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Development and Validation of Social Anxiety Scale for Social Media Users



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ABSTRACT

Although various scales have been developed with the aim of measuring students' social anxiety in a variety of settings, none of the studies has addressed the measurement of social anxiety in social media platforms. This study describes the process of developing and validating a multidimensional Social Anxiety Scale for Social Media Users (SAS-SMU) that can be used to assess college students' social anxiety arising from social media platforms. The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, data collected from 174 students were used to provide evidence for validity and reliability of the structure and its underlying dimensions. A four-dimensional structure emerged: shared content anxiety, privacy concern anxiety, interaction anxiety, and self-evaluation anxiety. In the second phase, data collected from 510 college students were used to confirm four-factor structure of the 21-item SAS-SMU. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the dimensions ranged from 0.80 to 0.92, demonstrating a satisfactory level of reliability. Further validation studies were also conducted and their findings provided. This validated scale will be a useful tool for both researchers and instructors to assess college students' social anxiety as social media users.

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1. Introduction

This study attempts to develop a particular measurement scale designed to measure certain affective characteristics of social media users as an anxiety in different social media platforms. Affective characteristics are concerned with the ways people that present their feelings and express their emotions (Anderson & Bourke, 2000). Scales for effective characteristics are designed to capture individuals' feelings, attitudes, or inner emotional states (McCoach, Gable, & Madura, 2013). Anxiety is one of the constructs that reflects affective characteristics and is widely recognized as an emotional response, mood, and specific anxiety disorder involving cognitive, physiological, and behavioral aspects (Steimer, 2002). It is a common disorder defined as "something felt" (Freud, 1924) and feelings of apprehension, worried thoughts, tension, nervousness, and physical changes such as increased blood pressure, sweating, trembling, and dizziness (Kazdin, 2000).

Social anxiety is a type of anxiety-related problem resulting from when people are fearful or anxious when interacting with or

being negatively evaluated and scrutinized by other people during social interactions in a social setting (Richards, n.d.). Hartman (1986) defined social anxiety as the "enduring experience of discomfort, negative ideation, and incompetent performance in the anticipation and conduct of interpersonal transaction" (p. 266). In a similar way, social anxiety is defined by Leary (1983b) as "a state of anxiety resulting from the prospect or presence of interpersonal evaluation in real or imagined social settings" (p. 67). In anticipated or real social situations, people may experience social anxiety due to emotional stress, discomfort, self-consciousness, apprehension, or fear (Leitenberg, 1990). They may deliberately avoid such situations, so as to not receive potential negative evaluations from others (Watson & Friend, 1969).

In the literature, social anxiety is seen as roughly equivalent to a social phobia known as Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) and therefore the two terms are often used interchangeably. Correspondingly, it is claimed that the same factors contribute to the emergence of both social anxiety and social phobia (Antony & Rowa, 2008). In their study, Weisman, Aderka, Marom, Hermesh, and Gilboa-Schechtman (2011) examined the interpersonal lives of individuals diagnosed with social anxiety disorder. The results of their study indicate that SAD was associated with low perceived intimacy and closeness in peer, friendship, and romantic relations.

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Moreover, they found that the person with social anxiety disorder tends to perceive themselves as having low social rank, being inferior, and behaving submissively. In another study, social anxiety is found to be significantly related to negative social feedback, interpersonal rumination, trait perfectionism, and perfectionistic self-presentation (Nepon, Flett, Hewitt, & Molnar, 2011).

The impact of social media on students has been recently recognized and has prompted researchers to investigate how the use of social media affects students in different ways (Alwagait, Shahzad, & Alim, 2015). Several studies have demonstrated an association between anxiety and different patterns of individuals' behaviors in a social media environment. Recently, a study conducted by Grieve, Indian, Witteveen, Tolan, and Marrington (2013) indicated that social connectedness arising out of Facebook usage was negatively correlated with anxiety. As a result of examining the associations between internet usage and internalizing problems, Selfhout, Branje, Delsing, ter Bogt, and Meeus (2009) found that use of the internet for purposes not related with communication, such as surfing, was associated with depression and social anxiety. There are also many studies in the literature indicating that sedentary computer use results in depressive and anxiety disorders (De Wit, Van Straten, Lamers, Cuijpers, & Penninx, 2011). However, findings from Shephard and Edelman's (2005) study are contradictory with De Wit et al. (2011), suggesting that individuals' behaviors of using the internet to cope with their social fears of being observed and evaluated by others is strengthened when they display symptoms of anxiety.

Besides, researchers have also been interested in privacy concerns arising in social media platforms, because it can play a substantial role in influencing social anxiety. Privacy concern includes certain potential privacy risks regarding personal information or distinguishing characteristics (e.g., unintentional disclosure of private comments or messages, personal information including birthday, home address, mobile phone numbers and personal photographs) disclosed through social networking sites (Lanier & Saini, 2008). In a study which examined how the cognitive, personality and social factors influence information disclosure behaviors of adolescents as Facebook users on social networking sites, Liu, Ang, and Lwin (2013) found that social anxiety is impacted by privacy concern. In addition, adolescents' privacy concerns mediate the effect of social anxiety on their personally identifiable information. Specifically, adolescents with high concerns for privacy may also be those who are socially anxious, and therefore more likely to avoid the sharing and revealing of personal information online.

Over the past several decades, many researchers have been concerned with developing scales for measuring anxiety in social situations. The scales that follow have been used in many studies, together with their adaptation to numerous other languages. Table 1 summarizes information related to those scales including dimensions, number of items, format of measurement, and rating types. In their seminal article, Watson and Friend (1969) reported the development and validation of two scales: Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) and Social Avoidance and Distress (SAD). FNE measures undergraduate students' fear of being negatively evaluated by others; whereas, SAD measures students' distress experiences in social situations and the extent to which they avoid situations that trigger anxiety. In addition, Liebowitz's (1987) Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) and Davidson, Potts, Richichi, and Ford's (1991) Brief Social Phobia Scale (BSPS) are two social anxiety-related scales featured in pharmacotherapy studies (Davidson et al., 1997). While LSAS was the first clinician-rating scale for assessing social phobia, assessed social anxiety, and the characteristic symptoms of social phobia, BSPS measures clients' avoidance and fear of social interaction and performance situations.

Moreover, Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE), which was formed based on the original FNE, was designed by Leary (1983a) in order to measure concerns of negative evaluation by others. Additionally, Mattick and Clarke (1998) developed two scales: the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) and the Social Phobia (Anxiety) Scale (SPS). SIAS concerns the assessment of general fear experienced in social interactions (e.g., initiating and maintaining conversations with others); whereas, SPS assesses the fear of being evaluated or judged by others. Furthermore, Glass, Merluzzi, Biever, and Larsen (1982) designed the Social Interaction Self-Statement Test (SISST) in order to measure self-statements about social interactions.

As indicated previously, a large number of scales have been developed and refined for the purpose of measuring social anxiety in a range of social situations. However, despite the growing number of people using social media platforms (Perrin, 2015), no study up until now has been concerned with developing a scale to assess social anxiety for social media users. Furthermore, most scales being designed to date limit their application to clinical studies, business, and marketing, and also have some methodological issues that must be considered such as generalizability.

Given the growing popularity and trends in social media studies (Kadirhan, Alkis, Sat, & Yildirim, 2016) and increasing intensive use of social media and other socially interactive technologies amongst college students, it is important to examine their social anxiety arising from the use of these social media platforms. This is pertinent because social anxiety is likely to influence types of social interaction and communication, privacy concerns, perceived fear of being self-evaluated or by others, and avoidance behaviors in social media. As a result, this study was conducted in order to address this issue by providing a developed and validated self-reporting scale that can be used to measure college students' social anxiety when using social media technologies.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The current study was conducted mainly in two main phases and data were collected from two independent sample groups of college students (first sample and second sample) in Ankara, Turkey. Convenience sampling method was adopted to recruit the participants. While the data collected from the first sample were used in the first phase to develop the initial scale and examine its underlying factor structure, the data collected from the second sample were used in the second phase to cross-validate the results of the first phase.

The first sample consisted of 174 college students recruited voluntarily from different programs (77 males, 97 females) between the ages of 17 and 42 years from the Middle East Technical University (METU). The mean age of the female and male participants were 23.30 and 23.36 years, respectively. The first sample consists of students from the department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology (CEIT) (32.80%), Elementary Education (6.90%), Civil Engineering (6.30%), and Mechanical Engineering (4.00%), and others. The second sample consisted of 510 college students recruited voluntarily from different programs (226 males, 284 females) between the ages of 17 and 50 years from a number of universities. The mean age of the female and male participants were 22.52 and 24.19 years, respectively. The second sample consists of students from the department of CEIT (47.10%), Foreign Language Education (17.80%), Elementary Science Education (4.90%), Educational Science (6.10%), and others. Data from both the first and second samples were collected in two formats: online and paper-based. The main reason to utilize two data collection formats

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