




# Qualitative Research on Social Media Addictions of Psychological Counsellor Candidates

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article History

Received 22.06.2023

Received in revised form

30.08.2023

Accepted 27.10.2023

Article Type: Research

Article



## ABSTRACT

Social media (SM), which is frequently preferred by young people, poses a risk of addiction when used excessively and unconsciously. It is important for psychological counselor candidates to have self-awareness about their use of social media and to become digitally literate in terms of the work they will do in the institutions where they will work in the future. Therefore, the aim of this study was to compare young people who use social media intensively or less by examining the views of PCC with high or low levels of social media addiction (SMA). This study presents a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. The SMA Scale-Adult Form was applied to the students (a total of 138) from the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance at Artvin Çoruh University. Focus group interviews were conducted with 20 PCC students who got the highest (11 students) and lowest (9 students) points on the scale, and extreme case and outlier samplings were preferred from the interviews. The data collected through the interviews was analyzed using content analysis. As a result of the study, SMA and related addiction symptoms have been observed in the PCC. The opinions of the PCC with low and high SMA levels varied in terms of the frequency of SM usage, application preferences, usage purposes, emotions, and opinions on the effect of SM on professional use. The results of the study are discussed and interpreted in line with the relevant literature, and recommendations are presented.

Keywords:

Psychological counselor, social media addiction, qualitative research, focus group interview

## 1. Introduction

Depending on the intensive use of the Internet in our lives, communication technology tools have developed, and one of these tools, social media, has started to be used more frequently. Social media is defined as an online platform where people can communicate with each other without the constraints of time and place. People can share information, meet new people, exchange ideas, and participate in discussions with social media applications (Bat & Akıncı Vural, 2010; Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010). It enables communication with people from all over the world, making it one of the most frequently used communication tools (Lopez-Lizarraga, 2021). Notably, adolescents and young people use social media as a means of self-expression. Young people predominantly use social media for social interaction to foster a sense of belonging to a specific group and use social media more intensively than adults (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009; Yavuz, 2018).

Okumuş (2018) asserts that free social media has a significant influence on young people and serves as a fast means of communication that allows for reaching a large audience instantly. In his study on university students, Dikme (2013) reported that 99.0% of the participants used the Internet daily, 95% used social networks, and 16.4% used social networks for online chat. Karaca (2007) suggests that the excessive use of social media by university students may stem from a lack of confidence in face-to-face communication, a desire for easier access to information, and the process of shaping their identities. While the use of social media

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**Citation:** Canoğulları, Ö. (2023). Qualitative research on social media addictions of psychological counsellor candidates. *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies*, 10(4), 1072-1086. <https://dx.doi.org/10.52380/ijpes.2023.10.4.1276>

provides an opportunity for youth to communicate and interact, its excessive use leads to a range of negative effects (Allen et al., 2014). One such adverse consequence is social media addiction.

Social media addiction is defined as spending an excessive amount of time on social media to the detriment of daily life, including social activities, work or academic responsibilities, and family life. It is characterized by an intense urge to go online, experiencing withdrawal symptoms when unable to access social media, and a lack of the ability to consciously control social media usage (Andreassen, Torsheim, & Pallesen, 2014; He, Turel, Brevers, & Bechara, 2017). In a study done by Demir and Kumcağız (2019), it was concluded that those who spend more time on social media and use it for downloading videos or music exhibit higher levels of addiction. The daily use of social media and the duration of use among university students were identified as significant variables in social media addiction (Aktan, 2018). In Zhao's (2021) study with university students, students with social media addiction were found to be more prevalent among those who used social media for socializing and entertainment.

As can be seen, it is worth noting that social media addiction has been investigated in university students in the literature but not in psychological counselor candidates, i.e., undergraduate students studying in the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance. It is important to unveil the perceptions of counselor candidates about their competencies in terms of knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics before they embark on their profession, especially concerning the students they will work with in the future (İkiz & Totan, 2014). Cormier and Cormier (1991) pointed out that there are certain characteristics that effective counselor candidates should possess. One of these characteristics is intellectual competence, defined as the counselor candidate's interest and willingness to learn new things and their continuous effort toward self-improvement. Another important trait is self-awareness, which encompasses being aware of one's feelings and thoughts, effectively coping with negative emotions, recognizing one's own competencies and limitations, and being able to set an example for their clients or students through their behavior (Cormier & Cormier, 1991). Korkut Owen and Tuzgöl Dost (2020), in their research, emphasized that self-awareness and psychological well-being are essential characteristics for counselor candidates. Öztürk (2014) found that senior counseling students had higher self-efficacy beliefs and expectations in using helping skills, session management, and working with difficult clients compared to first-year students. Aladağ, Yaka, and Koç (2014) found that counseling skills training enhanced the professional competencies of psychological counselor candidates and aided in the development of their professional identities. These studies highlight the fact that the training provided to psychological counselor candidates increases their awareness and competence.

Another area where psychological counselor candidates can enhance their awareness and competencies is the use of technology. Psychological counselor candidates frequently utilize social media, primarily to access information required for their profession and to interact with their colleagues and clients. When they begin their profession, they are also expected to use technology appropriately, critically assess information obtained from the internet, be aware of negative and excessive internet usage, have the ability to analyze and interpret content and messages shared on social networks, and, in short, be digitally literate (social media literate). This is essential because when they start their profession, it is crucial for them to exhibit digitally literate behaviors in order to support their students in matters such as how to use digital technology, what to be cautious about during usage, and potential risks (Canpolat, Canpolat, & Karaoğlu, 2021; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). School guidance services play a significant role in increasing students' knowledge about digital literacy and self-improvement. In this context, the digital literacy of counselor candidates upon graduation will also influence the students, parents, and administrators in the institution where they work (Canpolat et al., 2021).

Psychological counseling services adhere to the principles of prevention and protection before problems arise, focusing on potential crisis situations and strategies for coping with them (Can, 1998; Yüksel-Şahin, 2009). Being digitally literate and using social media consciously are emphasized as vital for school counselors to safeguard children and young people from potential internet-related risks (Chang & Man Law, 2008; Valcke Bonte, De Wever, & Rots, 2010). Therefore, the protective and preventive measures conducted by psychological counselors are expected to be effective in reducing internet and social media addiction in students. Müezzini's (2019) study, which examines the viewpoints of psychological counselors, mentioned that in cases of technology addiction, initiatives including informative seminars for students, collaborating with experts to provide support, social skills training, and developing psychoeducation programs have been

implemented. In this context, it is evident that how psychological counselor candidates use technology and social media is significant to their profession.

Research has indicated that addictive social media use is associated with negative outcomes, including reduced productivity, unhealthy social relationships, and decreased life satisfaction. Nevertheless, a comprehensive theoretical understanding of how social media addiction develops is still lacking, hindering practical research efforts aimed at designing educational and other intervention programs to prevent social media addiction (Sun & Zhang, 2021). Particularly, counselor candidates are heavily influenced by social media platforms. In this context, conducting qualitative research on the social media addictions of psychological counselor candidates will contribute to a better understanding of a significant issue, both at the individual and societal levels. This study aims to gain deeper insights into the social media addictions of counselor candidates. The experiences of counselor candidates in this domain can have significant effects on their practical applications and professional development. The results of the study may offer fresh perspectives on how to define and classify social media addiction and its impact within the field of counselor education and practice. Additionally, this research may contribute to assisting counselor candidates in using social media in a more mindful and healthy manner in their professional practices. It is worth noting that there is a research gap in the existing literature on this subject. For these reasons, this study aims to examine the perspectives of psychological counselor candidates who fall into the high-risk group for social media addiction and those who use social media more consciously (low-risk group) using a qualitative research method. The study seeks to describe the differences between these two groups by exploring the following questions. Counselor candidates in the low- and high-risk groups concerning social media addiction were asked about their own use of social media:

- What are their views on the frequency of social media use?
- What are their views on social media application preferences and the activities they do on these applications?
- What are their views on the purpose of using social media?
- What are their views on the emotions they feel when using social media?
- What are their views on what they think when they cannot access social media?
- What are their views on how they feel when they cannot access social media?
- What are their views on the professional effects of social media use?

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Model**

A phenomenological approach, a qualitative research method, was used in this study. Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that enables people to express their understanding, feelings, perspectives, and perceptions about a particular phenomenon or concept and is used to describe how they experience this phenomenon (Rose, Beeby, & Parker, 1995, p. 1124). In phenomenological studies, researchers turn to a phenomenon that interests them and reflect on the fundamental issues that constitute the nature of the lived experience. They also described the phenomenon by establishing a solid relationship with the research topic and creating a balance between all parts of the writing (Cresswell, 2020, p. 82). This study aimed to describe students' feelings, thoughts, and perspectives in line with qualitative interviews by focusing on the phenomenon of "social media addiction.

### **2.2. Research Sample**

The research was carried out with 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students studying at the Psychological Counseling and Guidance Program at Artvin Çoruh University. These students were referred to as "psychological counselor candidates" in the study. The Social Media Addiction Scale-Adult Form (Şahin & Yağcı, 2017) was applied to 138 students (51 males, 87 females) aged between 17 and 28, with an average age of 20.47. While collecting scale data, easily accessible case sampling was used. Working on a familiar sample is perceived as more practical and easy by some researchers. This research method adds speed and practice to research and saves money and effort (Baltacı 2018). The researcher preferred this method because it is easier to reach the students with whom s/he works at the university, and s/he will conduct a focus group interview later. In this study, the scale was used to select students for the second phase of the study, and a quantitative analysis was

not performed. Extreme case and outlier sampling, which are purposive sampling types, were used while collecting qualitative data. The students with the highest and lowest scores on the scale were preferred. Extreme and outlier sampling envisages the study of a limited number of equally information-rich situations that can be subjected to deep scrutiny. Extreme or outlier cases can provide richer data than normal cases, can help to learn unusual findings about the relevant phenomenon, and can help to understand the research problem in a deep and multidimensional way (Baltacı, 2018).

Eighteen students with the highest scores and 16 students with the lowest scores (total of 34) were asked about their opinions on participating in the focus group interview. The cut-off point for the highest-scoring students was 61 and above. The highest score in this group was 78. Low-scoring students were those with a cut-off score of 36 or below. Focus group interviews were conducted with 11 students in the high-risk group, nine students in the low-risk group, and 20 volunteer students in total. Table 1 presents the gender, grade, and age of the students who participated in the focus group interviews.

**Table 1.** *The Genders, Classes, and Ages of the Students Who Participated in the Focus Group Interview*

SMAS	Gender		Class			Age					
	Kadın	Erkek	2.	3.	4.	19	20	21	22	23	28
High risk group	8	3	4	3	4	1	3	4	2	1	0
Low risk group	5	4	4	4	1	0	1	3	3	1	1
Total	13	7	8	7	5	1	4	7	5	2	1

\*SMAS: Socail Media Addiction Score

As seen in Table 1, 13 of the students who participated in the focus group interviews were female, and seven were male. Eight of the students were in their 2nd year, seven in their 3rd year, and five in their 4th year of undergraduate education. The first-year students of the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance did not volunteer to participate in the study. The age of the students participating in the study ranged from 19 to 28 years.

### 2.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedure

*The Social Media Addiction Scale-Adult Form:* This scale was developed by Şahin and Yağcı (2017) to measure the social media addiction of adults in the 18-60 age group. The scale, which consists of 20 items in total, is a 5-point Likert type and consists of two sub-dimensions: virtual tolerance and virtual communication. The lowest score obtained from the scale was 20, and the highest score was 100. An increase in the scores obtained from the scale is interpreted as a sign of high social media addiction. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for the overall scale was .94 and .92 for virtual tolerance from sub-dimensions and .91 for virtual communication (Şahin & Yağcı, 2017). For this study, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was found .78 for all items of the scale, .75 for virtual tolerance of the sub-dimension, and .71 for virtual communication of the sub-dimension.

*Qualitative Interview Form:* This form was prepared by the researcher and consisted of seven questions in total. The questions were created in order to learn the frequency of social media use by students, why they use social media, the purpose of using social media, the emotions they experience on social media, what they think and feel when they cannot access social media, and finally, the professional effects of their use of social media as a psychological counselor candidate.

*Procedure:* Before data were collected, ethics committee permission to conduct the research was obtained from Artvin Coruh University Faculty of Education (dated May 31, 2022; 50736). After obtaining permission, the Social Media Addiction Scale Adult Form was applied by the researcher to all students studying in the Psychological Counseling and Guidance Program of Artvin Çoruh University in the fall semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. The students were informed about the form to be applied for and explained its purpose. The participants were asked to respond voluntarily and sincerely. After the scale was completed, students with high and low social media addiction scores were determined, a focus group meeting was held with them, and a suitable time and place were arranged for everyone. The interviews were conducted in a university classroom on October 28, 2022. First, the group with a high social media addiction was interviewed for 53 minutes. After that, the group with a low social media addiction was interviewed for 40 minutes. Audio recorders were used to record the data during the interviews. At the same time, when students answered, the researcher wrote down their answers on the interview forms by taking notes.

## **2.4. Data Analysis**

First, interviews with the voice recorder were listened to and transcribed. The interview records were transcribed by the researcher to prevent data loss. The data obtained from the interviews was subjected to content analysis. The main purpose of content analysis is to identify concepts and relationships that can explain the collected data. The fundamental process in content analysis is to bring together similar data within the framework of certain concepts and themes and to interpret them by organizing them in a way that the reader can understand. (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 259). In this sense, themes were determined to cover the answers to each question. Coding was then done separately for groups with high and low social media addiction levels, and a code list was created. Three different expert opinions were consulted during the creation and reporting of the coding lists and themes. This is because it is difficult for researchers to make coding decisions, regardless of their subjective judgments in qualitative research (Bahat, 2020). To ensure the reliability of the data, coding should be performed by experts other than researchers. To increase consistency, the data were coded by three authors by applying researcher diversity, and the consistency of the codes was calculated using the formula of Miles and Huberman (1994)  $\text{agreement/consensus+disagreement} \times 100$ . The encoder reliability coefficient obtained was found to be 82.34. According to coding control, which provides consistency, the consensus among coders is expected to be at least 80% (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The coding was reviewed, and corrections were made by holding a meeting with other coders for the detected inconsistencies.

According to Cresswell (2020), at least two methods should be used to ensure the validity of qualitative research. In this study, two methods were used to increase validity. First, validity was increased by member checking. In this method, the researcher presents the coding and themes to the participants and asks them to reflect on the accuracy of the results (Cresswell, 2020). In this study, it was observed that the participants confirmed the coding and themes. In addition, rich and dense descriptions, which are necessary for the phenomenological approach, were used. Dense and rich descriptions include providing detailed information about the themes, relating the details to each other, and using quotations to convey the findings (Cresswell, 2020). In the study, descriptive quotations were included along with codes and themes.

## **2.5. Ethical**

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Artvin Çoruh University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (No. E-18457941-050.99-50736).

## **3. Findings**

The first question of the interview procedure was asked in order to learn the frequency of social media use by the students. In this question, the students' age at social media use, how many years they have been using social media, and the hours of daily use during weekdays, weekends, and holidays were determined. While naming the students, PCC was preferred as an abbreviation for the psychological counselor candidate, and numbers were assigned according to the order of the participants. Student responses to this finding, gathered under the theme of the frequency of social media use, are shown in Table 2.

As can be seen in Table 2, in order to understand the difference between the ages of starting to use social media, upon analyzing the average age of students in the low and high social media addiction groups, it was determined that the average age of the high-risk social media user group was 10.55, whereas the average age of the low-risk group was 14.66. In this particular instance, it is evident that starting social media usage at a young age poses a higher degree of risk.

**Table 2.** *Social Media Usage Frequency of Psychological Counselor Candidates*

Social Media Addiction Level	Working Group	Age to Start Social Media	Used Year	Weekday Usage (hour)	Weekend Usage (hour)	Holiday Usage (hour)
High	PCC1	11	11	4-5	4-5	7
	PCC2	10	11	3-4	3-4	7-8
	PCC3	16	6	6-7	4-5	8-9
	PCC4	12	12	4-5	4-5	7-8
	PCC5	12	8	4-5	6	3-4
	PCC6	14	7	3-4	2-3	5-6
	PCC7	16	6	3-4	4-5	1
	PCC8	8	12	4-5	6-7	8-9
	PCC9	8	12	7	7	7
	PCC10	11	11	6-7	10	2-3
	PCC11	10	11	3-4	3-4	7-8
Low	PCC12	13	8	1,5	None at all	3
	PCC13	12	8	2	3	3
	PCC14	14	7	3,5	3,5	None at all
	PCC15	15	7	2,5	2,5	2,5
	PCC16	14	8	2,5	2,5	2,5
	PCC17	15	7	1,5	None at all	None at all
	PCC18	21	8	2	3	3
	PCC19	14	7	2,5-3	2,5-3	1,5
	PCC20	14	9	1,5-2	30 min	30 min

When the number of years they have been using social media is analyzed, it is seen that the low-addiction group has been using social media for less than ten years, while the majority of students in the high-addiction group have been using social media for more than ten years. When weekdays, weekends, and holidays were compared, it was observed that students in the high social media addiction group had more hours of daily use than the low social media addiction group.

The second of the interview questions aimed to determine which social media applications students preferred the most and the activities they did on these applications. The answers given by the students were grouped under two themes: the application preference and the activity done. The coding list and frequencies (f) are shown in Table 3. The reason why the number of frequencies is higher than the number of students is due to the fact that the students gave more than one answer.

As can be seen in Table 3, students with high SMA use the Instagram application (11) the most. It was followed, respectively, by Youtube (8), Twitter (8), WhatsApp (7), Snapchat (3), and Bundle (1). Students with low SMA use YouTube (9) the most. This was followed by WhatsApp (8), Instagram (3), and Twitter (2). The activities that students with high SMA perform on social media applications include following news and current events (10), communication (7), watching videos (6), individual sharing (6), following posts (5), watching channels (2), and watching TV series (1). The group with low SMA stated that they spend time on activities such as communication (8), education (4), watching videos (4), following news and current events (2), watching movies (2), information and research (1), following professional posts (1), entertainment (1), and shopping (1). In this case, it is seen that the group with high SMA uses social media mostly for following news and current events and for communication, while the group with low SMA uses it mostly for communication and education.

An example of a student's response in a group with high SMA is as follows:

*"I use Instagram to share my photos and to look at other people's photos. I use YouTube to watch the channels that I follow. And Twitter to keep up with the current event."* (PCC3)

An example of the response of a student in a group with low SMA is as follows:

*"I mostly use Youtube and WhatsApp. We can find almost any content that we are looking for on YouTube. I get what I need from there, both to make use of my spare time and my education. I also use WhatsApp mostly for communication."* (PCC12)

**Table 3.** Social Media Application Preferences and Activities of Psychological Counselor Candidates

Theme	SMA high codes	f	SMA low codes	f
The Application Preference	Instagram	11	Youtube	9
	Youtube	8	WhatsApp	8
	Twitter	8	Instagram	3
	WhatsApp	7	Twitter	2
	Snapchat	3		
	Bundle	1		
The Activity Done	Keeping up with news and recent events	10	Communication	8
	Communication	7	Education	4
	Video watching	6	Video watching	4
	Individual sharing	6	Keeping up with news and recent events	2
	Following shares	5	Watching movies	2
	Channel monitoring	2	Information/research	1
	Wathing series	1	Professional sharing and follow-up	1
			Entertainment	1
			Shopping	1

As can be seen from the quotations, although the social media application preferences of counselor candidates with low and high social media addiction are similar to each other, there are differences in the activities they perform in the applications used. While the group with high SMA uses these applications mostly for social sharing and following the agenda, the group with low SMA prefers these applications for communication and education. Third, the interview questions were asked to determine the purposes for which the students used social media. The answers given by the students were gathered under the theme of the purpose of use; the coding list and frequencies (f) are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Social Media Usage Purposes of Psychological Counselor Candidates

Theme	SMA high codes	f	SMA low codes	f
Purpose of Use	Relax	8	Communication	7
	Communication	4	Get education	6
	Follow others' posts	4	Keep up with the recent events	5
	Keep up with the recent events	4	Have fun	6
	Share posts	1	Follow others' posts	2

Table 4 shows that students with high SMAs mostly use social media to relax (8). Under this code, it was observed that the students gave statements such as “chilling out” and “freeing their mind,” and these were preferred to be gathered under a single code. Then, it is seen that they use it for the purposes of communication (4), following others' posts (4), keeping up with recent events (4), and sharing posts (1). Students with low SMA use social media primarily for communication (7) and educational purposes (6). It has also been determined that they use it to keep up with recent events (5), have fun (6), and follow others' posts (2).

An example of the response of a student in the group with high SMA is as follows:

*“I use it to pass the time and relax. To communicate with people who are not with me and to find out what has happened in the world.” (PCC8)*

An example of the response of a student in a group with low SMA is as follows:

*“I have family and friend groups on WhatsApp. I used it to communicate with each other. I also use YouTube mostly for educational purposes and watching movies.” (PCC14)*

As can be seen from the quotations, it is seen that counselor candidates with low and high social media addictions use social media for communication purposes. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the group with a high SMA uses it for relaxation and the group with a low SMA uses it for education. Fourth, the interview questions were asked to determine which emotions the students felt the most when using social media. The answers given by the students were gathered under the theme of emotions; the coding list and frequencies (f) are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** *Emotions of Psychological Counselor Candidates While Using Social Media*

Theme	SMA high codes	f	SMA low codes	f
Emotions	Happiness	7	Happiness	6
	Sadness	7	Astonishment	3
	Emotional changes according to the content	4	Anger	3
	Jealousy	3	Emotional changes according to the content	2
	Anger	2	Sadness	2
	Regret	1	Anxiety	1
			Comfort	1

As seen in Table 5, it has been determined that students with high SMA feel happiness (7) and sadness (7) the most while using social media. There are students who experience emotional changes (4) depending on the content they look at or watch; there are students who experience jealousy (3), anger (2), and regret (1). Students with low social media addiction experience the most happiness (6), but also feel astonishment (3), anger (3), emotional change according to content (2), sadness (2), anxiety (1), and comfort (1).

An example of the response of a student in the group with high SMA is as follows:

*"I usually get jealous. They share their clothes, the makeup they use, their relationship, everything. I envy them and feel jealous."* (PCC2)

An example of the response of a student in a group with low SMA is as follows:

*"My feelings change according to what I see. When I watch fun videos, I feel happy and laugh. When I see bad news, I get worried."* (PCC15)

As can be seen from the quotations, it was determined that the psychological counselor candidates with low and high social media addiction felt different emotions when using social media. It was observed that both groups experienced happiness, whereas those with high SMA experienced more intense feelings of sadness and jealousy, and those with low SMA experienced feelings of surprise and anger. The fifth question of the interview was asked to determine what the students thought when they could not use social media and lost their connection for any reason. The answers given by the students were gathered under the theme of opinions. The coding lists and frequencies (f) are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** *What Psychological Counselor Candidates Think When They Cannot Access Social Media*

Theme	SMA high codes	f	SMA low codes	f
Opinions	What happens in social media	6	Not affected	7
	Think they missed something	2	Think that they concern people	2
	Think about when social media will work again	2	Think about when it will work again	1
	Think they are disconnected from the world	1		
	Think about when social media will work again	1		

\*SM: Social media, \*SMA: Social media addiction

As seen in Table 6, it has been determined that students with high SMA think about what happens in social media (6) when they cannot access social media. It is observed that students think they missed something (2), think about when social media will work again (2), think they are disconnected from the world (1), and think their accounts have been hacked (1). Students with low social media addictions are not affected by this situation and do not face any problems (7).

An example of the response of a student in the group with high SMA is as follows:

*"My phone and social media stuck in my mind. When I cannot access the Internet, I think that important things will happen on social media at that moment. It seems to me that even things that would not normally happen will happen at that moment."* (PCC7)

An example of the response of a student in the group with low SMA is as follows:

*"It won't be a problem for me either. I go about my daily life. I study; I do other things."* (PCC18)



As can be seen from the quotations, there are differences between the opinions of psychological counselor candidates with low and high social media addiction who thought they could not access social media. While the group with high social media addiction experiences mental preoccupation with social media even when they are not connected to social media, not being able to access social media does not cause any problems for the group with low SMA. The sixth question of the interview was asked to determine whether they lost their connections for any reason. The answers given by the students were gathered under the theme of feelings. The coding list and frequencies (f) are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Psychological Counselor Candidates' Feelings When They Cannot Access Social Media

Theme	SMA high codes	f	SMA low codes	f
Feelings	Tension	5	Lack of emotional change	5
	Curiosity/fuss	3	Happiness	1
	Boredom	1	Anxiety	1
	Loneliness	1	Comfort	1
	Anger	1	Anger	1

As seen in Table 7, students with high SMA felt the most tension (5) when they could not access social media. Students feel curiosity/fuss (3), boredom (1), loneliness (1), and anger (1). There was no emotional change in students with low SMA (7). However, there were also students who felt happiness (1), anxiety (1), comfort (1), and anger (1).

An example of the response of a student in the group with high SMA is as follows:

*"I'm getting nervous. I feel down. For example, if I do not have a charger and I am outside, when my battery is low or goes flat, I say I shall leave. I go to a place where I can plug in the charger."* (PCC9)

An example of the response of a student in the group with low SMA is as follows:

*"I get nervous when the phone is turned off in Artoin, because my parents might text or call. When they cannot reach me, they worry about me. However, when I am in a district, there are no problems. Nothing will change."* (PCC13)

As can be seen from the quotations, there are differences between what psychological counselor candidates with low and high social media addiction felt when they could not access social media. While the group with high social media addiction experiences more tension in this situation, the group with low SMA does not experience much emotional change. The eighth question of the interview asked about the professional effects (what they think about the use of social media as psychological counselor candidates) of the students social media use. The answers given by the students were gathered under the theme of impact on professional use and divided into two separate categories in terms of positive and negative effects. The coding lists and frequencies (f) are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8.** The Professional Effects of Social Media Use on Psychological Counselor Candidates

THEME	SMA high codes	f	SMA low codes	f
Impact on Professional Use	Positive effects			
	Understanding and accepting different perspectives	6	Professional knowledge and sharing	9
	Professional knowledge and sharing	4	Keeping up with the recent events Education	2
				2
			Understanding and accepting different perspectives	1
	Negative effects			
	Struggling with time management	4	Exposure to negative content	2
	Sympathy for everyone	1	Distractibility	1
	Exposure to negative content	1	Self-esteem damage	1
	Mood swings	1		

As shown in Table 8, the positive effects of social media use by psychological counselor candidates with high SMA were understanding and accepting different perspectives, (6) professional knowledge, and (4) sharing.

The negative effects were struggling with time management (4), sympathy for everyone (1), exposure to negative content (1), and mood swings (1). The positive effects of social media use by counselor candidates with low SMA were professional knowledge and sharing (9), keeping up with recent events (2), education (2), and understanding and accepting different perspectives (1). The negative effects were exposure to negative content (2), distractibility (1), and self-esteem damage (1). One of the students with low SMA stated that he was not affected. The quotations that exemplify the answers of the students in the group with high SMA are as follows:

*"I think it has a positive effect on me because when I use Twitter, everyone has a different opinion there; they speak out. I understood that people have different opinions. I can approach them with more respect now."* (PCC1)

*"I think it affects it negatively. For example, negative things usually emerge when I go online. I feel down. For example, while I read a book, why should I stay on social media and feel down? This has positive aspects of the course. You can watch movies and read articles about our profession, but they are not usually used for this purpose. This is why I think it has a negative effect. For example, I read books, but I do not think I have read enough. I do not take much time for myself; I do not have fun. This happens because of social media. It makes you a little lazy."* (PCC11)

The quotations that exemplify the answers of the students in the group with low SMA are as follows:

*"As I said before, I follow the posts of experts in my field. It improves me. I can see that it has also improved me. Because it helps me do my homework and research."* (PCC19)

*"We are able to interact with experts in our field. Sometimes, they show things you have never thought of. I think it is very beneficial both in terms of education and career."* (PCC20)

As can be seen from the quotations, the opinions of psychological counselor candidates with low and high social media addiction differ regarding the professional use of social media. While some of the group with high SMA have a positive opinion about understanding different opinions, some of them think that social media is a waste of time. The group with low SMA, on the other hand, thinks that social media is mostly useful for informing and sharing information on professional issues.

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

In parallel with the development of technology, social media addiction has recently become an important problem. Psychological counselor candidates are expected to have digital literacy skills in their protective and preventive studies in terms of technology and social media use. For this reason, focus group interviews were conducted with a total of twenty psychological counselor candidates who were in the low- and high-risk groups in terms of social media addiction. As a result of these interviews, the differences between the two groups were determined, and the students were asked to evaluate their professional use of social media. The study is a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach, and answers to the study questions were sought through content analysis and quotations. In the following, the literature related to the findings is discussed, comments are made, and suggestions are presented.

The results showed that the average age of first use of social media in the group with high social media addiction was earlier than in the group with low SMA. In Bülbül and Tunç's (2018) study, a relationship was found between the early age of starting to use mobile phones and addiction. This finding supports the result of the study. In Baz's (2018) study, no relationship was found between the age of social media use and addiction. Since there are limited studies on this subject, it is possible to observe differences according to the group studied. It was observed that the group with low social media addiction (SMA) used social media for less than ten years, and their use of social media on weekdays, weekends, and holidays was less than that of the group with high SMA. The high SMA group used social media for more than ten years and spent longer hours on social media. When studies on this subject are examined, it is seen that the level of social media addiction increases with an increase in the time spent on social media. (Çömlekçi & Başol, 2019; İnce & Koçak, 2017; Şişman Eren, 2014). At the same time, in Şişman Eren's (2014) study, it was found that internet use for more than seven years had a significant effect on social media use. The results of these studies support the findings of the research. When the literature was examined, no different research on this subject was found.

This result shows that daily time spent on social media and starting to use social media at an early age may pose a risk for social media addiction.

When the applications used by the psychological counselor candidates on social media were examined, there was no difference between the two groups in terms of application preference (Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp), and it is noteworthy that the group with high social media addiction used Instagram more than the other group. It is seen that while the group with high social media addiction uses social media mostly for purposes such as communication, news, keeping up with recent events, sharing, and following, the group with low addiction uses it more for communication as well as for purposes such as education, research, and professional sharing. Aslan and Yaşar (2020) found that Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook were the three most used social media networks. In Koçer's (2012) study, the use of social media by university students was evaluated. It was stated that Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are the most used social media sites, and students use social media to communicate with their friends, access information, and share information such as homework and projects. In a study conducted by Güteryüz, Esentaş, Yıldız, and Güzel (2020), it was stated that Instagram was the most used social media application and that there was a relationship between the purposes of social media use (entertainment, leisure time evaluation, following the agenda, socializing, access to information) and social media addiction. In the study of Çömlekçi and Başol (2019), it was also seen that young people spend time on Instagram the most, and there are significant relationships between social media addiction and spending free time, getting to know people better, exchanging ideas, having fun, and messaging. These studies are similar to the findings of this study.

On the other hand, it has been determined that there is no significant relationship between social media addiction and communication, listening to music, keeping up with recent events, or accessing information. In a study conducted in the USA, it was observed that the majority of young people between the ages of 18 and 29 used Instagram, and more than half of them preferred Snapchat and TikTok applications. (Auxier and Anderson, 2021). Although there are studies stating that the use of Facebook and Tiktok is more common among young people (Küçükali, 2016), the present study differs from other research findings in that students do not use Facebook and Tiktok. In this study, while Twitter was used to keep up with recent events, a study by Grosbeck and Holetescu (2008) revealed that students use Twitter to participate in discussions, text, and share new resources. When the research results and literature findings are examined, it is seen that the application preferences of psychological counselor candidates on social media differ from those of other university students and are mostly used for communication purposes.

While there are similarities between the high and low addiction groups in terms of the psychological counselor candidates' social media usage purposes (such as communication, agenda tracking, and sharing), it is seen that the high addiction group uses social media more for relaxation, while the low addiction group uses social media for education. In a study conducted on university students, young people stated that they used social media to leave behind the day, relax, spend time, and have fun (Haase & Young, 2010). There are also studies showing that young people use social media mostly for communication (Pemppek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). In Yavuz's (2020) study with theology students, it was observed that social media was used for purposes such as following the agenda, entertainment, education, and religious sharing. In other studies, it is seen that social media is generally used for entertainment, sharing, and following current events (Durak & Seferoğlu, 2016; Radmard, Soysal, Kutluca, & Türk, 2020; Sezgin, Erol, Dulkadir, & Karakaş, 2011). Şavklı and Koç (2023) revealed that the most common activities of young people on social media are sharing stories and photos and following news. These results support the research findings. Although studies on the usage purposes of people who use social media at low and high levels have not been found, there is a differentiation in terms of Internet addiction. Research shows that while Internet addicts use the Internet for interactive purposes (such as communication, playing games, watching news, and shopping), those who are not addicted use it more for research and obtaining information (Beard & Wolf, 2001; Kubey, Lavin, & Barrows, 2001; Young, 1997).

While the emotions felt by psychological counselor candidates while using social media showed similarities (such as happiness, sadness, anger, and emotional change according to the content) in the groups with high and low social media addiction, the high addiction group differed in jealousy and regret, and the low addiction group differed in surprise and comfort. When psychological counselor candidates cannot access social media, their thoughts differ. Those in the high social media addiction group experienced mental or cognitive preoccupation and compulsive behaviors related to social media, while those in the low addiction group were

not affected by this situation. The feelings of psychological counselor candidates when they cannot access social media also differ between high and low groups. While it was observed that the group with high social media addiction experienced more tension and anxiety, there was no change in emotion in the group with low addiction. Although there are no studies examining emotions and thoughts in social media addiction, it has been found to be a symptom of addiction. Young (1999) stated that addicted young adults feel excited, happy, and supported online. He also stated that offline situations let them down, worry, tease, and depress themselves. He found that these strong emotions reinforce the compulsive behavior of young adults by creating an addictive effect on Internet addiction. One of the diagnostic criteria of Griffiths (2013) regarding social media addiction is mood change, in which people feel happy using social media as an escape and relaxation method. In addition, unpleasant emotional states and/or physical effects (such as tension, moodiness, and bad temper) that occur when people cannot access social networks are symptoms of the withdrawal syndrome. At the same time, the criterion called mental/cognitive preoccupation is related to mindsets such as "If I can't log in for a while, I'll be busy with the internet" and "I wonder what's going on when I'm not online" (Caplan, 2010). As a result of the research, it is seen that psychological counselor candidates who are addicted have similar symptoms.

When the professional impact of the social media use of the psychological counselor candidates was examined under the categories of positive and negative effects, it was observed that the groups with high and low dependency were positively affected by social media in terms of understanding and accepting different perspectives, professional knowledge, and communication. The group with high social media addiction had more difficulty with time management on social media, while the low group was exposed to negative content and had distractions. No study has examined the effects of social media use on counselor candidates. In accordance with the answers given by the students, it can be interpreted that the SMA group is not aware of their addiction, and they think they gain from its excessive use. Because it is seen that most of the students with high SMA are satisfied with their social media use, they stated that they are positively affected.

## 5. Recommendations

Social media addiction and related addiction symptoms were observed in psychological counselor candidates. The opinions of low- and high-SMA students on the frequency of social media use, application preferences, purposes of use, feelings, thoughts, and their effect on professional use differ from each other. The fact that students with high SMA do not have self-awareness may pose a problem in terms of future preventive studies. For this reason, this process, called digital literacy (social media literacy), should be integrated into other courses or given to students in Psychological Counseling and Guidance departments at universities. In this way, making use of their spare time, limiting the use of social media, obtaining knowledge, supporting teaching and learning, and gaining occupational knowledge could be encouraged. Thus, it is thought that psychological counselor candidates will work more efficiently in the jobs they will do after graduation and that they can control the social media addiction problem in line with preventive studies. This study is limited to students of the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance at Artvin Coruh University, and the findings of the study can be generalized to these students. Therefore, the research findings can be compared by choosing different university students for future studies. In this study, a qualitative research method was used. In future studies, the social media addiction of psychological counselor candidates can be determined using quantitative methods, or more comprehensive comparisons can be made using mixed (quantitative and qualitative) methods. Social media use by psychological counselors can be investigated with different variables, and a longitudinal study can be designed. Psychoeducational programs can be developed to prevent social media addiction, and their effectiveness can be tested by an experimental method. Also, future studies should focus on better understanding the underlying causes and triggers of social media addiction. This contributes to the development of customized interventions to help individuals change these habits.

This study also shows that university policies on behavioral addictions can be followed in the education of counselor candidates. In this regard, psychological counseling units and health faculties of universities can come together and organize seminars to inform students. In addition, elective courses on behavioral addictions can be given to education faculty students.

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