negative body image (Dogan, 2010). Researchers suggest that when adolescents have a negative body image and are unable to control their fears about their body shape, the anxiety they experience is similar to social anxiety, and this results in the arousal of social appearance anxiety. Furthermore, it is stated that the dissatisfaction they have about their own body shape during adolescence also creates concerns about their appearance (Lunde, Frisen, and Hwang, 2007; Smolak, 2004). Social appearance anxiety (SAA) has been expressed as "a type of social anxiety that arises from the stress or anxiety experienced by a person when his physical appearance is evaluated by his social environment." (Hagger and Stevenson, 2010; Hart, Leary, and Rejeski, 1989). According to Levinson and colleagues (2013), it is defined as "the fear that a person will be evaluated negatively because of their appearance" (p. 126).

It is observed that adolescents who have SAA tend to use the internet and social media applications more because they are concerned about their own physical appearance (Boursier, Gioia, and Griffiths, 2020; Deng & Jiang, 2023; Eser, 2023; Gilik, 2016; Kocaman and Kazan, 2021). Social media also provides adolescents with opportunities, such as filtering their photos, etc., to make changes related to their own appearance. An adolescent who is concerned about his appearance can try to show himself or herself better on social media by using filtering programs and increasing his social likeability by sharing. This situation is thought to increase SMA in adolescents with high social desirability and social appearance anxiety. At the same time, it is thought that social media, which offers misleading options regarding adolescents' own body perceptions, may cause other psychological problems in adolescents. Adolescents may not like themselves in their face-to-face communication world as much as they do on social media and may withdraw from themselves. In this direction, investigating the variables of social appearance, anxiety, and social liking is also important in terms of

understanding adolescents. Also, when the literature is examined, it is seen that social media addiction and social liking variables have not been studied. At the same time, there were no studies in which social appearance anxiety and social liking variables were addressed together in adolescents. For this reason, it is expected that the study will contribute to the research on social media addiction. The aim of the research is to determine whether social media addiction differs depending on gender in adolescents and to examine at what level social desirability and social appearance anxiety predict social media addiction. Depending on the purpose of the research, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Does social media addiction differ significantly depending on gender in adolescents?
2. Do social desirability and social appearance anxiety significantly predict social media addiction in adolescents?

## **Method**

### **Research Model**

The research is conducted among secondary school students based on the scores they acquire from the gender-based SMA scale, social anxiety scale, and social desirability scale to determine whether their scores differ significantly. Later, the relationship between SMA, SAA, and social desirability in adolescents was investigated within the scope of the study. In this context, the research is considered to be a descriptive study in the correlational survey model.

### **Research Group**

A total of 484 students, 338 of whom were girls (69.8%) and 146 (30.2%) were boys studying at secondary school institutions in the central districts of Hatay province, participated in the study in which the convenience sampling method, which is one of the non-probability sampling methods, was used. The ages of the students range from 14 to 29 ( $x=15.84$ ,  $Dec=1.25$ ). 134 of the students (27.7%) were 9th grade students, 151 (31.2%) were 10th, 121 (25%) were 11th, and 78 (16.1%) were 12th. 411 (84.9%) of the students participating in the study stated that they own a smartphone. At the same time, 193 (39.8%) of the participants reported that they were busy with their smartphones for 2 hours and less, 157 (32.4%) between 2-4 hours, 82 (16.9%) between 4-6 hours, and 52 (10.7%) 6 hours and more on a daily basis.

### **Data Collection Tools**

#### *Social Media Addiction Scale*

The Social Media Addiction Scale was developed by Ozgenel, Canpolat, and Eksi (2019) in order to determine the level of SMA among adolescents. The scale consists of a single-factor structure with nine variables. There are no reverse-coded factors in the quintuple likert type (1: Never, 5: Always). High scores obtained from the scale are accepted as an indicator of high SMA. An example item from the scale is "Although social media negatively affects my work, school, or family life, I continue to use social media extensively." The results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model was well fit ( $\chi^2/df= 2.69$ , CFI= .95, RMR= .06, SRMR= .04, GFI= .93 and AGFI=.88. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale is reported as  $\alpha=.90$ , and it is also taken as  $\alpha=.90$  within the scope of this study.

#### *Social Appearance Anxiety Scale*

The Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS), which is also a quintuple Likert-type scale with 16 variables, was developed by Hart et al. (2008) with the aim of measuring the SAA of individuals. The scale includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral expressions related to the appearance anxiety of individuals. The scale includes items such as 'I worry people will judge the way I look negatively' and 'I get tense when it is obvious people are looking at me'. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was made by Dogan (2010) in a university sample. Once again, the validity and reliability studies of the scale were conducted by Dogan (2011) on adolescents. The results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model was well fit ( $\chi^2/df= 2.96$ , RMSEA= .066, NFI=.93, CFI=.95, IFI=.95, RFI=.91, GFI=.93, and AGFI=.90). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale, which has a one-dimensional structure, was reported as .91, and if the test-retest reliability coefficient is reported as .80. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated within the scope of this study is calculated as .96.

### *Social Desirability Scale*

The scale which was developed by Erzen, Yurtçu, Ulu Kalin and Koçoğlu (2021) consists of a total of 15 variables aiming to determine the social liking levels of individuals. The 10 variables of the scale focus on acceptance and other 5 are the sub-dimensions of conspicuousness which are based in the quintuple likert type (1: I strongly disagree, 5: I strongly agree). The scale includes items such as ‘The more I post on social media, the happier I am’ and ‘I will try every way to get more likes on social media’. There are no reverse-scored items on the scale, and it is believed that the level of desirability increases proportionally with the score obtained from the scale. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the structure, consisting of two factors and 15 items, showed that the factors showed structural adjustment ( $\chi^2/df= 2.50$ , GFI= .93, CFI= .92, AGFI= .91, RMSEA= .06). The Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency coefficients of the scale for the acceptance sub-dimension are taken as .85, .75 for the conspicuousness sub-dimension, and .84 for the whole scale. Within the scope of this study, the consistency coefficients are taken as  $\alpha=.87$  for the acceptance sub-dimension,  $\alpha=.84$  for the conspicuousness sub-dimension, and finally  $\alpha=.90$  for the whole scale.

### **Procedure**

The sample of this study consists of students studying at four secondary education institutions located in the central districts of Hatay Province. The study was conducted by obtaining the Approval of the Ethics Committee (Decision No. 64548, dated September 29, 2022) from the Artvin Coruh University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee in the Field of Artvin Coruh University Rectorate. Furthermore, the necessary permissions were obtained from the Hatay Provincial Directorate of National Education (dated April 7, 2022, and 474225269) within the scope of this study. At the implementation stage, the data from the scales used in the study were collected on a voluntary basis after explaining the purpose of the research to the students and providing them with all the necessary information about the scales.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to prepare the data for analysis, the data of 524 students was reached within the scope of the study and examined; 40 data points with missing and extreme values were extracted from the sample, and a total of 484 data points were studied. For analyzing the provided data, a T-test was used to determine the relationship between the students’ SMA, social appearance anxiety, and social desirability scores with the gender variable. Since the data exhibited a normal distribution, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the level at which students’ social appearance anxiety and social desirability levels predicted their SMA. All the data were analyzed in the SPSS 22 program.

### **Findings**

Within the scope of the research, the values of the SMA scale, the social desirability scale, and the SAA scale were examined in terms of gender using the t-test. Table 1 shows the results of the analysis.

Table 1. The t-test results of scale scores

	Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	S	sd	t	p
1. Social Media Addiction	Female	338	18.36	8.38	482	.478	.633
	Male	146	17.99	6.96			
2. Social Appearance Anxiety	Female	338	42.97	17.84	482	.210	.005
	Male	146	38.10	16.91			
3. Social Desirability	Female	338	30.57	11.82	482	.422	.952
	Male	146	30.64	10.68			

When Table 1 is examined; the scores of SMA of students according to their gender [ $t(482)= 4788$ ,  $p>.05$ ] and social desirability [ $t(482)= .422$ ,  $p.05$ ] do not show significant differences. However, the scores of students’ SAA [ $t(482)= .422$ ,  $p<.01$ ] scale show significant differences based on gender.

The average score on the SAA scale of female students ( $x = 42.97$ ) is higher than that of male students ( $x= 38.10$ ). According to this finding, it can be said that there is a significant relationship between gender and SAA. In the research, multiple regression analysis was used to find out the level of SAA and social liking and predict

their effects on SMA. In this context, the relationships between variables, Cronbach Alpha values, and descriptive statistics of the variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Relationships between variables and descriptive statistics results

Variables	1	2	3
1.Social Media Addiction	1		
2. Social Appearance Anxiety	.33*	1	
3. Social Desirability	.42*	.45*	1
Average	18.25	41.50	30.59
Standard Deviation	7.97	17.69	11.48
Cronbach Alfa	.90	.96	.90

\*p<.001

In Table 2, when the relationship between the scales was analyzed: SMA and SAA ( $r = .33$ ) and social desirability ( $r = .42$ ), significant positive relationship was found between the two groups ( $p < .001$ ). In addition, a significant positive relationship between SAA and social desirability ( $r = .45$ ) was found. The results of the multiple regression analysis, which was conducted in order to find out the impact of SAA as predictors of SMA and social desirability, suggest that the two predictor variables explain 20% of the total variance in the scores of SMA ( $\Delta R^2 = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in a meaningful way. Table 3 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis.

Table 3. Results of multiple regression analysis

Variables	Non-standard coefficients		Standard coefficients		p	R	$R^2$	F
	B	$SE_B$	$\beta$	t				
Regression Coefficient	7.856	1.016		7.73	.000			
1.Social Appearance Anxiety	.079	.021	.175	3.81	.000	.443	.20	58.788*
2. Social Desirability	.233	.032	.335	7.31	.000			

\*p<.001

When Table 3 is examined, based on the results of the multiple regression analysis that was conducted in order to investigate the impact social appearance anxiety and social desirability have on SMA, it can be understood that social appearance anxiety and social desirability explain approximately 20% of the total variant of SMA meaningfully. According to the standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ), the relative order of importance of the predictor variables on SMA is social liking ( $\beta = .335$ ) and SAA ( $\beta = .275$ ) respectively. When the t-test results related to the significance of the regression coefficients were examined, it was understood that social desirability ( $t = 7.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and SAA ( $t = 3.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ) are significant predictors of SMA.

## Results and Discussion

As a result of the research, it was found that SMA does not differ by gender. When we look at other studies examining whether SMA differs by gender, it is evident that different results have been obtained. In the study of Baz (2018) with university students, there was no significant difference in SMA according to gender. In another study conducted by Dogrusever (2019), it was also observed that there was no significant difference in the SMA of adolescents based on their gender. Meena, Soni, Jain, and Paliwal (2015) also stated that the use of social media platforms by youngsters does not differ by gender. These studies support this research's findings.

On the other hand, in the research conducted by Okumuş (2018) with middle school students, it was concluded that social media usage differs by gender and that girls spend more time on social media than boys. In the study conducted by Yayman (2019) with adolescents, the gender difference was also in favor of girls. In a study conducted by Shaw and Black (2008), SMA was also seen more among girls. Similarly, Guney and Tastepe (2020) found out in their study that girls' SMA levels are higher compared to boys. There are other studies proving that girls have a higher SMA tendency compared to boys (Deniz and Noise, 2018; Tutgun-Ünal, 2015; Yüksel-Sahin and Oztoprak, 2019). On the contrary, it has also been revealed by other research that male students use social media and the Internet more than girls and also develop addiction (Aslan and Yasar, 2020; Aydiner, 2017; Buyuksahin-Cevik and Celikkaleli, 2010; Ciftci, 2018). These studies show inconsistency with research findings. When all the studies are examined, it is seen that there are studies revealing that SMA both differs and doesn't differ by gender. This may be due to the sample and the time at which the mentioned studies

were conducted. Since both girls and boys have unlimited opportunities to access the Internet and social media in today's conditions, it is to be expected that there will be no significant difference in the usage of social media. As a result of the research, it has been observed that SAA differs significantly according to gender, and girls are more anxious about this matter. The study conducted by White (2013) supports the research findings. Concurrently, in the study of Boxwood, Seki, and Dilmaç (2019), SAA was higher in boys than in girls. It is also possible to come across studies indicating that boys' SAA is higher than girls' (Alemdağ, 2013; Doğan, 2009; Soylu, Atik, & Öçalan, 2017). These studies show inconsistency with research findings. The fact that SAA differs by gender may be due to the sample and the conditions in which the research was conducted.

One of the findings of the research is that social desirability does not differ significantly by gender. In the research of Kogar and Gelbal (2015), it was also seen that social desirability preferences did not differ by gender. This study supports the research findings. As to the study of Gedik and Toker (2018), it was found that social desirability is higher in girls than in boys. This study does not show consistency with the research results. Examining the literature, it stands out that studies on social desirability and gender are limited. Therefore, it can be said that more studies are needed to be conducted and interpreted in order to relate the two variables.

In consequence of the research, it was also found that social desirability and SAA significantly predict SMA. Seemingly, usage of social media has become a common daily activity, especially among adolescents who are engaged in sharing visual content. Taking and posting selfies on social media is one of the most popular activities among youngsters' social media usage. Nonetheless, greater exposure to visual content on social media can lead to more social comparisons and reinforcement of appearance concerns. Therefore, digital activities based on body image can facilitate individuals who are dissatisfied with their appearance to create and manage their best online self-presentation, potentially leading to problematic social media usage. When the literature was examined, no study was found in which social appearance anxiety and social desirability variables were studied together as predictors of social media addiction. Studies have been conducted mostly in a relational way, between social appearance anxiety and social media addiction. In a study conducted accordingly, it was found that boys' concerns about their own appearance are a predictor of problematic social media usage. Despite the higher level of SAA among girls, no results have been obtained at a level of addiction in social media usage (Boursier Gioia and Griffiths, 2020). In the study conducted by Gilik (2016), a positive correlation between internet addiction and SAA was noted. Isik (2019) revealed in his study that a positive correlation was observed between adults' social media usage, social appearance anxiety, and their eating attitudes. In the study of Kocaman and Kazan (2021), specifically Instagram addiction was examined, and a significant positive relationship was observed between high school students' Instagram addictions and SAA. Dikmen (2019), on the other hand, revealed in his research that internet addiction scores increased proportionally with the scores taken from the SAA scale. Altindis et al. (2017) found out in their study on social media networks and social appearance anxiety that youngsters who use social media are concerned about their social appearance. In Fidan's (2021) study, it was seen that SAA explained 65% of the total variance related to SMA.

Değirmenci's (2020) research among women using social media revealed that mood, appearance perception, and the effect social media has on their daily lives show a meaningful difference in how they feel about their SAA when they receive fewer likes. In the study of Şengönül and Aydın (2023), a significant difference was found between the SAA of young adults as well as the frequency of social media usage and the number of hours they spend on social media. In the study of Deng and Jiang (2023), it was concluded that influencer women who use social media have significantly higher social appearance anxiety than women who use social media less. In Eser's (2023) study, the relationship between social media use, social appearance anxiety, and social comparison variables in adolescents was examined, and a significant positive relationship was found between the participants' social media use and social appearance anxiety. In all the studies conducted on SMA and SAA, it has been seen that the two variables are related to each other or predict each other. There were no studies inconsistent with the research findings on social media addiction and social appearance anxiety. As a result, it is observed that SMA enhances SAA in adolescents and that there is a significant relationship between SAA and SMA, proving that it poses a risk to adolescents' mental health (Caner, Sezer Efe, & Başdaş, 2020; Çetinkaya, 2021).

When the literature is examined, it can be seen that there is no study between SMA and social desirability. As similar variables, it has been observed that studies were conducted between internet addiction and the need for social approval. In the study conducted by Hacıbayramoğlu (2021), it was seen that there are positive and significant relationships between internet addiction and the need for social approval. In the study of Aydoğmuş and Demir (2018), it was also found that there is a significant relationship between the need for social approval and problematic Internet usage. Examining the Social Desirability Scale Variables, statements such as "I go all lengths to get more likes on social media". "It's important to me to have people like my social media shares." "I

become happier as I share posts on social media." leap out. For this reason, it can be considered that adolescents who have a high level of social desirability use both social media and the Internet problematically.

## Conclusion

It was found that social media addiction does not differ by gender. Social desirability does not differ significantly by gender. Social desirability and social appearance anxiety significantly predict social media addiction.

## Recommendations

In the study, it was revealed that SMA is highly associated with SAA and social desirability. It may be appropriate for psychological counselors in schools to provide trainings and seminars on adolescents' body perceptions, as well as conduct activities and informative studies on the problematic use of social media and the Internet. Since it is seen that SMA has not been studied with the social desirability variable, the relationship between the two variables can be examined by conducting different studies on this subject. Other variables that predict SMA should also be investigated. Considering that this study was conducted using quantitative measurement tools, the effect of the study can be tested by conducting qualitative interviews with adolescents who have SMA. Due to the study being conducted on high school students, the results can be examined by working with different sample groups (primary school, secondary school, and university students).

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## Author (s) Contribution Rate

The 1st author contributed 50 percent, the second author 30 percent, and the third author 20 percent.

## Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Approval

The study was conducted by obtaining the Approval of the Ethics Committee (decision No. 64548 dated 29/09/2022) from the Artvin Coruh University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee in the Field of Artvin Coruh University Rectorate.

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