

Social Media and Parental Mental Health

Sosyal Medya ve Ebeveyn Ruh Sağlığı

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ABSTRACT

This review study aims to examine the multifaceted effects of social media use on parental mental health. Recently, social media platforms have become a significant resource for parents, providing not only access to information on child-rearing and expert advice for families but also a source of social support. Through these platforms, parents can quickly and easily access the information they need and share their experiences with others who are going through similar processes. However, the filtered and idealized portrayals of parenting that are frequently shared on social media often lead parents to compare themselves with others and feel pressured to behave similarly, which can result in or exacerbate negative outcomes such as feelings of inadequacy, guilt, stress, anxiety, and depression. In particular, parenting influencers who present their experiences as flawless may create additional pressure on new parents. Furthermore, the potentially addictive nature of social media can have negative consequences for parents. Social comparison theory forms the theoretical basis of this study and provides a framework for understanding how parents' exposure to social media content influences their psychological well-being. Using a literature review method, studies published after 2014 were examined, revealing that the positive and negative effects of social media on parents vary according to usage purpose, type of content, personality traits, and level of exposure. Excessive and unregulated use can lead to addiction, burnout, social isolation, and weakened family communication. In contrast, mindful and selective use can foster social support, a sense of belonging, improved parenting skills, and reduced postpartum loneliness. Parents are therefore encouraged to manage their screen time effectively, stay aware of potential negative effects, and take steps to increase their privacy awareness.

Keywords: Social media, parenting, mental health, psychological well-being

ÖZ

Bu derleme çalışması, sosyal medya kullanımının ebeveyn ruh sağlığı üzerindeki etkilerini farklı yönleriyle incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Son yıllarda sosyal medya platformları, ebeveynler için çocuk yetişirme konularında bilgiye ve ailelerle çalışan uzmanlara erişimin yanında, sosyal destek de sağlayan, önemli bir kaynak haline gelmiştir. Anne babalar, sosyal medya aracılığıyla aradıkları bilgilere kolay ve hızlı bir şekilde ulaşmakta ve kendileriyle benzer süreçlerden geçen diğer ebeveynlerle deneyimlerini paylaşmaktadır. Ancak sosyal medyada sıkılıkla paylaşılanfiltrelenmiş ve idealize edilmiş ebeveynlik temsilleri, ebeveynlerin kendilerini diğerleriyle karşılaştırmalarına ve benzer davranışa konusunda baskı hissetmelerine yol açarak yetersizlik, suçluluk, stres, kaygı ve depresyon gibi olumsuz durumlara neden olabilmekte veya bunları artırabilmektedir. Özellikle içerik üreticisi ebeveynlerin, deneyimlerini kusursuzmuş gibi paylaşmaları, yeni ebeveynler üzerinde baskı yaratabilmektedir. Ayrıca sosyal medyanın bağımlılık yapıcı özelliği de ebeveynler için olumsuz sonuçlar doğurmaktadır. Sosyal karşılaştırmaya kuramı bu çalışmanın kuramsal temelini oluşturmuş ve ebeveynlerin sosyal medyada maruz kaldıkları içeriklerin psikolojik iyi oluşlarını nasıl etkilediğini anlamak için bir zemin hazırlamıştır. Literatür taraması yöntemiyle gerçekleştirilen bu araştırmada, veri tabanlarında 2014 sonrası yayınlanmış çalışmalar incelemiştir ve sosyal medyanın ebeveynler üzerindeki olumlu ve olumsuz etkilerinin kullanım amacı, içerik türü, ebeveynin kişilik özelliklerini ve maruz kalma düzeyine göre değiştiği görülmüştür. Sosyal medya, aşırı ve bilinçsiz kullanıldığından bağımlılık, tükenmişlik, sosyal izolasyon ve aile içi iletişimde zayıflama gibi sonuçlara yol açarken, bilinçli ve seçici kullanıldığından sosyal destek, aidiyet hissi, ebeveynlik becerilerinde gelişim ve doğum sonrası yalnızlığın azalması gibi olumlu katkılar sunabilmektedir. Bu nedenle ebeveynlerin sosyal medya kullanım süresini iyi yönetmeleri, olumsuz etkilerin farkında olmaları ve mahremiyet bilincini artırma yönünde adımlar atmaları önerilmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Sosyal medya, ebeveynlik, ruh sağlığı, psikolojik iyi oluş

Introduction

Social media platforms are online tools and websites that allow internet users to communicate with each other interactively, where users share content, chat, express their knowledge and ideas, and where interaction between individuals is at the forefront (Özdemir et al. 2014). In recent years, the rapid technological developments experienced worldwide have led social media to gain an important place in our lives. The proportion of individuals using these platforms was 62.3% worldwide and 67.4% in Türkiye in 2024 (Kemp 2024). It can be considered inevitable that such widespread use affects people's lives. Although social media has benefits such as strengthening individuals' social connections and facilitating access to information (Tayiz et al. 2025), for some individuals, social media use can be problematic. Considering that people tend to share the "best" versions of themselves on social media, other users who view these posts make social comparisons, which negatively affect their psychological well-being and increase anxiety and depression (Coyne et al. 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand the effects of social media, which is deeply embedded in daily life, on individuals' mental health.

Parents constitute a large user group on social media, and they are also an important target audience. Parallel to the increase in parents using social media, the number of users producing content for these parents has also grown over the years (Beuckels and Wolf 2024). Through these platforms, parents can access information on child-rearing and obtain social support (Frey et al. 2021).

However, parents are in fact constantly watching a filtered reality on social media, because social media users tend to highlight the positive aspects of their lives and present themselves as more popular and multifaceted (Vogel and Rose 2016). In addition, social media users tend to believe that other users have better lives than they do (Vogel et al. 2014). As a result, when content creators, especially those who emphasize their parental identity, downplay the negative experiences of raising children and present an unrealistic ideal, this ideal can create pressure on parents. It can be predicted that this situation may lead parents to feel inadequate, increase their anxiety levels, and negatively affect their mental health. Conversely, when parent content creators share about the difficulties of parenting, parents feel supported (Egmose et al. 2022). In this sense, how parents use social media and whom they follow can shape their personal experiences and how they are affected by this usage.

Young parents and those with younger children use social media more to alleviate their parenting-related concerns (Fierloos et al. 2022) and to obtain information about child-rearing (Glatz et al. 2023). Most Instagram users are in the 18-34 age group, which overlaps with the age group of new parents (Egmose et al. 2022). Given that the period following the birth of a child is quite stressful for new parents (Lau et al. 2021), it can be considered that the negative effects mentioned may be particularly observed in new parents and those with younger children.

Parents' mental health is of great importance both individually and in terms of family relationships, because the health, well-being, and functionality of a family are influenced by all members (Gladding 2011). Considering the prevalence of social media and the abundance of parenting-related content on these platforms, examining and understanding the effects of parents' social media use on their psychological well-being becomes even more important.

Based on this idea, this study aimed to examine the effects of parents' social media use on their mental health. In the study, the effects of social media were first examined in terms of individual mental health and psychological well-being, and then in relation to parents' mental health. Social comparison theory served as the theoretical basis of the study. For this purpose, a literature review method was used, and between September and December 2024, academic search engines such as Google Scholar and DergiPark were scanned for studies in Turkish and English. In the search conducted using the keywords "social media, parenting, sosyal medya, ebeveynlik," 120 studies were reached. Then, the 10 most relevant articles were selected, and their references were examined, through which 32 additional studies were identified. After excluding studies that were not sufficiently related to the topic, conducted before 2014, not social media-focused, or whose full texts were not accessible, the remaining 51 studies were analyzed in terms of the effects of social media on individual psychological well-being and parental mental health.

Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory provides the theoretical foundation for this study. This is because, with the increasing use of social media, individuals are now aware not only of the lives of people in their immediate surroundings but also of the lives of people from all over the world, across all socioeconomic levels. It is anticipated that the visibility of people leading different lives may influence social media users through social comparison. Indeed, studies have shown that the comparisons made by social media users negatively affect their self-esteem and psychological well-being (Büyükmumcu and Ceyhan 2020). For this reason, this theory has been included in this study.

Introduced in 1954 by social psychologist Leon Festinger, this theory fundamentally discusses that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their opinions, perceptions, attitudes, emotions, thoughts, abilities, and desires with those of others. According to the theory, the drive for self-evaluation exists in all individuals, and they require a standard to do so. In cases where this standard is not objectively available, individuals compare themselves with others to achieve the standard (Hogg and Vaughan 2014).

As the theory developed over the years, the concepts of upward and downward comparison emerged. Upward comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves with others whom they perceive as superior in various aspects. The purpose here is for individuals to feel like part of a group they consider more elite and to emphasize their similarities with that group (Suls et al. 2002). In downward comparison, on the other hand, individuals make comparisons to feel better about themselves during times when they feel happier, as a defensive mechanism. When individuals compare themselves with those facing greater problems or more negative conditions, they engage in downward comparison (Suls et al. 2002). After downward comparison, individuals' evaluations of themselves improve, whereas the opposite occurs after upward comparison (Gerber et al. 2018).

Social comparison theory provides a robust ground for explaining the effects of social media use on parents. The sharing of idealized parenting experiences by parent content creators or celebrity mothers on social media leads other parents to compare their own lives with this content. For instance, posts about "perfect" childcare routines, healthy eating plans, or posts of mothers who quickly regain their pre-pregnancy figures can trigger upward comparisons, fostering feelings of inadequacy and anxiety in parents (Chae 2015, Coyne et al. 2017). Conversely, when some parents encounter accounts that express similar challenges, they engage in downward comparison, which makes them feel less alone and thereby increases their motivation and sense of belonging (Amaro et al. 2019). Thus, the theory offers an important framework for understanding how parents' mental health is shaped by the parenting content they encounter on social media.

Relationship between Social Media and Individual Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being is a broad concept that encompasses the emotional aspects of daily life (Warr 1978). Ryff (1989) defined six sub-dimensions of psychological well-being as follows: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. In other words, psychological well-being relates to a person feeling good about themselves and their life, having satisfying relationships and a sense of purpose, and possessing the ability to cope with life's challenges, and it is an important factor in individuals' overall health and happiness (Dhanabhakyan and Sarath 2023). This section has been included to understand better the effects of social media on individuals' psychological well-being.

Negative Effects of Social Media

According to sources, individuals present themselves in the best possible way on social media (Vogel and Rose 2016), which can encourage them to make social comparisons while using social media and create a feeling of being worse off and inadequate (Vogel et al. 2014, Vannucci et al. 2017, de Vries et al. 2018). This

situation can lead to negative feelings about oneself in individuals with low self-esteem (Cramer et al. 2016, Mackson et al. 2019), those who frequently compare themselves to others (Lee 2014), individuals sensitive about body image (Fox and Vendemia 2016), and those prone to social comparison (Vogel et al. 2015). Studies also mention that social media use can trigger feelings of jealousy, which in turn reduces subjective well-being (Tosun 2019, Marttila et al. 2021).

The duration of social media use can also affect psychological well-being. Especially in young adults, as social media usage time increases, their psychological well-being may decrease (Nesi and Prinstein 2015, Güler et al. 2022, Hanbay and Yıldırım 2023). As this time increases, sleep, leisure activities, and study periods decrease, which may negatively affect the physical health of individuals who spend too much time on social media (Cizmeci 2015), and this, in turn, can affect their mental health negatively. Additionally, despite individuals perceiving the time they spend on social media platforms as meaningless, useless, or a waste of time, their continued prolonged use may harm their mood (Sagioglou and Greitemeyer 2014).

Moreover, social media can cause anxiety and depression due to reasons such as receiving too few likes or negative feedback (Mackson et al. 2019), expecting interaction with oneself (Lee 2014), comparing one's own features with others' physical attributes (Fardouly et al. 2015), distortion of reality perception (Öngen 2017), not being popular (Nesi and Prinstein 2015), frequent exposure to cyberbullying and negative situations (Vannucci et al. 2017), and feeling inadequate (Cizmeci 2015).

An increase in the time spent on social media may reduce individuals' face-to-face interactions, leading to social isolation, which can trigger feelings of loneliness (Marttila et al. 2021). Exposure to others' social media use while in a social setting can also increase feelings of isolation, loneliness, and worthlessness (McDaniel and Coyne 2016). The fact that interactions on social media are not as meaningful as real-life ones and are superficial can also lead to feelings of loneliness (Cizmeci 2015).

Another negative effect of social media is related to body image. Especially on platforms where photo sharing is prominent, individuals are exposed to unrealistic standards, which can lead to negative thoughts about their own bodies (Mackson et al. 2019). Physical comparisons can create pressure on individuals to present themselves in an ideal way (Fox and Vendemia 2016), and because of these comparisons, their mental health can be negatively affected (Nesi and Prinstein 2015).

Positive Effects of Social Media

According to the literature, social media use also has positive effects on individuals' psychological well-being. Through social media, individuals can stay connected with family and friends, meet new people, join groups, and consequently increase their sense of belonging; they can also receive social and emotional support (Vogel and Rose 2016, Mackson et al. 2019, Tosun 2019, Güler et al. 2022). Additionally, receiving likes and being accepted can enhance self-confidence (Vogel and Rose 2016, Mackson et al. 2019). Seeing others' positive posts can increase positive emotions (de Vries et al. 2018). Finally, individuals who engage in social comparison may be motivated and inspired by seeing people on social media whom they perceive to be in a better position than themselves (Vogel et al. 2015, Büyükmumcu and Ceyhan 2020).

Social Media and Parental Mental Health

It is important to understand how the individual effects discussed in the previous section specifically occur for parents. Parents can be influenced by the content they encounter on social media while trying to maintain their well-being and fulfill their role-related responsibilities. In this section, the effects of social media use on parents' mental health are examined under different headings, considering both negative and positive aspects, as well as the influence of social comparisons.

Shared Content and Its Negative Effects

When examining the posts of users who are parents or who share content directed at parents on various social media platforms, it is observed that these posts are particularly centered around information on health, education, and child-rearing (Dennen et al. 2021). However, some social media accounts that share

parenting-related content may post content suggesting that motherhood is a perfect and trouble-free experience, concealing negative aspects and creating unrealistic expectations among their followers (Germic et al. 2021).

For this reason, social media can also cause mothers to feel pressure to prove themselves and be perfect (Scheibling 2020). Seeing child-rearing information shared by professional accounts or examples of other parents' "trouble-free" interactions with their children on these platforms may also lead mothers to feel inadequate and pressured to improve themselves, even generating feelings of guilt (Chae 2015, Egmore et al. 2022). Exposure to excessive information about child-rearing can also contribute to stress (Radesky et al. 2016). The abundance of information, the presence of misinformation, and the difficulty in distinguishing reliable sources can cause confusion and insecurity regarding their own parenting skills (Germic et al. 2021).

The effort parents make to present themselves as competent and create a positive image on social media can lead them to suppress their genuine emotions and feel compelled to perform (Lim and Wang 2024). Parents who post about their children on social media to gain approval and support may also feel pressure to conform to the ideal parenting, which can further increase anxiety and feelings of inadequacy (Çoban and Doğan 2022).

Parents may also fear being judged on social media. According to a study by Lehto and Paasonen (2020), discussions on social media regarding different parenting approaches can increase competition and judgment among mothers, and mothers who constantly feel the need to defend themselves may experience stress and mental fatigue as a result. At the same time, social media can undermine mothers' self-confidence and generate concern and fear about their own parenting by exposing them to judgment, criticism, and unwanted advice on topics such as their children's behaviors and parenting methods. Additionally, mothers' constant and harsh criticism, and even shaming, of each other on issues such as breastfeeding, sleep patterns, and discipline, empowered by anonymity, can cause negative emotions as well as feelings of competition and hostility among mothers (Abetz and Moore 2018).

Social Comparison

Social media can lead mothers to compare themselves with other mothers, especially with content creators or celebrity mothers who present an unrealistic, idealized life, resulting in increased feelings of inadequacy, lowered self-confidence, and increased stress (Haslam et al. 2017, Damkjaer 2018, Egmore et al. 2022, Beuckels and De Wolf 2024). For example, mothers who engage in social comparison may believe they are not good enough mothers, thinking that the parents they see on social media do everything better than they do. The increased stress in this regard can also lead to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (Scheibling 2020, Lim and Wang 2024). Seeing career-oriented and successful mothers can amplify this effect in working mothers (Chae 2015).

As mothers compare themselves with these career-oriented mothers, they may feel constantly compelled to use the best products, prepare nutrition plans, exercise regularly, pay attention to their appearance, maintain the household, and always feel happy and energetic, which can lead to anxiety and depression (McDaniel and Radesky 2018, Ergül and Yıldız 2021, Özkan and Özer 2022). Especially content creator mothers who share their "fit" bodies, workouts, and diets on social media shortly after giving birth can create pressure on new mothers (Chee et al. 2024). Seeing these examples can lead them to belittle themselves and think that others are flawless and that they must be the same. When they follow mothers on social media who are very organized and always engage in different activities with their children, they may believe that they are not good mothers and that they cannot be like them.

Anxiety and Depression

Social comparisons can increase feelings of inadequacy and depression in mothers, as they lead mothers to be more self-critical regarding their parental roles, perceive lower competence in themselves as parents, and feel less supported (Coyne et al. 2017). Feelings of inadequacy may be particularly pronounced

in mothers who excessively share images of their children (Aydoğdu et al. 2023). In addition to feelings of inadequacy, social comparisons can also increase negative emotions such as stress, guilt, jealousy, and frustration in parents (Chee et al. 2024).

Sidani et al. (2020) reported in their study that parents who engage in more social comparisons on social media show increased depressive symptoms. This finding remained valid even when variables such as time spent on social media, the number of platforms used, and sociodemographic characteristics were controlled, although the direction of this relationship was not determined. In other words, making parenting comparisons on social media may lead to depressive symptoms, or mothers with depressive symptoms may be more inclined to make comparisons on social media. According to Coyne et al. (2017), social media use can increase depression in mothers.

Parents who are already experiencing depression may feel worse when they see positive posts from others on social media; this can lead to jealousy, lower self-esteem, and more intense depressive symptoms (Sidani et al. 2020). The same study indicates that passive use of social media—simply viewing content without posting or commenting—is associated with depression, and when parents see the positive aspects of others' lives, they are more likely to evaluate their own parenting negatively.

Mothers with a high tendency for social comparison and low self-esteem may experience increased anxiety due to social media use; these individuals can experience higher anxiety when interacting with content creator mothers (Moujaes and Verrier 2021). Additionally, mothers who devote themselves to child-rearing tend to engage in more competition with other mothers on social media, constantly evaluating themselves and their parenting in comparison to others (Amaro et al. 2019). Parents may also feel concern and anxiety by comparing not only themselves but also their children's development to other children they see on social media; following experts who share information about typical developmental periods can further increase this anxiety (Egmose et al. 2022).

Content Related to Fathers

In their study on fathers' social media use, Ammari and Schoenebeck (2015) observed that fathers are worried about being judged by other parents and refrain from expressing themselves when sharing posts. Parents may also experience anxiety when sharing content about their children. Being concerned that these posts might cause the "evil eye" can increase stress (Aydoğdu et al. 2023). Fathers also experience anxiety about issues such as misuse of photos, digital footprint, and privacy violations when they share their children on social media, and their mood may be negatively affected (Çitil Akyol and Sumbas 2023).

The limited number of studies focusing on fathers addresses the positive and negative effects of fathers' visibility on social media. Social media users who challenge traditional male and father roles can, by presenting an emotional father figure, help other fathers feel more comfortable in their parenting roles and express their emotional needs more clearly, thus contributing to their mental health (Scheibling 2020). According to a study by Çitil Akyol and Sumbas (2023), when fathers use social media as a tool for collecting and sharing memories about their children, their bonds with their children may strengthen. This, and sharing positive moments, may contribute positively to their mental health. However, the insufficient visibility of fathers' experiences on social media may create a sense of worthlessness in fathers.

In their study on fathers' social media use, Ammari and Schoenebeck (2015) state that fathers, like mothers, use social media to share experiences and seek support. According to this study, fathers can share their problems related to parenting or family in a safe environment, thereby reducing their feelings of loneliness. They can meet their needs by receiving support and connecting with fathers in similar situations. However, according to the same study, fathers believe there are insufficient resources and content for them, and for this reason, they feel inadequately represented.

Social Media and Addiction

Another issue where social media negatively affects parental mental health is behavioral addiction. Excessive social media use can cause parents to become disconnected from real life and isolated, and as

a result, their mood may be negatively affected (Haslam et al. 2017). Parents may expect to receive positive reactions and confirmation that they are good parents by sharing content about their children; this expectation can make them dependent (Aydoğdu et al. 2023). Mothers may spend excessive time on social media due to both their need for approval and their desire to receive social support, which can lead to them becoming isolated by damaging their real-life relationships (Özkan and Özer 2022) and can cause them to experience fear of missing out when they are away from social media (Ergül and Yıldız 2021). Attachment and addiction to social media can lead to burnout and mental fatigue in parents (Lim and Wang 2024) and cause anxiety (Radesky et al. 2016, Lippold et al. 2022).

Positive Effects

Social media use also has positive effects on parents. Connecting with other parents on these platforms, joining a community, sharing similar experiences, and receiving advice can increase the emotional and social support available to parents (Lehto and Paasonen 2021). This can particularly help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation during the postpartum period (Chee et al. 2024, Beauckels and De Wolf 2024). The same applies when new parents share posts on their own accounts directed at family and friends, strengthening social bonds between parents (Damkjaer 2018).

In addition, when parents can speak openly about their experiences on social media, they can inform and encourage one another (Haslam et al. 2017, Ergül and Yıldız 2021). Accounts that share realistic posts about parenting, openly sharing mistakes, ups and downs, can increase positive emotions and benefit parents' mental well-being by normalizing their experiences (Germic et al. 2021, Chee et al. 2024). In particular, when content creator mothers share the difficulties they face, it can help followers feel less alone and allow comparison to lead to positive feelings (Egmose et al. 2022).

Social media can help parents improve their parenting skills by providing easier access to information on child-rearing and parenting, practical tips, coping strategies, and experts (Lehto and Paasonen 2021, Çoban and Doğan 2022, Egmose et al. 2022). Fathers also use social media as a tool to find positive role models and enhance their parenting skills (Ammari and Schoenebeck 2015). New parents who are adapting to their roles can improve their identities by observing others' experiences on social media (Damkjaer 2018).

Social comparisons can inspire parents and enable them to evaluate themselves, thereby increasing their motivation to become better parents (Rheu et al. 2023). Through social comparison, mothers may feel a sense of belonging to communities, which can reduce anxiety and frustration; as negative emotions decrease, their satisfaction with parenting increases, and they may feel more confident in their parenting (Amaro et al. 2019).

Social media use enables parents to learn about the difficulties and experiences of other parents and can help them develop positive emotions such as empathy and compassion; this can also help parents be more understanding and forgiving toward themselves and their children (Radesky et al. 2016, Lippold et al. 2022). At the same time, social media can serve as a means of escape and relaxation during stressful and tedious moments of parenting and a tool for emotion regulation (Radesky et al. 2016). Parents can use social media for entertainment, relaxation, communication with friends, or following news to distance themselves from daily stress (McDaniel and Radesky 2018). When experiencing stressful or challenging situations, social media communities can function as a coping mechanism (Amaro et al. 2019, Lippold et al. 2022).

Being a Conscious Social Media User and Content Creator

As seen, social media can negatively affect individuals' psychological well-being through social comparisons, leading to outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and negative body image. Beyond this, parents may experience negative emotions related to their parenting, families, and children, and situations such as feelings of inadequacy, performative parenting, or addiction may develop. Therefore, learning to use social media consciously is important for all individuals.

Suggestions for Conscious Social Media Use for Parents

Despite its negative effects, social media can also be beneficial for parents. Parents use social media as a source of information and support on various topics related to child-rearing (Kahraman and Özbaşaran 2024). When doing this, however, they may struggle to verify the information they obtain from social media (Frey et al. 2022). Parents should be cautious of the misinformation on these platforms and make a point of selecting suggestions that are appropriate for themselves, their children, and their families.

Parents should recognize that social media presents an idealized and uniform model of parenting (Ergül and Yıldız 2021). They should also be aware that content creators' accounts are often professionally managed and may not always be authentic (Beuckels and De Wolf 2024). Being aware of the pressure for perfection in such content is important for protecting oneself from comparisons. Parents should have realistic expectations about parenting, understanding that the flawless lives and perfect parents they see are not real. To mitigate the negative effects of social media, viewed content can be curated, and social media can be utilized to follow beneficial content, seek support, or build connections.

Another point parents should consider regarding their social media use is the distracting features of these platforms. Unawareness of the time spent on social media can reduce the time parents spend with their children and negatively impact the quality of family interactions (Akram and Farzand 2022). Particularly during periods when young children require more parental attention, excessive and uncontrolled social media use can hinder parents' ability to respond sensitively and mindfully (Kahraman and Özbaşaran 2024). Therefore, it is important for parents to set time limits on social media use, restrict device use during interactions with their children, and develop conscious usage habits to avoid distractions.

The limited availability of content targeted at fathers is noteworthy, and this may be influenced by traditional roles (Çitil Akyol and Sumbas 2023). Fathers sharing realistic and authentic content about their roles, being active on social media, and showing themselves can encourage other fathers to take on more responsibility in childcare.

Protecting children's privacy is of great importance when parents use social media. Simple measures such as masking faces, concealing location information, adjusting privacy settings, and obtaining children's consent before sharing can help protect their privacy (Çoban and Doğan 2022). Such measures protect children's rights while enabling parents to become more conscious and responsible social media users.

Suggestions for Experts That Are Content Creators

It is crucial for experts working with parents or producing content for them to be aware of the negative effects that social media can create on parents, such as addiction, stress, and anxiety. Since parents use social media to seek information, experts should guide them toward reliable and scientific sources regarding child development and care, and their own content should always include accurate, up-to-date, and evidence-based information (Fierloos et al. 2022, Kahraman and Özbaşaran 2024). Presenting information in an overly academic manner may cause confusion among parents, so experts should provide concrete examples and use clear, understandable language.

When sharing personal opinions and experiences, experts should clarify that these may not apply to every parent. Especially professionals in the health field should refrain from giving direct advice on diagnosis or treatment and should direct parents to relevant specialists when necessary. In content related to children, privacy and safety should be prioritized, and care should be taken to avoid sharing information that could reveal children's identities.

Furthermore, experts should avoid triggering feelings of inadequacy in parents and instead adopt a supportive and reassuring approach. Professional profiles can reduce anxiety by providing accurate information and practical suggestions, and emphasizing "good enough parenting" can boost parents' self-confidence (Egmose et al. 2022). Experts should prepare their content with social comparisons in mind, ensuring it helps parents feel supported.

Another important responsibility is facilitating parents' access to accurate information. Since misleading or promotional content can spread rapidly on social media, experts play a critical role in directing parents to reliable sources. Providing lists of trustworthy websites, creating educational content to enhance media literacy, and guiding parents to evaluate the accuracy of information they encounter can be beneficial (Fierloos et al. 2022).

Ethical responsibilities must not be overlooked in the professional use of social media. Transparency in product and service promotions, openly indicating advertisements, and avoiding pressure on followers to make purchases are among these responsibilities. Additionally, experts should raise awareness among their followers about unrealistic parenting expectations created on social media and contribute to the formation of supportive communities.

Suggestions for Content Creator Parents

Parent content creators must also act responsibly regarding the accuracy and reliability of their posts. Sharing unscientific information, particularly on critical topics such as health and child development, should be avoided, and when sharing personal experiences, it should be emphasized that these may not apply to every family. Regarding children's privacy, sensitivity is essential. Sharing personal information such as names, schools, addresses, and faces, as well as content that could embarrass children, make them targets of ridicule, or cause harm in the future, should be avoided. Content creators should be aware of their influence on parenting roles and use this influence for societal benefit. Raising awareness about children's rights, healthy family relationships, and respect for diverse parenting styles is important. Rather than imposing a single correct path, an approach that embraces diversity should be adopted, and instead of trying to create an image of perfect parenting, authentic and realistic experiences should be shared. Such posts can reduce pressure on parents and contribute to the development of a supportive community environment (Egmose et al. 2022).

In commercial posts, transparency should be ensured, advertising content should be clearly indicated, and followers should be provided with objective information about different options rather than being directed toward a specific product. It is also of great importance that children are not used on social media for popularity or financial gain, both in terms of ethical responsibility and the protection of children's rights.

Conclusion

In this study, the effects of social media on both individual psychological well-being and parental mental health have been examined by drawing on existing literature. In conclusion, it can be stated that social media has significant effects on parents' psychological well-being. These effects can be both positive and negative, but the direction of this effect varies depending on the parents' manner of use, purpose of use, and individual characteristics (Sidani et al. 2020, Egmose et al. 2022). Therefore, understanding the impact of how social media is used on parental mental health is of great importance. Understanding the psychological effects of social media is also crucial for mental health professionals, teachers, social workers, and healthcare professionals working with parents and families.

Conducting scientific studies to better understand the effects of rapidly evolving technology on individuals and society is crucial, and such studies are needed. To deeply understand the effects of social media use on parental mental health, mixed-method studies combining qualitative interviews and quantitative data are needed. In Türkiye, studies on social media and parenting primarily focus on the concept of sharenting, emphasizing children's privacy, digital footprints, and the ethical dimensions of sharing (Çimke et al. 2018, Ergül and Yıldız 2021, Çoban and Doğan 2022). However, the impact of such posts on parents' mental health has not yet been sufficiently explored. Future studies examining the psychological effects of sharenting behavior on parents, such as social pressure, the need for validation, anxiety, and burnout, could contribute to addressing the existing gap in this field.

Parental roles on social media may vary across cultures. If the number of studies conducted in the Turkish context increases, how cultural differences shape this relationship can be investigated in greater detail.

Furthermore, the literature often focuses on mothers, and insufficient attention is given to fathers' social media experiences, mental health, and the social pressures they face (Çitil Akyol and Sumbas 2023). In future studies, more comprehensive samples that also represent fathers can be selected.

The effects of social media use on parental mental health are an important issue that needs to be addressed not only at the individual level but also at the societal level. This is because parents' mental health is a crucial factor in the well-being of the entire family (Newland 2015), and family well-being benefits society. In this regard, expanding educational programs that enhance digital media literacy for parents and evaluating the impact of social media on mental health services are important. Establishing ethical guidelines for content creators focusing on parenting and developing oversight mechanisms for content involving children can contribute to increasing societal awareness and to protecting the rights and safety of children shared by their parents.

There is also a need for intervention programs aimed at addressing issues such as social media-related stress, feelings of inadequacy, and burnout. Such psychoeducational programs can support parents in regulating their social media use, avoiding comparisons, and maintaining their psychological well-being. Future studies in this area are of great importance for both strengthening individual mental health and fostering a healthier parenting culture at the societal level.

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