

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A Study on Health Nutrition Obsession, Social – Physique Anxiety, and Social Media Addiction of Young Individuals

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Main Points

- Our study investigates the relationships between healthy eating obsession, social physique anxiety, and social media addiction.
- The results revealed that obsession with healthy eating had an impact on social physique anxiety, and social media addiction. Similarly, it confirmed that social media addiction has an impact on social physique anxiety.
- The study contributes to revealing the relationships between healthy eating obsession, social physique anxiety, and social media addiction in young individuals.
- It is recommended to organize training programs for young individuals on topics such as healthy nutrition, conscious social media use, and body positivity.

Abstract

The objective of this research is to explore the connections between preoccupation with healthy dietary habits, social physical apprehension, and addiction to social networking platforms among young people. The research focuses on individuals aged between 18 and 29 residing in Isparta, Türkiye, comprising the study population. In the study, a questionnaire was given to 400 people, and the obtained data were analyzed using various statistical methods. The outcomes of the correlation analysis revealed statistically significant and positive associations between the fixation on healthy eating and both social physical anxiety and social media addiction. Additionally, a positive relationship was observed between social media addiction and social physical anxiety. The findings from the regression analysis indicated that the fixation on healthy eating accounted for 6.3% of the overall variation in social physical anxiety and 3.7% in social media addiction. Finally, it was concluded that social physical anxiety explained 2.5% of the total variance in social media addiction. The findings of this study are believed to hold significance in comprehending the connections among the fixation on healthy eating, social physical anxiety, and social media addiction among young individuals.

Keywords: Healthy eating obsession, regression analysis, social media addiction, social physique anxiety, young individuals

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Introduction

The interest and importance of healthy living and healthy nutrition have gradually increased throughout society. Although this situation has positive effects on public health, it has also caused various

disorders in the eating behaviors of society. In addition, the eating disorders of society paved the way for the emergence of future health problems (Arusoglu, 2006; Pekcan, 2020). The desire to consume healthy foods is not an inconvenience in basis. However, obsession with consuming healthy foods

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and missing the measure and balance in healthy eating habits can lead to orthorexia nervosa (ON). Orthorexia nervosa can also be considered a serious personality or behavioral disorder (Donini et al., 2004). Steven Bratman was the first to bring up the term orthorexia. Orthorexia nervosa occurs when healthy eating behavior reaches the level of obsession (Bratman & Knight, 2000). An orthorexic individual spends most of his time thinking about food. He often dedicates his existence to the planning, purchasing, preparation, and consumption of foods that he considers healthy (Donini et al., 2004).

The underlying causes of ON are very deep (Horovitz & Argyrides, 2023). These reasons may sometimes be hidden behind an attractive belief. For example, one of these reasons may be a person's belief in complete health without pathological risks. Also, the desire to have full control over their own life and a secret conformism that healthy nutrition will provide may be among these reasons. This conformism can provide an excuse to follow healthy eating habits without having to confess one's belief in socially and culturally accepted norms of beauty (Donini et al., 2004). The basis of eating disorders including ON is an excessive preoccupation with ideal body weight, ideal and healthy body perception, and being thin. These are also like obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (Arusoğlu, 2006; Scarff, 2017). In addition to all these, there may be a search for a new identity and spirituality in one's eating behavior. Similarly, believing that one's own eating theory is the best can lead one to socially isolate oneself from society (Donini et al., 2004).

As it is known, social media is one of the platforms where a person is active in the online environment by isolating himself from social life. Social media use is high among young individuals. Since young individuals are born into a high-tech environment, it seems quite natural that their use of social media is high. However, research reveals that the frequency of use of social media by young individuals has increased significantly and reached the level of addiction (Kırık et al., 2015; Xuan & Amat, 2020). The reasons behind social media addiction among young individuals are manifold (Al-Samarraie et al., 2022). Economic problems, psychological problems, and concerns about physical appearance may cause young individuals to escape from the real world and take shelter in the virtual world (Kırık et al., 2015).

As it is known, dissatisfaction with physical appearance is extremely common among young college-aged individuals. This is also seen as an important risk factor for eating disorders. Social media is a medium where a physically idealized body image is presented and shared. In this context, social media is seen as extremely problematic in terms of body image and eating behaviors (Delgado-Rodríguez et al., 2022; Pop, 2016). Various eating behaviors with no scientific basis have encouraged on social media under the name of healthy and clean eating. This situation causes orthorexic behaviors, especially in young individuals who are actively interested in healthy nutrition and their bodies. Research also confirms the relationship between ON and social media use in young individuals (Awad et al., 2022; Scarff, 2017; Turner & Lefevre, 2017) Similarly, research shows that the widespread use of social media in young individuals increases dissatisfaction with physical appearance (Brown & Tiggemann,

2016; Fardouly et al., 2018; Tiggemann et al., 2013). This situation makes young individuals more vulnerable to eating disorders (Jiotsa et al., 2021). Considering the relationship between social media and negative body image and eating disorders, the increasing use of social media among young individuals is worrying (Turner & Lefevre, 2017).

Material and Methods

Type of Study

The design of this study is descriptive and cross-sectional research.

Purpose and Hypotheses of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationships between healthy eating obsession, social – physique anxiety, and social media addiction variables in young individuals between the ages of 18 and 29. The research hypotheses formed in line with the purpose of the study are as follows.

Hypotheses

H₁: Healthy eating obsession has a statistically significant effect on social physique anxiety.

H₂: Healthy eating obsession has a statistically significant effect on social media addiction.

H₃: Social media addiction has a statistically significant effect on social physique anxiety.

The Universe and Sample of the Study

The study's target population comprises individuals aged 18 to 29 residing in Isparta, Türkiye, estimated to be 102,270 (TSI, 2023). The sample size was determined using the non-clustered, single-stage random sampling method proportional to the main population (Collins, 1986). While a larger sample generally enhances representativeness, this study collected data from 400 individuals. Calculations based on a 5% margin of error, 95% CII, and assuming a 50% event occurrence in the main population suggested a sample size of 384 individuals.

Data Collection Method

In this study, the inclusion criterion required participants to fall within the age range of 18 to 29. Exclusion criteria encompassed individuals under 18 or over 29 years old, as well as those who declined to provide voluntary consent.

Data Collection Tools

The research utilized a four-part questionnaire as its primary data collection instrument. In the first part, there is the "Healthy Eating Obsession Scale" developed to measure individuals' healthy eating obsessions (ON) (Arslantaş et al., 2017). The scale was first prepared by Bratman and Kinght as an orthorexia short questionnaire with ten questions (Bratman & Knight, 2000). It was later developed as a self-assessment tool for ON by Donini et al (Donini et al., 2004). The scale comprises 15 items and follows a four-point Likert format. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was made by Arusoğlu et al. In the Turkish version, four items with factor loads less than 0.50 were excluded from the scale. For this reason, the Turkish version of ORTO-15 was named ORTO-11. Low scores from the scale indicate orthorexic tendency. The Cronbach α coefficient

of ORTO-11 is 0.62. This value indicates that the internal consistency of the scale is at an acceptable level (Arusoğlu et al., 2008). Different national adaptations of ORTO-15 have been made due to the unstable factor structure in different populations (Özdengül et al., 2021). One of these adaptations was made by Rogoza and Donini (Rogoza et al., 2022). Rogoza and Doini recommend using the revised version (ORTO-R), which overcomes the limitations of the ORTO-15 and allows cross-country comparison. The revised version, ORTO-R, consists of six items and is in a five-point Likert type ranging from one (never) to five (always). Higher scores highlight more ON tendencies. In a study conducted by Özdengül et al. (2021) in Türkiye, the Cronbach's alpha value for the scale was determined to be 0.72. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha value computed for the scale was 0.68.

In the second part, there is the "Social Media Addiction Scale" developed by Andreassen et al. in 2016 (Andreassen et al., 2016). The Turkish adaptation of the scale was done by Demirci (Demirci, 2019). The scale served as a tool to assess the participants' levels of social media addiction. The scale consists of six items and one dimension. Each item is evaluated according to a five-point response system (1 = very rare, 5 = quite often). The items within the scale align with six fundamental addiction criteria: preoccupation, mood alteration, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and unsuccessful attempts to cease. The total score range for the scale spans from 6 to 30. Elevated scores on the scale suggest a higher level of social media addiction. While the Cronbach alpha value of the scale was found to be 0.83 in Demirci, it was calculated as 0.79 in this study.

In the third part, the "Social - Physique Anxiety Inventory" was used to measure the social - physique anxiety levels of the participants. The social - physique anxiety inventory was developed by Hart et al. (Hart et al., 1989). The Turkish adaptation of the inventory was made by Mülazımoğlu Ballı and Aşçı (Mülazımoğlu Ballı & Aşçı, 2006). The inventory consists of 12 items and is in 5-point Likert type (1 = completely false, 5 = completely true). The inventory consists of two sub-dimensions: physical appearance discomfort (the person's discomfort about his physical appearance) and negative evaluation expectation (the expectation that one's physical appearance will be negatively evaluated by others). The inventory's minimum achievable score is 12, while the maximum score attainable is 60. Elevated scores suggest a heightened level of concern regarding the individual's appearance. Items 1, 2, 5, 8, and 11 in the inventory are reverse scored. Mülazımoğlu Ballı and Aşçı computed the Cronbach's alpha value for the entire scale as 0.87. The Cronbach alpha values calculated by the researchers for the sub-dimensions of the scale are 0.80 for physical appearance discomfort and 0.81 for negative evaluation expectation, respectively (Mülazımoğlu Ballı & Aşçı, 2006). Within this study, Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was computed as 0.87. Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the sub-categories of the scale were determined as 0.76 and 0.83, respectively.

In the last part, nine questions to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (gender, age, education, marital status, income status, having any chronic disease status, regular physical activity, continuous drug use, vitamin/supplement use, and body mass index) are located.

Analysis of Data

All statistical analyses in the study were carried out using SPSS v22.0 (IBM SPSS Corp.; Armonk, NY, USA). In the analysis of the data, descriptive analyses (means, standard deviation, etc.), reliability analysis, and regression analysis were performed.

Ethical Considerations

The Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee of Süleyman Demirel University granted ethical approval for this study (date: January 4, 2023, decision no. 131/8). Potential participants were presented with a document detailing that participation in the study was voluntary and that the information collected would be used for scientific purposes only. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Results

In Table 1, the individuals participating in the research were examined in terms of their descriptive findings. It was detected

Table 1.
Descriptive Findings Regarding the Participants

Variables	Feature	N	%
Age	18 – 24	296	74.0
	25 – 29	104	26.0
Gender	Woman	277	69.3
	Male	123	30.7
Education	Primary school	7	1.8
	High school	23	5.8
	Associate degree	12	3.0
	License	330	82.5
	Graduate	28	7.0
Marital status	Single	337	84.2
	Married	63	15.8
Income status	≤2500 TL	218	54.5
	2501 – 5000 TL	46	11.5
	5001 – 10,000 TL	69	17.3
	10,000 TL ≥	67	16.8
Doing regular physical activity	Yes	264	66.0
	No	136	34.0
Using vitamins/supplements	Yes	108	27.0
	No	292	73.0
Having chronic disorder	Yes	40	10.0
	No	360	90.0
Continuous drug use status	Yes	37	9.3
	No	363	90.7
BMI	≤18.9 kg/m ² —weak	45	11.3
	19 – 24.9 kg/m ² —normal	256	64.0
	25 – 29.9 kg/m ² —fat	76	19.0
	30 – 34.9 kg/m ² —obese	19	4.7
	≥35 kg/m ² —morbidly obese	4	1.0

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics on Study Variables

Variables	X	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Healthy eating obsession scale	2.86	.71	1.00	4.83
Social-physique anxiety	2.64	.75	1.00	4.83
Physical appearance discomfort	2.71	.80	1.00	5.00
Negative evaluation expectation	2.77	.68	1.00	4.43
Social media addiction	2.84	.88	1.00	5.00

that 74% of the participants are between the ages of 18 and 24, 69.3% are women, 82.5% are undergraduate graduates, and 84.2% are single. When the participants were examined among their BMIs, it was determined that 64% were normal, 19% were overweight, and 4.7% were obese. Of the participants, 54.5% stated that their monthly income is 2500 TL or less. Sixty-six percent of the participants stated that they did regular physical activity, and 10% stated that they had any chronic disease. Of the participants, 9.3% reported that they used regular medication, and 27% reported that they regularly took vitamins and supplements.

As a result of the descriptive analyses made in the study (see Table 2), the mean score of the answers given by the participants to the healthy eating obsession scale (ORTO-15) was $\bar{X} = 2.86$; the mean score of their answers to the social – physique anxiety scale was calculated as $\bar{X} = 2.64$. When the social – physique anxiety scale was analyzed based on sub-dimensions, it was determined that the mean score of “the physical appearance discomfort” sub-dimension was $\bar{X} = 2.71$ and the mean score of “the negative evaluation expectation” sub-dimension was $\bar{X} = 2.77$. The mean score of the answers given by the participants to the social media addiction scale was $\bar{X} = 2.84$.

Table 3 presents a simple regression analysis conducted to uncover the influence of preoccupation with healthy eating on social – physique anxiety. The analysis revealed that healthy eating obsession accounts for 6.3% of the overall variability in social – physique anxiety. Upon scrutinizing the *t*-test outcomes concerning the regression coefficient’s significance in the model, it was evident that an elevation in participants’ perceptions of their healthy eating obsession ($t = 5.170$; $p < .001$) statistically raises their social – physique anxiety. According to this result, the H1 hypothesis was accepted.

Table 3.
The Effect of Healthy Eating Obsession on Social – Physique Anxiety

Variable	B	Std. Error	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	1.884	.151		12.459	<.001
Healthy eating obsession	.265	.051	.251	5.170	<.001
$R = 0.251 \quad R^2 = 0.063 \quad F = 26.729 \quad <.001$					

Note: Criterion: Social physique anxiety.

Table 4.
The Effect of Healthy Eating Obsession on Social Media Addiction

Variable	B	Std. Error	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	2.417	.118		20.460	<.001
Healthy eating obsession	.156	.040	.193	3.919	<.001
$R = 0.193 \quad R^2 = 0.037 \quad F = 15.360 \quad <.001$					

Criterion: Social media addiction

In Table 4, a simple regression analysis was performed to reveal the effect of healthy eating obsession on social media addiction. As a result of the analysis, healthy eating obsession explains 3.7% of the total variance in social media addiction. When the *t*-test results regarding the significance of the regression coefficient in the regression model are examined, the increase in the perceptions of the participants’ obsession with healthy eating ($t = 3.919$; $p < .001$) increases their social media addiction statistically. According to this result, the H2 hypothesis was accepted.

In Table 5, a simple regression analysis was performed to reveal the effect of social media addiction on social – physique anxiety. As a result of the analysis, social media addiction explains 2.5% of the total variance in social – physique anxiety. In the regression model, when the *t*-test results regarding the significance of the regression coefficient are examined, the increase in the perceptions of the participants’ social media addiction ($t = 3.215$; $p < .001$) statistically increases their social – physique anxiety. According to this result, hypothesis H3 was accepted.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationships between the variables of healthy eating obsession, social – physique anxiety, and social media addiction in young individuals. It is seen that studies addressing these three variables in the young sample are limited in the literature. Contributing to the literature in this field is the main starting point of this study. As a result of the analysis carried out in the study to reveal the effect of healthy eating obsession on social – physique anxiety, it was determined that the increase in young individuals’ healthy eating obsession increased their social – physique anxiety. In the study conducted by Jiotsa et al. (Jiotsa et al., 2021) it was found that there is a relationship between young individuals’ body image concerns and eating disorders. In the study conducted by Gann, it was determined that the shame young women felt about their physical appearance was

Table 5.
Effect of Social Media Addiction on Social Physique Anxiety

Variable	B	Std. Error	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	2.257	.126		17.975	<.001
Social media addiction	.136	.042	.159	3.215	<.001
$R = 0.159 \quad R^2 = 0.025 \quad F = 10.338 \quad <.001$					

Note: Criterion: Social physique anxiety.

one of the predictive variables of ON (Gann, 2019). In the study conducted by Domingues and Carmo (Domingues & Carmo, 2021), it was found that the drive for thinness was one of the most important predictors of ON. Similarly, in their study, they found that the prevalence of ON was high in individuals who were concerned about their physical appearance. The results of studies conducted especially on young individuals of university age (Bundros et al., 2016; Duran, 2022) confirm the relationship between ON and physical appearance dissatisfaction. In the study conducted by Varga et al. (Varga et al., 2014), it was found that ON further exacerbates body image disorders. It is commonly stated that individuals with eating disorders develop a negative perception of their body image in their cognitive structures (Jiotsa et al., 2021). These results clearly reveal the impact of individuals' physical appearance/body image on their eating behavior.

In the study, it was determined that the increase in young individuals' obsession with healthy eating also statistically increased their social media addiction. Studies have shown that social media use is associated with eating disorders (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Jiotsa et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2013). One of the main reasons for this situation is the "healthy life" content that comes to the fore on social media platforms. These contents aim to change individuals' nutrition and eating habits. Advice given on eating habits is often not based on scientific evidence. In addition, these recommendations cause individuals to experience psychological problems in their eating behaviors. In some cases, it causes eating disorders such as ON (Turner & Lefevre, 2017). As it is known, eating disorders are more common in women in the younger age group (Arusoğlu, 2006). For this reason, studies addressing the relationship between social media use, eating disorders and body image are often conducted with female samples (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). In a study conducted with a sample of young women, it was found that Facebook use increased women's overeating (bulimia) symptoms (Smith et al., 2013). A study conducted on young women and young men also confirmed that social media use is largely associated with orthorexic eating tendencies (Scheiber et al., 2023). In the study conducted by Turner and Lefevre, it was determined that Instagram use among young individuals increases the risk of ON (Turner & Lefevre, 2017). These results reveal that social media is associated with eating disorders such as ON. Also, questions about how social media affects eating disorders direct researchers to body image variables. In the research conducted by Scheiber (Scheiber et al., 2023), it has been proven that following health and fitness-related accounts on social media tools is an important risk factor for ON. This shows that social media affects the eating behaviors of young individuals through their desire to have an "ideal," "thin," or "muscular" body.

In this study, it was determined that the increase in social media addiction of young individuals increased their social physique anxiety. Studies also confirm that social media use in young individuals is associated with dissatisfaction with physical appearance/body image (Gann, 2019; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Jiotsa et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2013; Thompson & Loughheed, 2012). A study conducted by Brown and Tiggemann found that Instagram use increased young women's concerns about their physical appearance (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). Again, in the study

conducted by Tiggeman et al., it was determined that there was a relationship between Facebook use of teenage girls and their concerns about body image (Tiggemann et al., 2013). Similarly, in the research conducted by Fardouly, it was found that Instagram use negatively affected young women's perceptions of their physical appearance and increased their anxiety (Fardouly et al., 2018). In Thompson and Loogman's study and Smith et al.'s study, it was found that Facebook use increased young women's dissatisfaction with their physical appearance (Smith et al., 2013; Thompson & Loughheed, 2012). One of the main reasons for body dissatisfaction is that people compare themselves with the images shared by the people they follow (Fardouly et al., 2018). According to these results, social media tools affect the dissatisfaction of young individuals, especially young women, with their physical appearance. However, more and longitudinal type studies are needed to reveal the underlying causes of physical appearance discomfort in young individuals.

In this study, the effect of individuals' healthy eating obsessions on their anxiety about their physical appearance was tried to be determined with the Social Physique Anxiety Scale. Similarly, the tendency of individuals who are obsessed with healthy eating to use social media tools, which they refer to as the easiest and fastest accessible source in search of information about healthy nutrition and healthy foods, has been taken into account. In this context, the effect of individuals' healthy eating obsessions on social media addictions was evaluated. Finally, it has been taken into account that young individuals who are uncomfortable with their physical appearance also isolate themselves from social environments and use social media tools intensively. In this context, the effect of social media addictions on their anxiety about their physical appearance was evaluated.

As a result of the study, it was determined that there are significant relationships between healthy eating obsession, social physique anxiety, and social media addiction. In the study, it was determined that as the healthy eating obsession of the participants increased, their social physique anxieties and social media addictions increased. In addition, it was revealed that as the social media addiction of the participants increased, their social physique anxiety increased. In line with these results, it has been seen that it is important to support and encourage, especially young individuals on healthy nutrition. However, it is thought that young individuals should develop their interest in healthy nutrition in an effective and controlled manner without reaching the level of obsession. In addition, it is thought that it is very important to improve the concerns of young individuals about their physical appearance and to encourage them to use social media rationally. For this reason, it is recommended to organize training programs on topics such as healthy nutrition, conscious use of social media, and body affirmation, primarily for young individuals. It is thought that these trainings will be beneficial for young individuals in terms of healthy nutrition, developing healthy body perceptions, and reducing their physical appearance concerns, and social media addictions. In addition, to reduce the anxiety of young individuals about their physical appearance, it is recommended to organize social activities based on healthy body perception instead of the concept of ideal body size. In addition, it is recommended to develop policies that prevent unhealthy behaviors and support healthy behaviors of young individuals for the future, and to provide services to increase their awareness.

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Finally, it is clear that the prevalence of eating disorders such as ON, social media addiction, and body image disturbances is rapidly increasing among young individuals. This situation is met with concern by many parties. Given the multifaceted impact of these concerns, it is felt that health professionals, policymakers, and educators should address these issues collaboratively.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. First of all, the study cannot be generalized to the whole of Türkiye, since the study was conducted only on individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 living in a province of Türkiye. In addition, since the study was based on the participants who voluntarily participated in the survey, it was accepted that the participants evaluated the questions about the scales subjectively. In addition to all these, since eating disorders are more common in younger women in studies conducted so far, the study sample mainly consists of women in the younger age group

Ethics Committee Approval: This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Süleyman Demirel University (approval no: 131/8 date: January 4, 2023).

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from the participants who agreed to take part in the study.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

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