

CHAPTER 8

ADDICTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA DIET

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INTRODUCTION

In an era in which information has been circulating rapidly as ever, time management and effective usage of time require more skills than ever. A social individual has various simultaneous tasks and responsibilities as necessities of social roles. While technology facilitates life by helping in certain situations, it might prevent completing responsibilities in others.

Smartphones as popular devices in today's world now have the processing power similar to a computer. Smartphones help easily completing various tasks without needing a computer with their processor speed, memories and storage capacities. Accessing to required information, managing electronic mails, following business calendar, setting reminders, taking notes, monitoring house or office is among some tasks that smartphones can easily complete.

Opportunities provided by the internet and smartphones are not limited to work life. Internet and mobile devices are the locomotives of culture and entertainment industry. Social media platforms as a strong advancement of the recent years pose as a new internet approach that deeply effects our informing, socialising and entertainment culture. Social media accounts that change daily routines and acts as an extension of digital identities are mainly used via mobile devices and applications. Smartphones that turned into fundamental necessities of being in social life poses addiction problems with excessive internet and social media use.

To prevent intensive social media usage from turning into an addiction, it is important for users to show efforts to decrease social media usage time. Smart applications that facilitate social media diet can help to reach diet targets. Properties offered by QualityTime and similar applications enable self-auditing for users.

This study aims to present social media addiction and social media diet in a practical sense with a smart application. Within the scope of this study, in addition to literature review on social media addiction and social media diet, descriptive analysis on popular social media platform applications and independent social media diet applications are provided. This study is important as there are few studies in related literature on descriptive analysis focused on social media diet and practices. Social media use limitation and tracking algorithms for social media addiction and social media diet constitute the limitation of this study.

Social Media Addiction

Social media addiction as a behavioural addiction is defined by Andreassen and Pallesen (2014: 4054) as excessive attention to social media, frequent log in on platforms and spending time and effort that disrupts social activities, work, interpersonal relationships, psychological health and well-being.

According to Digital in 2019 report, 4.4 billion individuals among 7.6 billion world population have internet access and 3.5 billion have an active social media account. While there were 1.9 billion social media users in 2014, this number reached 3.5 billion by 2019. Daily

average time spends on the internet is 6 hours 42 minutes for these users. On the other hand, daily average time spent on social media is 2 hours 16 minutes. 1 hour 37 minutes daily average social media usage time in 2014 has reached 2 hours 16 minutes in 2019. 18-24 and 25-34 age group use social media most frequently. (We are social, 2019). This report shows that social media is mainly used by young individuals, number of users increased every year and daily average usage time of user continue to increase.

Huang and Leung (2009: 677) emphasise four main addiction signs on their study with young individuals. First, when addicted young individuals experience a cut during online chat, they feel depressed and tend to increase online chat duration. Second, addicted young individuals tend to hide usage time from their parents, fail to decrease usage time and endanger their friendships and educations. Third, addicted young individuals spend more time than they have planned in online chat, struggle to control this time and fail to complete some responsibilities. Fourth, addicted young individuals regard online chat as an escape field from responsibilities and increase their usage time when they feel bad.

There are five fundamental properties that guide social media usage (Nakaya, 2014: 44):

1. *Fearing of Missing Out (FOMO)*: Desire to instantly know important developments, agenda and what happens around them leads various individuals to check their social media accounts more frequently.

2. *Ego*: Studies show that individuals enjoy having a follower audience on social media. This situation triggers sharing more frequently to reach the audience.

3. *Perceived Value*: Individuals believe being on social media brings various advantages. Communication opportunities, access to information and fast access to campaigns make social media valuable.

4. *Control*: Social media users feel empowered when they have the control about when and how much they will access to platforms and content.

5. *Social Comparison/Self Esteem*: Social media enables users to compare themselves with other users and assess weak-strong aspects.

According to study results conducted to identify sub-dimensions of social media addiction (Al-Menayes, 2016:26);

- Increased time on social media reinforces the possibility of social media addiction.
- Increased satisfaction from social media reinforces possibility of addiction.
- Increased social media experience reinforces possibility of addiction.

Although extensive social media use is an important indicator of addiction, this indicator is insufficient on its own. Possibility of

addiction increases when intense usage is supported with suppressing negative emotions with social media, suffering when not reaching to social media and indifference to social activities (Huang, 2014: 127). In addition, people are able to search for and express what they cannot achieve in real life, what they cannot freely express in virtual environments (Çiftçi, 2018: 418).

There is a thin line with problem-free frequent social media use and addiction level. Fearing of missing out (FOMO) might trigger social media addiction. Salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, relapse, and conflict symptoms in traditional substance abuse might be indicators of social media addiction (Griffiths & Kuss, 2017:51). Fight against addiction is the task given by authorised centres and professionals. Noticing frequent use that might turn into an addiction and decreasing this use is directly related to individual will.

Social Media Diet

Easier communication opportunities and varieties have brought intense information sharing. While Alvin Toffler (1970) preferred “information overload” to represent intense information, Johnson (2012) preferred “information obesity” that indicates a situation where it is possible to become healthy with diet. Each individual has different digital metabolism. Hunger diet by cutting almost all connections might bring fast weight loss together but fast weight gain as well. (Sieberg, 2011:13). In this sense, instead of risking to be obese by completely cutting connection with detox, it is recommended to decrease to correct usage level with social media diet.

Generally, the concept, diet used for decreasing excessive food consumption is known as the effort to decrease any consumption or behaviour contrary to addiction. Similarly, detox represents stopping consumption completely or for a while. Social media detox or social media diet concepts are used as completely ending or decrease addiction-level unnecessary social media use in the related literature. In this study, detox concept was not preferred as this concept suggested completely stopping social media use. Social media diet concept is preferred to define healthy and controlled usage.

Cal Newport (2019:27) defined more aware intense technology use with “digital minimalism”. Digital minimalism is an understanding of technology usage that predicts the necessity for detailed pre-defined online time and focusing on limited beneficial activities and turning back to remaining things. Individuals that adopt this understanding are called digital minimalists.

According to Johnson (2012:65) being physically obese is a visible condition that an individual can self-identify. Information obesity is more dangerous. It is not easy to identify information obesity or weak information consumption. Social media is the leading platform for intense information consumption. When thousands of followers, shares and time spend on social media are considered for users, it is possible to talk about social media obesity. Intense and unconscious data consumption that leads to obesity can show ways to fight against the same problem when used in a conscious manner.

It is important to access existing usage time data for social media diet. A comparative analysis is possible by tracking daily, weekly and monthly social media usage duration. There are practical applications that provide information about time spend on social media by users and help to apply usage limits. Social media platforms can have built-in options or measure social media usage time with independent applications.

While there is built-in option on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, there is no data on Twitter application. Beyond learning usage time of related platforms, independent applications are necessary to learn detailed usage information such as time spent online or time spent on phone screen. These applications that help social media diet are present on mobile application stores. Today, it is possible to talk about hundreds of applications such as QualityTime, Moment, Digidiet, StayFree, YourHour, Digital Detox Challenge, Digitox, AppDetox, UsageTime, My Phone Time. When compared with socialising, game and entertainment applications, number of such applications are almost zero.

Basic principle of diet applications is to calculate usage time, report this time and notify users with a pre-defined usage time limit. Although these applications that facilitate social media diet do not demand fee from users for basic functions, there are in-app purchasing options for advanced services. When these applications are used for

free, application developers try to generate income from in-app advertisement.

Adam Alter in his *Irresistible* book (2017:14) expressed how he started to use Moment application and his own experience:

“When I did research for my book, I decided to measure my phone usage amount. I thought I checked my phone ten times per day and used it for about 1 hour. After installing Moment application, I faced the bitter truth in one month. I learned that I checked my phone forty times per day and spend approximately three hours on my phone.”

Alrobai, Mcalaney, Phalp and Ali (2016) conducted a study on 14 participants with four different applications for two weeks to measure the effect of digital diet applications on users. Participants have extremely different views towards application experience. While there are users who expressed this application was boring and there is no change in their attitude, there are also participants who expressed decreased intense usage and better time management. Research emphasises five basic risk factors to develop applications in a healthier way:

1. Unsustainable Change
2. Lowering Self-Esteem
3. Creating Misconceptions
4. Creating Alternative Addictive Experiences
5. Enforcing Biased Decisions

For a successful application, application developers must consider both technical and social factors.



Figure 1: Your Time on Facebook

User's average daily Facebook use for a week as the most popular social media platform around the world is given in Figure 1. Facebook users can access these information by following these steps.

1. Open the application and click \equiv symbol.
2. Click on **Settings & Privacy** option.
3. Click on **Your Time on Facebook** option.

As seen in Figure 1, Facebook applications provide information about time spend on Facebook and offers a reminder option with "Set Daily Time Reminder". This way, when daily use reaches pre-defined time, application will notify the user about this time.

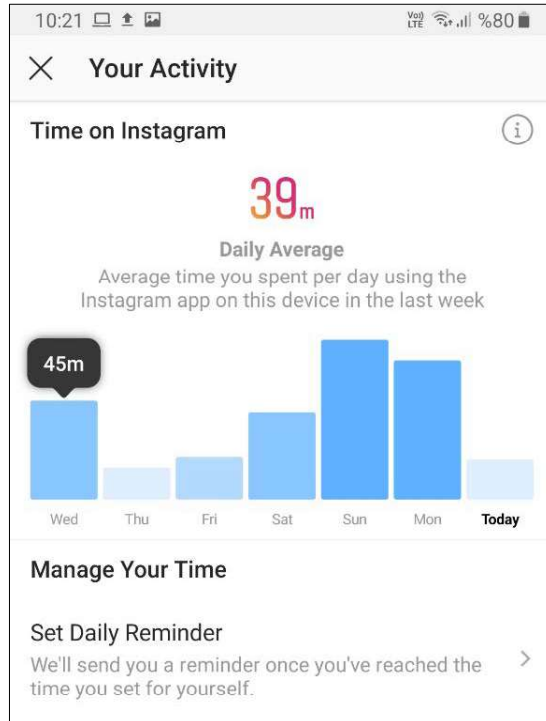


Figure 2: Instagram Your Activity

Instagram as one of the popular social media platforms offers statistics related to daily average time on Instagram for a week. Each Instagram user can access this information by following two steps.

1. Go to your profile and click \equiv symbol.
2. Click on **Your Activity** option.

As seen in Figure 2, Instagram applications provide information about daily time spend on Instagram. “Set Daily Reminder” option of this applications offers notification. This way, when daily use reaches pre-defined daily time, application will notify the user about this time.

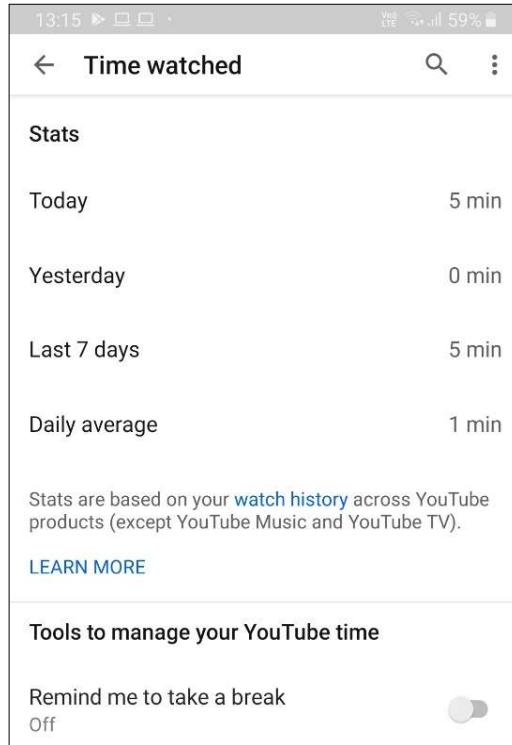


Figure 3: YouTube Time Watched

YouTube as the most popular video-sharing platform around the world offers information about daily video watching time of users. YouTube users can access these information by following these steps.

1. Open the application and click \equiv symbol.
2. Click on **Time Watched** option.

As seen in Figure 3, YouTube applications provide information about daily time spend on YouTube. “Remind me to take a break” option of this applications offers notification. As in Facebook and Instagram, YouTube application can also send notification when pre-defined time limit is reached.

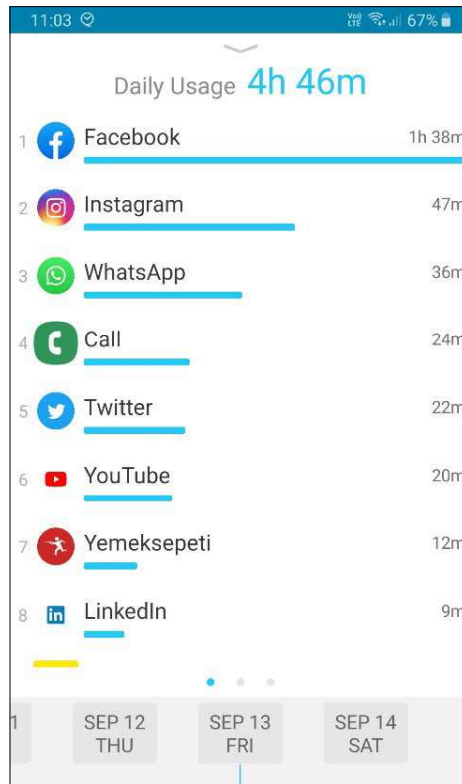


Figure 4: QualityTime Daily Usage

Another application is QualityTime that shows how much time is spend on mobile devices and how much an application is used independently of built-in applications of popular social media platforms. This application offers beneficial data to reach social media diet targets. As seen in Figure 4, it is possible to access total daily usage duration, separate usage direction for each application and comparison of daily usage duration. With profiles created on this application, it is possible to set schedules breaks and limit daily usage time for any application.

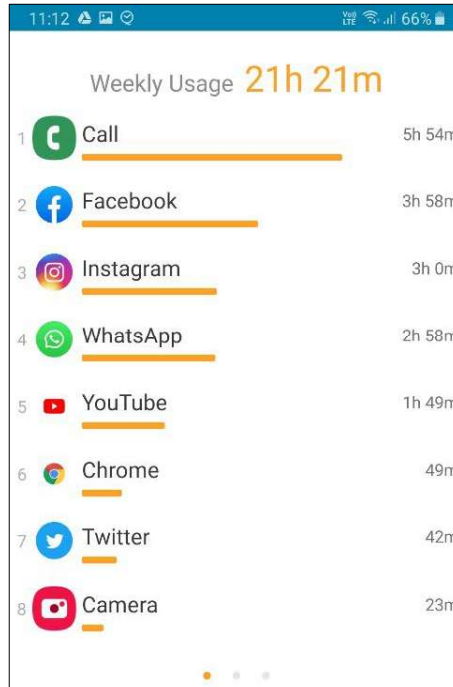


Figure 5: QualityTime Weekly Usage

As seen in Figure 5, QualityTime applications offer weekly usage statistics. In addition to total weekly usage and weekly statistics for applications, this application offers detailed usage reports to users about talking duration, screen unlocking numbers.

Findings and Discussion

Smart applications and social media platforms have turned into popular communication and socialisation network especially among young individuals. Every minute without using WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube applications reaches to an uncomfortable level for users having fear of missing out. There is a thin line between addiction and healthy usage. The way for moving away from social

media addiction and allocating appropriate time to social media is self-control of individuals which means social media diet.

Social media diet consists of identifying current usage size, decreasing usage and sustaining at ideal level stages. At this point, it is important to measure and assess social media usage time. Both data from popular social media platforms and applications that entirely focus on this topic, it is possible to access daily, weekly social media usage time reports.

Applications that help to decrease social media use creates profiles to set limited usage time and send warning notifications. With usage time history and instant usage reporting, it is easier to observe the changes in time. Thus, social media diet becomes practical. Different studies on this topic show that social media diet practice can contribute to decrease intense usage time and effectively manage time spend on this application. Few experimental studies emphasise that these applications help social media diet, however, social factors must be considered when these applications are developed.

When findings of this study are evaluated in general, it can be seen that smart applications are beneficial to notice excessive social media usage, limit this usage and monitor usage level. In this sense, it is believed that increasing experimental studies on social media diet and the effects of these applications on the diet will benefit for this field.

Finally, it is possible to state that environmental factors are important for social media diet efforts. Therefore, individual social media diet efforts must be supported by the family, social surrounding,

school and colleagues. Social media diet will be challenging for an individual that has friends who intensely use social media. In this sense, it is believed that an increasing number of social activities and having a social environment to frequently repeat these activities will help social media diet to be successful.

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