Derleme Makale ● Review Article

From Addiction to Fatigue: Social Network Fatigue in the Digital Age

Lale Barçın AKA*

Faculty of Communicaiton, Department of Public Relations and Publicity, Ege University, İzmir/Turkey.
ORCID: 0000-0003-3420-3802

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ABSTRACT

In today's conditions, social networking has been adopted by all segments of society. Every age group prefers social networks for different reasons and justifications. In the literature, there are generally studies on the purposes, types and frequencies of social networking use in society. However, very few studies have attempted to examine the relationship between social networking use purposes and certain problems such as addiction, academic success or anxiety. In recent studies, it has been stated that more research is needed on what social networking use purposes cause, what they affect or what they affect. This study is structured based on some suggestions. In this study, social networking use purposes are addressed from a different perspective and social networking fatigue, which has just started to gain a place in the literature, is studied. The concept of social networking fatigue, which was put forward based on the concept of fatigue in medical science, is explained by examining the results of qualitative and quantitative studies. In the existing studies in the literature, it is stated that the concept is in the definition phase and that its boundaries are likely to expand with the research to be conducted. The purpose of this research is to introduce the theoretical framework of social network fatigue to Turkish literature and to ensure that this new phenomenon is examined with different variables in future social network research. Based on this, this study was created with a literature review of qualitative research designs. At the end of the research, it was recommended that those interested in social network studies focus on researching this new concept.

1. Introduction

With computer technology and the internet, there have been differences in the ways of communicating. The first of the communication applications that internet technology has brought about is social networks (Edosomwan et all, 2011: 2). Users communicate on social networks through mutual interaction and individual sharing.

Accordingly, we can define a social network as the virtual version of physical socialization in real life. According to Selvi Darling and Kalarani (2020: 2), a social network is a computer-based technology that enables the creation of virtual communities and the sharing of thoughts and information with users. The basis of social networks is profile, user, content, sharing, and interaction. Social

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networks are a web-based application that allows information, photos, and videos to be shared by creating a profile in online environments (Çam, 2023: 63). Social networks are used in different types and versions today. A new social network application called Threads was introduced on July 5, 2023.

According to the We Are Social "Digital 2024" report, 75.2% of young people between the ages of 16-24 use social networks. The average number of social networks owned by young people in this age group is 7.3 for male users and 7.5 for female users. The report also identified the purposes for which young people use social networks. (Kemp, 2024: 221-222) stated that the young generation uses social networks for purposes such as communicating, spending free time, watching videos and television, and creating content. In the relevant literature, attempts have been made to determine the reasons, purposes, and motivations for people of all age groups to use social networks. Because social networks are used by people for different purposes (Köksal, 2022: 228). Social networks are used in all areas of social life because humans are social beings. Today, people use social networks in different areas such as information, sharing, shopping and health services (İnce and Koçak, 2017: 737). According to Yavuz (2020: 103), social networks are used by people as an expression of socio-psychological/emotional states such as happiness, stress, depression and loneliness.

Acar and Gülnar (2023: 147) also recommend that social network fatigue research be conducted with this group, as the proportion of young people using social networks is high in Turkey. The concept of social network fatigue was first described by Ravindran et al. (2013:432) by adapting the reasons that meet the characteristics of medical fatigue described in clinical and professional studies to online communities (Acar and Gülnar, 2023: 511). The concept refers to the anger, rage, stress, and depression that occur after using social networks, as well as the decrease in the purpose and frequency of social network use (Ravindran et al., 2013: 431). Social network fatigue is a negative condition

that manifests itself with physical and psychological symptoms that occur in social network users.

2. The Concept of Social Network Fatigue

In a period when digital developments are rapidly taking place, social networks have become the most frequently used option for internet users to interact with each other. The fact that social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube are more easily accessible via mobile devices and that such platforms are increasing day by day are the main reasons that facilitate the widespread use of these applications.

In the literature, the concept of digital addiction, which researchers use as internet addiction (Tarhan and Nurmedov, 2013:41), is defined by Yengin and Bayındır (2019, 85) as exceeding the normal usage period between being connected and being addicted, and is explained with the "Diffusion of Innovations Theory", which Everett Rogers explained in the 1960s as the changes that occur in the individual or the social system after the adoption or rejection of something new. The developmental stages of technological addiction have been updated with the additions made to this theory. Rogers addresses the stages of individuals' acceptance of the innovation that reaches them in 5 categories as "knowledge, persuasion, decision, acceptance and approval". In the first stage, which is knowledge, the individual is not informed about the innovation and is not aware of the innovation. The decision-making stage is when the individual questions the advantages and disadvantages of using the innovation and conducts research about the innovation. In this stage, the user makes the final decision about whether to use the innovation they encounter (Hardy et al., 1997:84) . The stage in which the individual makes the final decision about the innovation is approval. At this stage, information can be obtained about the individual's dependence or addiction status depending on the time he or she spends on technology.

Love et al. (2015) focus on psychological antecedents when explaining the concept of digital addiction. According to the researchers, it is possible to talk about reward conditioning as well as automatic feedback to new stimuli during internet use. The American Psychiatric Association has updated their definition of addiction by adding exposure to various content such as video games and addiction to digital content. In a different vein, push notifications (e.g., texts, social media messages) from friends or advertisements have been shown to cause the development of smartphone addictive behavior or addiction (Peper and Harvey, 2018:3) . According to the 2024 results of the Household Information Technologies Usage Survey conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute, the internet usage rate increased from 82.6 percent in 2022 to 87.0 percent in 2024 among individuals aged 16-74. These data form the basis of a process that increases due to ease of access, creates a sense of unease when not used, and creates anxiety when used excessively (Köse, 2024:115).

Before summarizing the published studies in order to provide information about the state of the literature on social networking fatigue, it is necessary to answer the question "What is social network fatigue?" The concept of fatigue can be explained as the inability to maintain the cognitive or physical effort required to achieve a certain goal experienced by an individual in his/her daily life (Dobryakova, E. et al., 2013: 849). In general, fatigue can be said to be a symptom related to physical and mental activities (Chaudhuri and Behan, 2000:34). In this context, individuals addicted to the online and offline world made possible by digital communication technologies today have decided to reconsider the issue of fatigue. The phenomenon of fatigue, which is specific to the offline world today, appears online as a psychophysical and psychosocial understanding of fatigue. Because, as Chaudhuri and Behan (2000) stated, although fatigue is a complex condition with many factors, fatigue caused by social networking sites is considered to be one of the important reasons for the level that digital

communication technologies have reached today.

According to Ravindran et al. (2014: 2317), social network fatigue is "a subjective, multidimensional user experience that includes feelings such as fatigue, boredom, anger, disappointment, and loss." The decrease in need/motivation associated with various aspects of interactions resulting from social network use is also considered as social network fatigue. Therefore, Zhang et al. (2016) also state that social network fatigue, which occurs with digital technologies, is a psychological fatigue experienced by individuals in social networks and the world of digital technology, and social network fatigue is defined as negative emotional reactions given while existing in social networks, such as states of mind such as boredom, exhaustion, and indifference.

According to Zheng and Ling (2021), defining the drivers of social media fatigue is important in order to understand the motivation that leads to social media fatigue in this process. In the study, which was conducted on a final sample group of 40 articles by conducting a systematic literature review, the drivers of social media fatigue are investigated. In this study, the dynamics in question are discussed in the context of basic theoretical approaches such as the Stress-Strain-Outcome Framework and Cognitive Load Theory and their relationship with social network fatigue. In this context, Zheng and Ling define these two theories that underlie social network fatigue in their study, then explain social network fatigue in the context of these theories and state that the complex nature of social network fatigue should be examined with socio-technical approaches outside the field of psychology.

Acar (2022) conducted a study with 1100 people aged 18 and over across Turkey to measure whether independent variables such as social network usage were antecedents of social network fatigue. Acar stated that participants felt social network fatigue the most in the future usage purposes sub-dimension, and that in the fatigue sub-dimension, satisfaction fatigue became apparent in the user, and that visible physical

negative situations such as uncontrollable anger, physical fatigue, and exhaustion caused emotional fatigue; and in the aggressiveness sub-dimension, participants regretted using social networks and their stress levels increased.

In another study, Acar (2024) examined the purposes of using social networks from a different perspective and examined the relationship with social network fatigue, which has just begun to gain a place in the literature. The research, which was constructed with a quantitative design, was conducted on 433 students studying in Turkey using the convenience sampling technique. At the end of the study, it was determined that the students' social network fatigue levels were at a moderate level, and the pleasure and sense of relaxation they felt from using social networks led to psychological/physical fatigue.

In the study of Tuncer (2023), social network fatigue, which is described as the new epidemic of the digital age, is one of them. In the study, the increasing social network fatigue as a necessary result of a period in which the world is dependent and connected, was examined in the light of basic concepts and current findings. Social network fatigue was emphasized and then the relationship between the syndromes of the connected age such as technostress, fear of missing out (FOMO), infobesity and social network fatigue was emphasized. And finally, the study was completed with various suggestions developed in the context of social network fatigue. As a result, in this study, it was examined that there is an increase in the tendency of social network fatigue as a result of being dependent at all times and everywhere, and the relationship between social media fatigue caused by excessive use of social media platforms and the relevant concepts in the literature.

The study examined the relationship between smartphone addiction and physical activity, fatigue level and sleep quality among university students. 140 university students participated in the study. The study used the smartphone addiction scale short form, the international physical activity questionnaire

short form, fatigue severity scale and the Pittsburg sleep quality index. The age range of our study was applied to the 18-32 age group. While a negative 'weak' relationship was determined between the physical activity questionnaire and the fatigue severity scale, it was determined that fatigue levels increased with the increase in smartphone addiction, which has become widespread in students in recent years (Baskan et al.. 2023: 299).

3. The State of Being "Connected" in The Digital Age

Various developments in communication tools, information technologies and internet access, the fact that these developments have become the focal point of daily life, and the digitalization of the network of relationships between individuals are important in terms of defining the present day we live in. Every technology has defined the period it was in and has also affected the elements it contains. In the 21st century, the transformation that started with the digital age, globalization, social technological developments and changes, has brought structural and holistic changes to the field of communication. The biggest of these changes is the state of being constantly connected thanks to smart devices due to its impact on daily life.

When social media platforms, instant messaging, the internet of things, and the interaction of smart devices with each other and with people come together, being offline has become almost impossible. Being connected, a result of the digital age, has not only provided our connection on social networks but also the connection of physical objects connected to the network. The internet of things allows objects to talk to each other by sharing information with each other, and is defined as the transformation of basic technologies such as embedded devices from a traditional system to an intelligent system (Aktaş et al., 2016).

It is possible to discuss social network fatigue and over-connectedness within the framework of concepts such as "technostress," "infobesity," or "fear of missing out (FoMO)." Indeed, although these concepts were created based on the

digitalization of all means of communication, over time, they create an infrastructure that serves to create some important elements that cause social network fatigue and make this fatigue visible.

The concept of technostress can be defined as "a sub-dimension of stress and the direct or indirect effect of technology use on people" (Uddin et all, 2023: 938). Zhang et al. (2016) indicate that social network fatigue results in technostress. Based on this, it is possible to say that technostress is caused by tasks that have a technological infrastructure, such as work plans and anxiety about deadlines. According to Ravindran et al. (2014), while the factors that cause technostress are caused by the use of the technology in question, social network fatigue is triggered by a series of antecedents. On the other hand, what social network fatigue is related to is FOMO, or Fear of Missing Out. FOMO, which has emerged as a result of the habit of constantly following instant developments and news with the widespread use of social media, refers to more than just excessive use of social media. Ayaz (2024: 645) define fear of missing out as the individual's concern that others will have more satisfying experiences in an environment where he/she is not present, and the desire to stay in constant contact with others and what they are doing as a result of this concern, and to know what they are doing. In other words, fear of missing out can be said to be the state in which an individual who cannot follow any development sees this situation as a deficiency for him/herself.

Today, people are exposed to many details about what others are doing through social networks and are constantly faced with uncertainty about whether they are where they should be in their lives. The fear of missing out can also be called problematic attachment to social media. While lack of sleep causes decreased quality of life, tension, negative effects on physical well-being, anxiety and lack of emotional control; it is seen as a way to resist social rejection (Gupta and Sharma, 2021). According to Song et al. (2017) , users instantly connect with physical or virtual worlds through mobile information behaviors such as browsing, searching and socializing. When their need for instant connection cannot be satisfied, they produce anxious feelings including restlessness, discomfort, nervousness and panic. It would be appropriate to see these studies as an exit or a point of completion that will be of serious help in reading the causes of social network fatigue and to comment that social media use increases the state of fatigue due to a feeling of tension such as anxiety and worry.

Bilginer Kucur (2022), in his study on infobesity, found that users largely turn to the internet to access information/knowledge, are suspicious of the information/knowledge they access, are provided with information/knowledge even when they have not done any research, and this causes confusion and leaves feelings such as stress, pressure, and loss of time. Kucur also found in his study that loaded content feeds negative emotions such as fatigue, anxiety, stress, pressure, loss of time, hopelessness, confusion, overstimulation, and loss of motivation in individuals, and as a result, they resort to methods such as detox, filtering, and blocking in the context of temporary or instant solutions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the results obtained from the studies, social media use has also become a "fatigue". In the literature, social network fatigue is addressed in various dimensions. However, it can be said that the main problems that cause this fatigue are generally exposure to information overload, technological addiction, and the physiological and psychological consequences of technological deprivation. Studies have shown that social media users' social network overload (Zhang et al., 2016; Guo et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2020) brings with it the desire and need to use social media platforms longer and more intensively (Whelan et al., 2020; Fu et al., 2020), and when this need is not met, the user feels psychologically and physically bad, and experiences anger, anxiety, and distressing situations when they cannot connect to social media (Ravindran et al., 2014). In this process, it is seen that the loyalty of the tired of our age turns into addiction, and the desire of the users to stay in touch, the needs met by technological

tools, turn into the fear of being deprived of these tools, and this is based on these reasons.

As a conclusion, fatigue has never been based on a single classification, it often has a multiple structure. As one of the multiple types of fatigue, social network fatigue is the concept that best represents the digitalized age we are in. Not only being a social media user, but also the potential for addiction due to the uncontrolled use of technological devices and numerous social and individual characteristics cause the fatigue felt to increase exponentially, and the anxiety, worry and stress levels experienced to become stronger. It is anticipated that taking measures to prevent social network fatigue and to reduce the effects of these factors on social network fatigue by revealing other factors that cause this fatigue will be beneficial in reducing the negative consequences caused by social network fatigue.

The research has some suggestions in terms of both accelerating the conceptual development of the phenomenon and guiding other studies to be conducted;

When looking at social network studies to be conducted specifically in Turkey, classically topics such as addiction, motivation, advertising, and health have always been investigated. When the literature on social network fatigue is examined, it is seen that the majority of publications are made by researchers from other countries (Kozan, 2016:87).

It is thought that observational studies will be effective in expanding the boundaries of the concept of social network fatigue and increasing the number of antecedents.

It will enable social network studies in different sample groups in different countries and the global evaluation of social network fatigue. Because people in different places have different cultural and socio-economic characteristics. This will especially contribute to the internal antecedents of the concept.

In another study, social network fatigue should be examined especially in the context of the uses and gratifications approach.

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