

INVITED REVIEW

Social Media Psychology

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Main Points

- When the interest of users in Turkey in Internet and social media networks is considered, it is seen that there is an increase in the use of these networks in the population. 82.4% of Internet users in Turkey state that their primary purpose of Internet use is to access social media networks.
- Studies have found that social media addiction has high comorbidity with depression, anxiety disorders, suicide, dysthymia, social anxiety, panic disorder, and separation anxiety.
- Many problems such as increased anxiety as a result of wrong information leading to wrong diagnosis can be explained by the concept of cyberchondria, which has become more prominent with the development of technology.
- Studies have found that there is a relationship between impulsivity, narcissism, neuroticism, and extraversion personality traits and social media addiction. High extraversion and low self-control were reported to be predictors of social media addiction tendencies. In addition to personality traits and individual addictions, attachment styles may be important in predicting social media addictions.

Abstract

With the developing technology, social relations have moved to online environments, and this has opened a new area for individuals to make social comparisons. It is also seen that the use of social media may cause some concerns about body image, especially in adolescents and young women. When the interest of users in Turkey in Internet and social media networks is considered, it is seen that there is an increase in the use of these networks in the population. 82.4% of Internet users in Turkey state that their primary purpose of Internet use is to access social media networks. Similar to the results around the world, it has been found that 90.8% of those who use social media networks in Turkey are young people between the ages of 18 and 25. Social media and Internet use can become addictive to the user at the point where it gets out of his/her control and starts to affect his/her daily life negatively. In this study, romantic relationships in social media, cyberbullying, social comparison, social media addiction and its treatment will be discussed within the scope of social media psychology.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, social comparison, social media addiction, Social media psychology

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Introduction

Today, with the development of technology, the Internet has begun to take more place in our lives and the opportunities provided by the Internet have led to the emergence of new media tools. The new media, which enables individuals to communicate more, has not only provided individuals with the opportunity to receive news but also to generate news and to be the news themselves. In the past, the need for individuals to get news created newspapers and the media took on an identity in the 19th century.

On the other hand, with the developing technology in the 20th century, the forms of communication have evolved and changed, and the concept of social media has emerged. Social media is a virtual media that allows users to express themselves and communicate with other users. Although it is difficult to define social media because of the fact that social media provides so many services today, it is possible to explain it with three keywords (İşlek, 2012):

1. *Content:* items that include photos, videos, and status updates.

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2. *Communities*: it enables people to communicate, network, and collaborate.
3. *Web 2.0*: it includes technologies and applications that facilitate content sharing for users.

People use web-based desktop/laptop computers or mobile devices to access social media services. As people use these electronic services, they create highly interactive platforms where individuals, communities, and organizations can share, co-create, discuss, participate, and exchange user-generated content or self-curated digitally posted content online. In addition to all these, social media is used to document memories (Kaakinen et al., 2020). Furthermore, with social media, users have the opportunity to learn and discover something, to introduce themselves, and thus social media also enables the establishment of new friendships. The development of social media is rapidly changing the social interactions that take place every day. The concept of social media encompasses various Web 2.0-based technologies consisting of user-generated content. Different social networking sites are prominent examples of social media platforms that allow individuals to interact with other users while also providing tools to maintain and build social networks. With the introduction of social media sites and platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, people can reach out to other like-minded people at unprecedented rates. Thus, social media aids in responding to a basic human need to interact and seek friendship (Kaakinen et al., 2020).

In today's cultural and technological environment, it can be said that almost every individual uses some form of social media. Studies report that 88% of individuals aged between 18 and 29, 78% of individuals aged between 30 and 49, and 64% of individuals aged between 50 and 64 use some form of social media. This statistic is quite surprising, especially if we consider that individuals between the ages of 50 and 64 are a generation that has not grown up with the Internet or social media. This indicates that social media is now a cultural feature and reveals the prevalence of social media use. With the spread of social media across all age groups, more attention should be paid to what each user does individually and how it affects them. The endless flow of communication and connection provided by social media changes the way each individual thinks and absorbs information. With this change, social media contributes to the development of social media habits that can benefit and harm users at the same time. This situation affects the psychology of social media users, that is, their mental or spiritual health. Given that this expanded use of social media will continue, it is clear that more research is needed in the field to analyze and understand social media addiction in our culture.

In this section, social media psychology, being on social media, romantic relationships and dating on social media, social media and social comparison, cyberbullying, persistent stalking, and social media addiction will be evaluated.

Cyberbullying

The main difference between cyberbullying and the types of bullying carried out in the physical world is that it is the means of information and communication technologies such as the Internet or mobile phones through which virtual communication

can be carried out. Belsey (2006) considers cyberbullying as "a type of bullying involving deliberate, repetitive and hostile behaviour designed by an individual or group to harm others through the use of information and communication technologies." According to Patchin and Hinduja's (2006) definition, cyberbullying is behaviors that are carried out intentionally and repeatedly through electronic texts with the intention of causing harm. In cyberbullying, these electronic texts may contain very serious messages (death threats, swearing, insults, etc.). Actions such as gaining unauthorized access to e-mails by obtaining others' personal passwords, sending embarrassing messages, and taking embarrassing pictures of the victim and spreading them are also included in the scope of cyberbullying.

Research on cyberbullying in Turkey is quite new. In a study on the situations of cyberbullying and being cyberbullied of high school students aged between 14 and 19, it was found that 28% of the students indulged in cyberbullying and 30% of them were cyberbullied (Erdur Baker & Kavşut, 2007). Peker (2015) conducted a study with secondary school students and found that 46% of the students performed cyberbullying behaviors and 65% of them were cyberbullied. Topçu (2008) found that 48% of students engaged in cyberbullying, and Aricak et al. (2008) found that the rate of cyberbullying among Turkish students was 36%.

Taking the act of bullying as a criterion, Willard (2007) classified different types of cyberbullying as follows:

- *Flaming*: It involves short-term heated discussions between people in public communication environments such as discussion groups, chat rooms, or games where rude, obscene, threatening, and offensive language is used. People who are bystanders to this situation can either exacerbate the discussion or try to put an end to it.
- *Harassment*: It involves continuously sending messages with offensive and hurtful content to a person selected as a target through personal communication channels such as e-mail, instant messaging, and unilaterally hurting the victim. Unlike the flaming type, it lasts longer and repeatedly.
- *Denigration*: It is the sharing of damaging, unfounded, and cruel messages about the targeted person online or sending them to others in order to spoil their friendships or damage their reputation. In such behaviors, the victim is not the direct recipient of the messages. Gossip and rumors are examples of denigration. The most common subtype of denigration is using the victim's face digitally in sexually explicit photographs and sharing them publicly online.
- *Impersonation*: It is making posts that make the targeted person look bad or damage the person's friendships by impersonating the person on the person's web page, profile, or other communication channels. This type of bullying can occur when personal passwords are shared.
- *Outing and trickery*: Outing is the public posting or sending of particularly intimate and embarrassing personal information and images of a person online. The most common form is the sharing of information online by the cyberbully with the intention that it will remain only with the sender. Trickery, as a part of the outing, is sharing or threatening to share it with others by establishing an intimate and private communication with the targeted person and learning private information about the person.

- *Exclusion:* In a password-protected environment such as group blogs and online gaming environments, the target is to deliberately remove the selected person from the group or not to include them in the group at all.
- *Cyberstalking:* It is the continuous sending of threatening, offensive, extremely disturbing messages to a targeted person by a cyberstalker. The intentions of the cyberstalker may include harming the victim's reputation and damaging friendships.

Cyberteasing

Electronic aggression is an important psychological health problem. Cyberbullying with electronic communication tools is repetitive damaging behaviors that are intentionally inflicted on a person with electronic communication tools and electronic texts (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Although cyberteasing, which is a phenomenon related to cyberbullying, includes hurtful behaviors through technology, it has received less attention (Madlock & Westerman, 2010). Like bullying, hurtful teasing is conceptualized as deliberate actions designed to cause tension, including verbal abuse. These actions lead to feelings of anxiety, frustration, anger, shame, and humiliation in the victims. While the meanings of harming or hurting are predominant in the act of bullying, teasing itself can be seen as a form of play or a type of communication, especially among children (Madlock & Westerman, 2010).

Stalking

"Stalking," a word of English origin, is not a new concept, but its legal characterization is new. It can be translated into Turkish as "ısrarlı takip," "musallat olma," "dadanma," and "sırnaşma." Since the phenomenon is of interest to many disciplines such as psychology, education, sociology, and criminology, it is very difficult to find an established Turkish equivalent. Stalking is the act of following the other party with an overt or covert sexual desire or orientation in a way that causes extreme discomfort, with acts that can be defined as molestation or harassment in unity and continuity, with executive or negligent behaviors in a certain period of time (Doğan, 2014).

Stalking behaviors can be triggered by many different motivations. These motivations include finding the victim physically and sexually attractive, seeking revenge against the victim, seeking intimate relationship with the victim, and wanting to be with the victim despite being rejected. Similarly, according to Spitzberg and Cupach's (2003) study, stalking may be based on or perceived to be based on motivations such as love and hatred for the victim, controlling the victim, or trying to express oneself to the victim. The fact that these motivations that lead to stalking are perceived as romance in the society may affect the society's perspective toward stalking. For example, the idea that men should be persistent in a romantic proposal, thus upholding traditional gender roles, may lead the parties to perceive persistent behaviors such as romantic approach, courtship, and showing interest as normal. This perception, in turn, carries persistent pursuit to a legitimate and positive position within the society. In a study, it was found that many stalkers try to justify and normalize their behaviors romantically (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000). If the ex-partner's stalking is perceived as a reflection of love and love pain, the phenomenon of stalking begins to be perceived in

a positive way. However, this is a terrifying event for the victim. In addition to feelings of pity and sympathy toward the stalker, the victim may be considered as a person who refuses love and attention, and negative feelings may be harbored toward him/her. Sinclar (2012) found that a woman who rejects a man arouses negative emotions in male participants. Romance can legitimize stalking even if it is one-sided. In addition to this, in Turkey, as in other countries, assertiveness in romantic relationships and marriage proposal are expected from men (Sakallı & Curum, 2011). From this point of view, it is also seen that in some environments and cultures, stalking behaviors exhibited by men are tolerated (Başar & Sakallı, 2021).

Social Media Addiction

The study on the subject of social media addiction will first provide technical information about the path followed by users, then research in the literature will be compiled and new behavioral disorders associated with social media will be emphasized.

Statistical Evaluation of Use of Social Media in the World and Turkey

Statistical studies on Internet usage show that the number of internet users worldwide has increased continuously and gradually from 1.24 billion users to 3.9 billion users between 2005 and 2018. Demands from countries for access to the Internet and the practicalization and diversification of the tools used have important effects on this increase. When we look at the use of social media tools worldwide, it was found that the number of social media users in 2018 was 2.65 billion, while this number reached 4.62 billion users in 2022.

While the prevalence of Internet usage in Turkey was recorded as 69.95 million in February 2022, the prevalence of social media usage was recorded as 68.90 million. Again, according to the data obtained in February 2022, the top six most used social media networks worldwide were, respectively, as follows: Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat, and TikTok. In Turkey, in the light of the data obtained in 2018, the most used social media networks are WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Facebook Messenger, Telegram, and TikTok, respectively (We are Social, 2022).

Epidemiology

Frequent social media use does not necessarily indicate the presence of social media addiction. An important distinction between intensive use of social media and social media addiction is the uncontrolled and compulsive behavior and the negative consequences of spending time on social networks (Andreassen, 2015). Prevalence estimates of social media addiction vary widely across countries, ranging from 0% to 82%. The reason for this is the sharp differences in prevalence rates between studies and the use of different symptom thresholds in classifying social media addiction (Cheng et al., 2021). In a meta-analysis of 94 studies covering a total of 40 countries, the prevalence rates for behavioral addiction were found as follows: 10.6% Internet addiction, 30.7% smartphone addiction, 5.3% gaming addiction, and 15.1% social media addiction. When we consider social media addiction according to the age variable, it has been found that young people have access to social media at a much earlier age than older generations, so they feel more comfortable using social media as a communication tool and become more vulnerable to

social media addiction (Ho et al., 2017). A study by Cheng et al. (2022) found a fourfold higher risk of social media addiction in young adults aged 18 – 34 years compared to older adults aged between 50 and 65 years in the UK and the USA. However, gender differences in the prevalence of social media addiction were not evident for both countries, but women in the US sample were found to have a higher risk of social media addiction than men.

When we look at the social media addiction in the world geographically, the prevalence in the Southeast Asia region is relatively higher than in other regions, while the prevalence in the American region is relatively low. In addition, social media prevalence was found to be higher in lower-middle-income regions than in high- and upper-middle-income regions (Meng et al., 2022). It was observed that the prevalence of gaming addiction and social media addiction increased during the quarantine periods of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic compared to the periods without curfew (Alimoradi et al., 2022). Recent studies have found that increased social media use in young people during the quarantine period due to the need to regulate their emotions and reduce perceived loneliness has a high risk of turning into addiction (Cauberghe et al., 2021). When social media addiction rates were compared with prepandemic rates in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was found that the prevalence of social media addiction in the UK and the USA remained largely stable in contrast to increasing psychiatric problems (Cheng et al., 2021).

Etiology

One of the most important factors in understanding addictive behaviors in youth is the family. Previous studies on addictive behaviors have focused on various factors such as mother's occupation, socioeconomic status of the family (Wu et al., 2016), race and ethnicity (Wong & Wu, 2020), and type of attachment of the child to the parent (Kim & Kim, 2015). A study by Soh et al. (2018) found that factors such as parenting style (authoritarian, permissive, neglectful, etc.) and parental supervision have a strong effect on Internet addiction and risky online activities. It was found that when parents monitor and guide their children's Internet use and respect their autonomy, less risky social media and Internet use occurs (Floros & Siomos, 2013). In contrast to all these, it has been found that when strict and oppressive rules are applied in the family, adolescents are more likely to develop addictive Internet use behaviors (Wu et al., 2016). Rates of social media addiction also vary significantly from culture to culture. In a study investigating social media addiction by comparing Eastern and Western cultures through helicopter parenting, the role of maternal helicopter parenting on social media addiction was more effective in the USA, while no difference was observed between parental genders in China and social media addiction was found to be higher in China. The reason why social media addiction is higher in China can be explained by the fact that Chinese parents, unlike American parents, are tolerant of their children's social media use as long as they perform well academically (Hwang et al., 2022). In a study comparing individualistic and collectivist cultures, it was found that there was a higher rate of social media addiction in collectivist cultures compared to individualistic cultures. It has been suggested that the reason for this is that members of individualistic cultures are affected by internal demands (mood, etc.) in using social

media, while members of collectivist cultures are affected by both internal and external demands (in-group norms). In collectivist societies with culturally stricter demands, members are more likely to use social media due to the pressure to comply with in-group norms and to provide motivation to maintain in-group relationships, to provide social support, to obtain peer approval, and to build consensus (Kim et al., 2011).

Clinical View

With the emergence of social media, researchers have started to look more closely at the use of the Internet through social media rather than focusing on Internet use. The use of social media and Internet signals addiction at the point where it gets out of the control of the individual and starts to negatively affect his/her daily life. Internet, smartphone, and social media addiction is not classified as a disorder in DSM-V, but it is considered as a behavioral addiction in the literature. Social media addiction has been found to be strongly associated with smartphone addiction (Csibi et al., 2018). Based on the information on how much time individuals spend on their smartphones, it can be estimated how prone they are to social media addiction. Looking at social media addiction from a cognitive – behavioral framework, it has been found that individuals with psychosocial problems such as loneliness, anxiety, and depression are prone to problematic social media use that leads to negative consequences (Davis, 2001). We can say that maladaptive cognitions play a central role in individuals' tendency toward problematic social media use and predict problematic social media use behaviors. Caplan (2005) argued that, in addition to maladaptive cognitions, individuals who lack social skills and self-presentation skills and have social anxiety may be particularly likely to prefer online social interaction to face-to-face communication and may become vulnerable to problematic online interactions that may lead to negative consequences. Factors such as perception of one's own self-worth, level of self-esteem, psychological well-being, and perceived social support also predict social media addiction (Özcan & Buzlu, 2005). In a study conducted with Indonesian youth during the COVID-19 pandemic period, it was found that students with higher social media addiction scores were more likely to experience mild depression (Sujarwoto et al., 2023). Various results have been obtained in studies on social media use and psychological well-being. Some studies have concluded that social media use protects psychological well-being (Pittman & Reich, 2016) or that social media use has no effect on psychological well-being (Coyne et al., 2020), while some studies have concluded that social media use has negative effects on mental and physical health (e.g., low self-esteem, greater depression, more negative social comparison, greater loneliness) (Verduyn et al., 2017). Young (1998) states that in order for a person to be diagnosed with internet and social media addiction, it is necessary to be "excessively interested in social media," "increasingly needing to use social media," "hiding the truth about the time spent on social media," "not being able to control the use of social media," "stopping the use of social media," "using social media more than needed," "experiencing problems in family, school, work and social environment," and "seeing social media as a space to escape from negative emotions." Social media use may occur as an indicator rather than a determinant of the risk of a psychological disorder (Beeres et al., 2021). Studies have found that social media addiction has high comorbidity with

depression, anxiety disorders, suicide, dysthymia, social anxiety, panic disorder, and separation anxiety (Khalil et al., 2022). In addition to these psychiatric disorders, it has been found that attention deficit hyperactivity disorder frequently accompanies social media addiction and is associated with addiction. There are scales such as Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, Internet Addiction Scale, Young Internet Addiction Test—Short Form, Social Media Disorder Scale, Social Media Addiction Scale—Adult Form, and Smartphone Addiction Scale—Short Form that evaluate users' social media addiction.

Treatment

Since the use of the Internet is now compulsory in our daily lives in academic, business, and personal life, treatment interventions are applied in the treatment of social media addiction in order to increase the individual's control over Internet use instead of eliminating Internet use altogether. These interventions include therapeutic interventions, precautions, drug treatments, and self-help strategies. Therapeutic interventions include support groups, family therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing techniques, and reality therapy (Huang, 2022). Self-help strategies include methods such as planning social media use in environments such as workplace and school, setting time limits, increasing offline activities, relaxation techniques, and reminder cards (Andreassen, 2015). In the reminder card technique, the person is expected to write the problems caused by Internet use and the benefits he/she gains when he/she stops using it on both sides of the card and to read these cards when he/she turns to social media use (Berber Çelik & Çelik, 2022). In drug treatment, drugs such as antidepressants and mood stabilizers come to the fore.

Andreassen et al. (2014) defined social media addiction as "excessive and continuous engagement with social media platforms, having an intense desire to stay connected to these platforms continuously, and spending so much time that it damages other activities in social life, student/work life, interpersonal communication and mood." The biggest controversy encountered in studies on behavioral addiction is whether excessive use (video games, Internet, etc.) should be considered as addiction or not. In a study conducted by Griffiths (2005), he stated that the presence of six elements is necessary for excessive use to be classified as behavioral addiction. These elements are:

- *Determinism*: It is the fact that being present on social media platforms has become the only and most important activity in a person's life and social media directs the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the person. When the user is not active on social media platforms, he/she dreams of the moment when he/she will be online.
- *Change of Mood*: It is the subjective experiences of social media users as a result of excessive use of social media and the ways they develop to cope with them. For example, the user feels better or more numb than they really are.
- *Tolerance*: It is the gradual increase in the amount of time spent on social media in order to regain the satisfying feelings achieved through the use of social media networks.
- *Deprivation*: It is the physical effect that occurs when social media users cannot access social media networks due to various reasons such as health problems and holidays and

causes unpleasant emotional states such as pessimism and irritability.

- *Conflict*: It can be defined as the conflicts that social media users experience with the people around them and within themselves in the context of social activities such as hobbies and other interests as a result of spending a lot of time on social media platforms.
- *Cycle*: It is the recurrence of the symptoms experienced by the user in the previous stages as a result of excessive and continuous social media use, the rapid increase in symptoms after the withdrawal and control period (Bilgin, 2018), and the inability to get out of this cycle.

In studies on social media use, users have stated that the use of social media networks has an important role in reducing stress, anxiety, and other psychological symptoms. Social media networks contribute positively by increasing the user's perception of self-efficacy and the sense of satisfaction they get from their lives by distancing them from the feelings of depression and loneliness experienced in real life. Due to such positive contributions provided by social media use, individuals tend to increase the frequency of social media use. These positive emotions experienced by the user are like a reward to him/her and for this reason, more social media use is realized each time with the expectation of reward. In this cycle of social media use and reward, disruptions occur in the user's work life, social relationships, and daily functions. These positive emotions that occur in the individual bring about deterioration in daily functioning and more negative emotions for the user with the increase in social media use.

Social media is known to negatively affect social relationships, psychological well-being, and private life. In a study conducted with university students with high daily social media usage time, it was stated that students thought that life was full of injustice. It was also found that adolescents with high daily social media usage time had high levels of depression. Similarly, it is stated that there is a positive correlation between anxiety and depression levels and daily social media usage time, and as the daily usage time increases, the symptoms of depression experienced increase. In studies examining the relationship between depression and social media use, individuals who make depressive posts on social media platforms and who can be observed in social media platforms where the user experiences depression symptoms may have a high rate of clinical depression diagnosis and a high rate of needing psychological support (Çayırılı, 2017).

It is important to understand the causes, consequences, and treatment of social media addiction because social media addiction is associated with many emotional, relational, health, and performance problems. Studies investigating the causes of social media addiction have also examined personality traits that may be related to addiction. In the studies, it has been found that there is a relationship between impulsivity, narcissism, neuroticism, and extraversion personality traits and social media addiction. High extraversion and low self-control were reported to be predictors of social media addiction tendencies. In addition to personality traits and individual addictions, attachment styles may be important in predicting social media addictions (Taluy, 2021).

Conclusion

The field of social media psychology has emerged and created an agenda in the last 10 – 15 years. Due to the newness of this field, the research conducted in the field is not yet sufficient and the studies lack comprehensive information. Since there are many gaps in existing research, there is a great need for new perspectives to be added to the field. According to Jean M. Twenge, author at *The Atlantic* and psychologist of 20 years, people need to be more aware of the consequences of social media addiction, especially for the future of our children. She summarizes the process with the words, “It is not only how children experience adolescence that is at stake, and the constant availability of smartphones will affect them well into adulthood” (İşlek, 2012).

Especially in the current pandemic process, it is important that people can quickly and reliably learn about the symptoms of the disease and the measures to be taken to alleviate the disease. People see social media tools as a platform where they can access information quickly. Due to mandatory quarantines and social distancing rules imposed by governments to slow the spread of the virus, people spend the whole day at home and therefore have limited physical activity. Due to all these conditions, people use social media tools intensively in order to socialize, obtain information, and spend time during the day. According to the studies in the literature, the excessive use of social media also reveals some problems. According to a study investigating the mental state of people during the pandemic, false and unverified information about the epidemic on social media is increasing and this situation causes panic and fear in people.

At the same time, with the introduction of social media into our lives, businesses are actively using social media in terms of marketing in order to reach consumers. With social media, businesses have the opportunity of marketing and direct sales. In addition, the fact that consumers can reach the business they want by using social media tools puts businesses in a competitive environment and this situation leads to the emergence of a new market area. In the age of technology, it has become one of the current trends of recent times that consumers are influenced by the social media environment and some phobias created by this environment. Fear of missing out (FOMO), referring to the fear of missing the developments in social media, is one of these trends. It is thought that this fear turns into consumption behaviour over time. Businesses try to turn this fear of the consumer into an opportunity. In this sense, marketers and advertisers try to mobilize the FOMO of the consumer with stimulating advertising messages such as “don’t miss it,” “an unmissable opportunity” as a frequently used strategy and try to make the consumer shop more. In short, as the areas of use of social media expand, many different concepts emerge and more research is needed in this field. It is obvious that social media, which distances individuals from reality and is associated with many psychological disorders, promises a future with low functionality if necessary measures are not taken. In particular, it is necessary to create training programmes on the healthy use of social media, to explain them to social media users with emphasis on the consequences and to create an infrastructure to ensure their implementation. In addition to state policies and all the measures mentioned,

it is predicted that individual awareness and families being a model for healthy use of social media will prepare the ground for healthy use of social media in the future.

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