

Social Media Addiction and Career Decision-Making Difficulties among Adolescents: The Mediating Role of Ruminative Identity Exploration*

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This study explores the mediating role of ruminative identity exploration in the association between adolescent social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties. Four hundred eleven adolescents, 228 (55.5%) females and 183 (44.5%) males, participated in the study. The Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents, the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale, and the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Scale for High School Students were utilised to collect the study data. Data were analysed using structural equation modelling. Significance was examined by bootstrapping. The study analyses revealed that social media addiction positively predicted ruminative identity exploration and career decision-making difficulties. Also, ruminative identity exploration positively predicted career decision-making difficulties. Moreover, ruminative identity exploration mediated the relationship between social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties. This study's results suggest that adolescents' social media addiction increases decision-making difficulties via ruminative identity exploration. The results are discussed in light of the literature. Recommendations were made for practitioners and researchers.

Keywords: Social media addiction, ruminative identity exploration, career decision-making difficulties, adolescence

Highlights:

- Social media addiction positively predicts career decision-making difficulties.

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- Ruminative identity exploration positively predicts career decision-making difficulties.
- Social media addiction positively predicts ruminative identity exploration.
- Ruminative identity exploration mediates the relationship between social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties.

Introduction

Individuals undergo many developmental stages, including adolescence (Steinberg, 2016). One of the main developmental tasks of the adolescent years is forming the identity structure. Identity structure encompasses values, ideals, career goals, philosophy of life, and moral norms (Erikson, 1968). During adolescence, individuals explore intensely the options involving these identity structures (Marcia, 1980). In ego-identity formation, adolescents search for social roles, values, beliefs, life purposes, social groups, career roles, social environment, and personal characteristics and commit to the appropriate options (Erikson, 1968). This exploration process may result in adaptive or maladaptive outcomes (Berzonsky, 1989). At this stage, individuals may experience problems in social and educational areas and their careers (Marcia, 1980). Among these problem areas are career indecision (Nota et al., 2007), lack of career information (Julien, 1999), career motivation (Sönmez, 2018), and career decision-making self-efficacy (Xing & Rojewski, 2018). Indeed, these problem areas are related to adolescents' career decision-making difficulties (Gati et al., 1996). Additionally, adolescents experience career decision-making difficulties intensively in high schools (Bacanli, 2016). Hence, career decision-making difficulties in high school surface as important issues for adolescents (Gati & Saka, 2001) because individuals' career decision-making process in high school is significant in the education system (Bacanli, 2016; Mau, 2004). Furthermore, adolescents try to cope with career decision-making difficulties at this educational stage (Bacanli, 2016; Creed & Yin, 2006; Mau, 2004). Indeed, high school students in Turkey also struggle with career decision-making difficulties (Bacanli, 2016).

In Turkey, students attend four years of primary school, followed by four years of secondary school and another four years of high school. There are two types of high schools in the Turkish education system: vocational high schools and academic high schools (Ministry of Education, 2016). Vocational high schools offer basic knowledge and skills training for the profession chosen by adolescents. Academic high schools, on the other hand, prepare students for university education. In the latter, students in 10th grade choose one of the following tracks: Social Sciences, Turkish-Mathematics, Mathematics-Science, or Foreign Language (English, German, or French). Once they decide on their tracks, they must take the courses offered in this track in their remaining high school years. After completing their high school education, they are subjected to a university entrance exam based on their tracks. This standardized university placement test is developed centrally by a government agency called 'Measurement, Selection and Placement Centre (ÖSYM)' and is administered throughout Turkey (Ministry of Education, 2016). In the Turkish education system, individuals' career decisions in high school also determine the

education they will get in their university years. Thus, the career decision-making process in high school years is critical. This process may lead to adolescents experiencing career decision-making difficulties (Bacanlı et al., 2013). Previous studies demonstrate that high school students in Turkey experience career-related difficulties such as indecision about career choice, not being aware of their interests and abilities, and family and environmental pressures (Dursun & Kara, 2019; Duru, 2019; Traş & Gökçe, 2017).

Gati et al. (1996) systematically explained the theoretical framework of career decision-making difficulties by developing the taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making. According to the taxonomy, career-decision making difficulties involve three categories and their related sub-categories. These three categories are lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information. The category of lack of readiness includes lack of motivation, indecisiveness, and dysfunctional myths. In contrast, the category of lack of information includes career decision-making process, self, occupations, and ways of obtaining information. Finally, the category of inconsistent information includes unreliable information, internal conflicts, and external conflicts (Gati et al., 1996). The dimensions of this taxonomy suggest that career decision-making difficulties may be related to many factors. In the literature, career decision-making difficulties were negatively associated with career decision self-efficacy (Santos et al., 2018), occupational maturity (Duru, 2019), and psychological adaptability (Tian et al., 2014). In addition, career decision-making difficulties were positively related to intolerance of uncertainty (Arbona et al., 2021), self-criticism (Braunstein-Bercovitz, 2014), and social media addiction (Lehmann & Konstam, 2011).

As a result, career decision-making difficulties may be linked to social media addiction, a risk factor for impaired identity development in adolescents. Some studies determined a relationship between social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties (Lehmann & Konstam, 2011; Sinkkonen et al., 2018). Also, in the taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making, there are subcategories regarding the lack of information about self, internal conflicts, and indecisiveness. These subcategories align with the core features of ruminative identity research and suggest a potential connection between the two constructs. The present study examines the relationship between career decision-making difficulties and ruminative identity exploration.

Social Media Addiction and Career Decision-making Difficulties

With the sharp increase in technology in recent years, social media platforms have become accessible anytime via the internet and smart devices (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014). With this accessibility, individuals have constant access to social media (Hou et al., 2019). However, the uncontrolled use of social media has brought many problems, such as addiction to social media (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Social media addiction refers to individuals' excessive and uncontrolled use of social media and its negative reflection on academic, social, and emotional areas (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014; Ryan et al., 2014). Social media addiction is accepted as a form of behavioural addiction and internet addiction (Griffiths et al., 2014; Young, 1998).

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that problematic use of social media is becoming a pervasive issue among adolescents, with one in ten adolescents exhibiting signs of problematic use of social media (WHO, 2024). The 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) included behavioural addiction in the diagnostic category and defined its symptoms. These symptoms include loss of control, interference with daily activities and interests, continued use despite detrimental consequences, and adverse outcomes on work, education, social environment and family relationships (WHO, 2018). According to Andreassen (2015), the symptoms of social media addiction have six components, namely conflict, withdrawal, salience, mood modification, tolerance, and relapse. Conflict refers to social media causing problems in academics, work, and family life. Withdrawal is about being nervous and tense when not active on social media. Salience means thinking constantly and distinctly about social media. Mood modification refers to changes in individuals' moods due to social media. Tolerance is about the need to constantly increase the use of social media in order to enjoy and be satisfied. Finally, relapse means having problems reducing the use of social media and quitting it, and the continuation of this problem cyclically (Andreassen, 2015).

In order to explain social media addiction, Brand et al. (2016) suggested the Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution (I-PACE) model. In the model, the Person (P) component refers to the personal factors affecting individuals' social media addiction. These factors include genetic predispositions, psychopathological features, social cognition, personality, and personal motivation. Affect (A) and Cognition (C) involve affective and cognitive responses that affect individuals' social media addiction. These responses are displayed against internal and external stimuli. The components include coping, cognitive biases, cue-reactivity, craving, urge for mood regulation, and attentional biases. Finally, in the model, Execution (E) refers to the decrease in individuals' executive functions (inhibitory control, decision-making). All these stages cyclically cause individuals to develop social media addiction (Brand et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the I-PACE model underlines that social media addiction is not only an outcome but a reciprocal process involving dynamic interactions among personal, emotional, cognitive, and executive functions (Brand et al., 2019). According to this model, social media addiction has adverse impacts on cognitive functions, social relations, and mood, as well as detrimental consequences on decision-making processes (Brand et al., 2019). Previous studies reported that there is a negative relationship between social media addiction and positive decision-making strategies (Delaney et al., 2018; Wegmann, 2021). As the I-PACE model suggests, the negative impact of social media addiction on decision-making processes may also indicate its relationship with career decision-making difficulties. Studies are revealing a positive correlation between social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties (Sinkkonen et al., 2018; Yurdadon & Dinç, 2021). Accordingly, H_1 will be examined in light of the I-PACE (Brand et al., 2019) and previous studies.

H_1 = Social media addiction positively predicts career decision-making difficulties.

Ruminative Identity Exploration and Career Decision-making Difficulties

Based on Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development and Marcia's (1966) identity status model, the ruminative identity exploration is a five-dimensional model of identity formation introduced by Luyckx et al. (2008a). The model includes the dimensions of commitment-making, exploration in breadth, identification with commitment, exploration in depth, and ruminative identity exploration. *Commitment-making* refers to individuals' decision-making level about their ego identity (Luyckx et al., 2010). *Identification with commitment* refers to how strongly individuals feel that their chosen identity structures are adaptable and well-aligned with their sense of self. *Exploration in breadth* is about individuals' extensive exploration of the structures that will form their ego identity (Luyckx et al., 2008b). In contrast, *exploration in depth* concerns individuals' level of re-evaluation of the identity structures that they adopted. Finally, *ruminative identity exploration* refers to the process in which individuals explore the options that form their ego identity structures but are stuck and cannot make a decision. Furthermore, ruminative identity exploration is strongly associated with two identity statuses: moratorium (actively searching for identity without committing) and diffusion (lacking both identity exploration and commitment) (Luyckx et al., 2008a).

In ruminative identity exploration, the adolescent experiences internal conflict over which identity structures to adopt. Being stuck in identity exploration brings with it many problems, such as negative time perception, aggression and depression (Carter et al., 2013; Luyckx et al., 2010; Redmayne, 2017). One of these problem areas may be the career decision-making process. Namely, according to Marcia (1980), who developed the identity status model, being stuck in exploring identity structures makes it difficult for the individual to make career-related decisions. Additionally, the taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making includes subcategories such as lack of self-information, internal conflicts, and indecisiveness (Gati et al., 1996). These difficulties reflect key aspects of ruminative identity exploration involving prolonged uncertainty and recurrent questioning about one's values, goals and self-concept. Thus, these subcategories may indicate a conceptual and empirical connection between ruminative identity exploration and career decision-making difficulties. While no prior studies have directly explored the relationship between ruminative identity exploration and career decision-making difficulties, existing research suggests a potential positive relationship between these two variables. Accordingly, previous studies revealed a positive association between adolescents' moratorium and diffusion identity statuses and career decision-making difficulties (Bacanli, 2012). Accordingly, H_2 will be examined in light of the Marcia's (1966) identity status model and taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making (Gati et al., 1996) and previous studies.

H_2 = Ruminative identity exploration positively predicts career decision-making difficulties.

The Mediating Role of the Ruminative Identity Exploration

In this study, the relationship between social media addiction and ruminative identity exploration was also examined. According to Côté & Levine (2002),

individuals' involvement with addiction, one of the risky factors, prevents them from forming an adaptable ego identity. A study conducted by Schwartz et al. (2008) determined a positive relationship between substance addictions and identity confusion. Social media addiction has been a risk factor for adolescents in recent years (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). The aforementioned studies may indicate a positive association between social media addiction, a risk factor for adolescents, and ruminative identity exploration. Studies reveal a positive relationship between social media addiction and ruminative identity exploration (Monacis et al., 2017; Morsünbül, 2014). Furthermore, Kaya and Güneş (2023) reported that smartphone addiction predicted ruminative identity exploration. In addition, Marcia's (1966) identity status model suggests that addiction is a critical risk factor for adolescents to become stuck in identity confusion. H_3 will be examined in line with Marcia's (1966) identity status model and previous studies.

H_3 = Social media addiction positively predicts ruminative identity exploration.

In addition to all these relationships, according to Marcia's (1966) identity status model, addiction, one of the risk factors, increases the moratorium and diffusion of identity statuses and negatively affects the decision-making processes in these statuses. Drawing on this model, the current study suggests that social media addiction increases career decision-making difficulties by promoting ruminative identity exploration. Although Kaya and Güneş (2023) found that smartphone addiction predicted ruminative identity exploration, Morsünbül (2014) found that internet addiction predicted ruminative identity exploration. Marcia's (1966) identity status model suggests that addiction is a risk factor for identity confusion. Monacis et al. (2017) indicated that achievement identity status plays a protective role against social network addiction. Indeed, Marcia's (1966) identity status model emphasises that while addiction is a risk factor for identity confusion, achievement identity status plays a protective role against addiction. On the other hand, moratorium and diffusion identity statuses increase career decision difficulties (Traş & Gökce, 2017). Adolescents with high ruminative identity exploration are stuck in decision-making processes (Luyckx et al., 2008a). Thus, ruminative identity exploration may have an indirect effect on the relationship between adolescents' social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties. This study, H_4 will be examined based on Marcia's (1966) identity status model and previous studies.

H_4 = Ruminative identity exploration mediates the relationship between social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties.

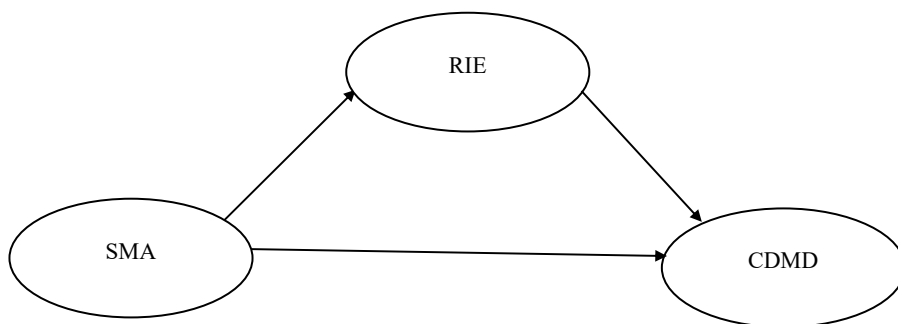
Current Study

Social media addiction negatively affects adolescents in many aspects (Andreassen, 2015; Griffiths, 2005). Previous studies explored the relationships between social media addiction and social (Lin et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2016),

affective (Fabris et al., 2020; Sriwilai & Charoensukmongkol, 2016), and academic (Al-Menayes, 2015; Malak et al., 2021) aspects. However, there are not enough studies on how social media addiction is associated with individuals' career decision-making process and ego-identity. Hence, this study will attempt to fill this gap in the literature. This study aims to examine the mediating role of ruminative identity exploration in the relationship between social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties. It is expected that the study will enhance understanding of the mechanism linking adolescents' social media addiction to their career decision-making difficulties. Moreover, by identifying this relationship during high school years, the findings may inform the development of prevention and intervention programmes addressing career decision-making difficulties and social media addiction in high schools. The hypothetical model of the study formed in this direction is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Hypothetical Model of the Study



Note. SMA; Social Media Addiction. RIE; Ruminative Identity Exploration. CDMD; Career Decision-Making Difficulties

Method

Participants

The prior sample size calculator for structural equation models (Soper, 2025) was used to determine the required sample size. A power analysis was conducted using an expected effect size of .20, a statistical power level of .90 and a significance level of .05. Based on a model consisting of three latent and seventeen observed variables, the minimum recommended sample size was 382. The study participants were 411 high school adolescents. The participants were determined using the convenience sampling method. Two hundred and twenty-eight (55.5%) participants were female and 183 (44.5%) were male. Their ages varied between 13 and 18 ($M = 15.66$, $SD = 1.32$). Ninety-one (22.1%) participants were in 9th grade, 131 (31.9%) in 10th, 113 (27.5%) in 11th, and 76 (18.5%) in 12th. Participants were asked to tick whether they use social media or not, and if they were users, they were asked to write their daily social media usage time in minutes. All of the participants were actively using social media platforms. The average daily social media platform usage time was 223.95 minutes. This study focused on Turkish students, specifically adolescents

in academic high schools in the South-eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey. Turkey exhibits a rich blend of cultural influences at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. The South-eastern Anatolia region, characterized by low per capita income, high unemployment, dense population, and growing urbanization, primarily sustains itself through agriculture (Kızılgöl & Kuvat, 2020). While Turkish culture embodies both collectivist and individualist traits, the South-eastern Anatolia region tends to lean towards collectivist values (Kagitcibasi, 2017).

Measures

The Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents

The Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents (SMASA), devised by Özgenel et al. (2019), comprises nine items, such as “I have difficulty trying to control, decrease or stop my social media use,” measuring addictive tendencies. Respondents rate each item on a five-point scale, from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Always*. Özgenel et al. (2019) confirmed the one-factor structure of the scale. In this study, the single-factor model fit values of the scale were found to be within the acceptance range ($\chi^2(27) = 111.73$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 4.14$; CFI = .94; GFI = .94; IFI = .93; RMSEA = .08; SRMR = .04) with factor loadings between .062 and .75. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .90.

The Dimensions of Identity Development Scale

The Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS), devised by Morsünbül and Çok (2014), comprises twenty-five items, such as “I keep looking for the direction I want to take in my life,” measuring ego-identity tendencies. The five dimensions of the scale are commitment making, exploration in breadth, ruminative identity exploration, identification with commitment, and exploration in depth. Respondents rate each item on a five-point scale, from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. However, only the ruminative identity exploration factor was used in this study. The fit values of the single-factor model of ruminative identity exploration were within the acceptable range ($\chi^2(4) = 14.11$, $p < .01$; $\chi^2/df = 3.53$; CFI = .99; GFI = .99; IFI = .92; RMSEA = .08; SRMR = .07) with factor loadings between .53 and .80. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .79.

The Career Decision-Making Difficulties Scale for High School Students

The Career Decision-Making Difficulties Scale for High School Students (CDMDS-HS), devised by Gati and Saka (2001) and adapted into Turkish by Bacanlı (2016), comprises thirty-four items, such as “I find it difficult to make a career decision because I do not know how to obtain more detailed information about my abilities and personality traits”, measuring career decision difficulties tendencies. The three dimensions of the scale are lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information. Respondents rate each item on a five-point scale, from 1 = *Does not describe me at all* to 5 = *Describes me well*. Bacanlı (2016), confirmed the second-order factor structure of the scale. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.92. In this study, the Second-order factor model fit values of the scale were found to be within the acceptance

range ($\chi^2(510) = 1082.41$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.12$; CFI = .91; TLI = .91; IFI = .91; RMSEA = .05; SRMR = .05). The scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .92.

Procedure

Before the scales were administered, an informed consent form was obtained from the parents and students and permission to administer the scales was obtained from the Ministry of Education. Participants were selected among the students who voluntarily chose to participate in the study and were informed about the study purpose and how the study results would be used. Informed consent forms were filled out by the participants. Also, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The paper-and-pencil scales were administered face-to-face by the researchers. It took approximately 30 minutes for the participants to fill out the scales. All the study processes were carried out according to the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Assembly, 1964). In addition, permission was obtained from the scientific research ethics committee of Çukurova University Institute of Social Sciences (Doc. No: E-95704281-604.02.02-491685).

Data analysis

In the initial phase of the study, multivariate statistical assumptions underwent rigorous testing. To address missing data, the expectation-maximization algorithm (Cokluk & Kayri, 2011) was employed to impute the nine missing values. In order to avoid an outlier problem, Mahalanobis distance values should be less than 15, and Cook's distance value should be less than 1 (Büyüköztürk et al., 2010; Leys et al., 2018). Cook's distance values were between 0.00 and 0.12, and Mahalanobis's were between 0.01 and 12.54. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2019), skewness and kurtosis values are expected to be between +1.5 and -1.5 for a normal distribution. Kurtosis was calculated between -0.64 and -0.29, whereas skewness was calculated between -0.17 and 0.53. To ensure internal consistency, reliability coefficients should be above .70 (Streiner, 2003). McDonald's omega values were between 0.82 and 0.93, and Cronbach's alpha values were between .82 and .92. Tolerance being above 0.10 and VIF being below 10 indicates that there is no multiple linearity problem, and the Durbin-Watson value being between 1 and 3 indicates that there is no correlation between residuals (Field, 2016). The tolerance value was calculated as 0.44, the VIF value as 2.23, and the Durbin-Watson value as 2.07 (These values were calculated using multiple regression analysis). Finally, Herman's single-factor test cut-off score of less than 40% indicates no common method bias problem (Zhou & Long, 2004). Harman's single-factor test was conducted to address potential common method bias. This test examines whether a single factor accounts for most of the covariance among variables, indicating a threat of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Herman's single-factor test cut-off score was found to be 27.79%. After the assumptions were met, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed.

In the present study, maximum likelihood estimation was utilized for SEM. The SEM analysis followed a two-step approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The first step of the SEM analysis involves testing the measurement model. The second step of the SEM analysis involves testing the structural model. In the analyses, the criteria determined by Hooper et al. (2008) were taken into consideration as the model fit value. Accordingly, if the model fit value is $RMSA < .08$, $SRMR < .08$, $GFI > .90$, $IFI > .90$, $CFI > .90$, it is an acceptable value. The study model chose bootstrapping with 5000 resamples analysis and a 95% confidence interval for indirect effect analyses. In this context, the indirect effect is considered statistically significant if the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval does not include zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). SPSS 23 and AMOS 23 package programs were used for study analyses.

Results

Correlation analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between the variables. Table 1 illustrates that social media addiction is positively correlated with both ruminative identity exploration ($r = .21$, $p < .01$) and career decision-making difficulties ($r = .31$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, a significant positive correlation emerged between ruminative identity exploration and career decision-making difficulties ($r = .53$, $p < .01$).

Table 1
Correlation Values and Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach α	McDonald ω	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3
1. SMA	21.04	6.19	.88	.88	0.53	-0.38	-		
2. RIE	15.79	5.07	.82	.82	-0.17	-0.64	.21*	-	
3. CDMD	88.74	14.86	.92	.93	0.38	-0.29	.31*	.53*	-

Note. SMA; Social Media Addiction. RIE; Ruminative Identity Exploration. CDMD; Career Decision-Making Difficulties. * $p < .01$

Measurement model

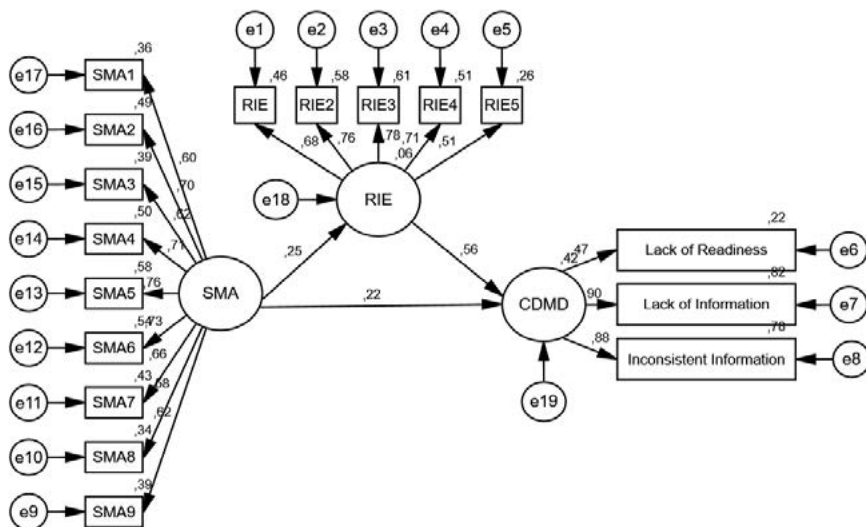
In the measurement model, along with the items of social media addiction and ruminative identity exploration, career decision-making difficulties were included in the analysis with its dimensions (nine items with social media addiction, five items with ruminative identity exploration, and three dimensions of career decision-making difficulties). Model fit values were found to be within the acceptance range ($\chi^2(115) = 257.86$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.24$; $CFI = .96$; $GFI = .93$; $IFI = .96$; $RMSEA = .05$; $SRMR = .04$).

Structural model

In the structural model, the mediating role of ruminative identity exploration in the relationship between social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties was examined. The findings are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Structural Model for the Mediating Role of Ruminative Identity Exploration



Note. SMA; Social Media Addiction. RIE; Ruminative Identity Exploration. CDMD; Career Decision-Making Difficulties; Values are standardized coefficients

The results revealed that the total effect of social media addiction on career decision-making difficulties was significant ($\beta = .36, p < .01$). In addition, social media addiction and ruminative identity exploration explained 42% of the variance of career decision-making difficulties. In terms of direct effects, as seen in Table 2, all the coefficient values were found to be significant. A positive direct effect of social media addiction on career decision-making difficulties ($\beta = .22, p < .01$) and ruminative identity exploration ($\beta = .25, p < .01$) was determined. Ruminative identity exploration had a positive direct effect on career decision-making difficulties ($\beta = .56, p < .01$). Furthermore, a mediating role of ruminative identity exploration was determined between social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties ($\beta = .14, p < .01$). Statistical significance was analysed by bootstrapping 5000 resampling with a 95% confidence interval. As seen in Table 2, all coefficient values were found to be significant since lower bound and upper bound values did not include zero in direct and indirect effects. In the SEM analysis, the model fit values were found as ($\chi^2(115) = 257.86, p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.24$; CFI = .96; GFI = .93; IFI = .96; RMSA = .05; SRMR = .04)

Table 2
Bootstrapping Analysis Findings of the Study Model

Pathway	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	β	Lower Bound (CI)	Upper Bound (CI)
Direct effect					
SMA→ RIE	0.28	0.07	.25	.13	.36
SMA→ CDMD	0.07	0.02	.22	.10	.34
RIE→ CDMD	0.14	0.02	.56	.44	.66
Indirect effect					
SMA→ RIE → CDMS			.14	.07	.22

Note. SMA; Social Media Addiction. RIE; Ruminative Identity Exploration. CDMD; Career Decision-Making Difficulties. CI; Confidence Interval

Discussion

In this study, we found that social media addiction positively predicted career decision-making difficulties. Experimental studies previously reported that developing addiction to social media negatively affects individuals’ decision-making mechanisms (Ko et al., 2017; Meshi et al., 2019; Seok et al., 2015; Wegmann et al., 2021). Also, a cross-sectional study revealed a positive association between social media addiction and indecisiveness (Delaney et al., 2018). In addition, according to the I-PACE model, social media addiction negatively affects the decision-making processes (Brand et al., 2019). In this context, several studies have examined the relationship between social media addiction and career decision-making. Research within this framework indicates that social media addiction negatively predicts career decision-making self-efficacy (Choi & Yoo, 2016) and positively predicts career indecisiveness (Lehmann & Konstam, 2011). Similar to the finding of this study, previous studies determined that social media addiction positively predicts career decision-making difficulties (Sinkkonen et al., 2018; Yurdadon & Dinç, 2021). As a result, adolescents may have difficulties in making career-related decisions since their social media addiction impairs their decision-making processes.

This study also revealed that ruminative identity exploration positively predicted career decision-making difficulties. According to Luyckx et al. (2008a) five-dimensional identity formation model, ruminative identity exploration refers to the process in which adolescents cannot decide on options and are stuck in this decision stage. In addition, according to the identity status model, individuals’ being stuck on options makes it challenging to decide on their careers (Marcia, 1980). Studies in this direction reported a negative relationship between ego-identity development, career indecisiveness (Cohen et al., 1995; Landine, 2016), and career choice certainty (Li et al., 2015). Furthermore, there is a positive association between identity diffusion and avoidance among the decision-making styles (Sharma & Mittal, 2017). Indeed, Gati et al. (1996) emphasized the relationship between an individual’s ruminative identity exploration and career decision-making difficulties, considering the subcategories of lack of self-information, internal conflicts, and indecisiveness in their taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties. Previous studies found that adolescents’ moratorium and diffusion identity status positively predicted career decision-making difficulties (Bacanlı, 2012; Traş & Gökce, 2017). As a result, adolescents’ ruminative identity exploration may impede effective decision-making and complicate their career decisions as they are stuck in indecisiveness.

The current study demonstrated that social media addiction positively predicted ruminative identity exploration. According to Marcia's (1966) identity status model, the individuals' association with substance addiction, one of the risk factors, increases their tendency for moratorium and diffusion identity statuses. According to a study conducted by De Moor et al. (2022), adolescents with substance addiction are in the moratorium and diffusion identity statuses. Also, in a cross-sectional study, a positive correlation was determined between substance addiction and moratorium and diffusion identity statuses (Schwartz et al., 2008). Along this line, in recent years, social media addiction has been considered among the risk factors for adolescents. The relationship between the formation of ego-identity, which is the basic developmental task of adolescence, and social media addiction was explored in previous studies. Studies reported a negative relationship between social media addiction and ego-identity formation (Israellashvili et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2010). In addition, a positive relationship was found between social media addiction and identity confusion (Sharif & Khanekharab, 2017). Furthermore, a positive relationship was reported between social media addiction and moratorium and diffusion identity statuses (Mazalin & Moore, 2004). Also, similar to the current study's results, the literature revealed that social media addiction positively predicts ruminative identity exploration (Kaya & Güneş, 2023; Morsünbül, 2014). As a result, the adolescent's social media addiction may increase their ruminative identity exploration.

The present study found that ruminative identity exploration had a mediating role in the relationship between social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties. The I-PACE model (Brand et al., 2016) and previous experimental studies (Seok et al., 2015; Wegmann et al., 2021) reported that social media addiction negatively affects individuals' decision-making mechanisms. Social media addiction increases career decision-making difficulties (Sinkkonen et al., 2018; Yurdadon & Dinç, 2021). Additionally, adolescents' social media addiction increases their ruminative identity exploration (Kaya & Güneş, 2023; Morsünbül, 2014). This ruminative identity exploration is also positively related to adolescents' career decision-making difficulties (Bacanlı, 2012). In addition, according to the identity status model (Marcia, 1966), addiction raises the moratorium and diffusion identity statuses, and the moratorium and diffusion identity statuses negatively affect the decision-making mechanism of individuals. Considering all the aforementioned theories and literature, it can be said that excessive and uncontrolled use of social media may make adolescents stuck in their exploration of identity and make it difficult for them to make career decisions.

Limitations, Implications, and Future Research

The present study has some limitations. The sample is convenient and limited to one region in Turkey, so it cannot be generalized to all high schools. The same study can be conducted with high school students in other countries. In addition, this study is cross-sectional, which limits its ability to explore longitudinal aspects. Accordingly, a cross-lagged panel design could examine the mediating role of ruminative identity exploration between social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties over time. The current study addressed only ruminative identity exploration as the mediator. Other variables may mediate this relationship, such as academic procrastination, career barriers, irrational beliefs in career selection, and indecisiveness. Another limitation of the study is that the study used self-report scales. Thus, the participants' biases may

have affected the study. In order to reduce the effect of this limitation, future studies may employ triangulation of measures. This study is important in terms of revealing the relationship between social media addiction and the individual's ruminative identity exploration and career decision-making difficulties. Based on this result, preventive and intervention programs can be developed for social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties in high schools.

This study showed that social media addiction impacts career decision-making difficulties among high school students and that this effect is partially mediated by ruminative identity exploration. Accordingly, some implications are suggested. Firstly, mental health professionals can implement intervention programmes for adolescents with social media addiction. Intervention programmes focused on time management, digital detox strategies and fostering healthier social media habits may assist in mitigating the detrimental effects of social media addiction on career choice and ego-identity formation. Secondly, social media literacy training can be organised for adolescents. In this way, adolescents can learn which social media platforms to benefit from for their career decision-making processes. Thirdly, educators can create an internet-based career psycho-education programme. Thus, social media can be utilised to help adolescents make career decisions. Fourthly, practitioners can create and implement group activities involving parents and adolescents about the many factors of identity exploration and occupations displayed on social media. Fifthly, policymakers can design informative applications about social roles, values and beliefs, life purpose, social group, career roles, social environment, personal characteristics and occupations. These applications can help adolescents in their search for identity and career choices.

Conclusion

The present study shows that ruminative identity exploration is important in social media addiction and career decision-making difficulties. The study findings suggest that adolescents' social media addiction complicates career decision-making and determines the indirect effect of ruminative identity exploration. The study also reported that social media addiction plays an important role in adolescents' being stuck in identity exploration. Finally, the study contributed to the literature by determining that social media addiction makes it difficult for adolescents to make career decisions by making them get stuck in ruminative identity exploration.

Ethics Approval

All procedures performed in the study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Ethics committee approval was obtained from the scientific research and publication ethics committee of Cukurova University in the field of social sciences and humanities.

Conflict Interests

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Data/ Materials Availability

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Zavisnost od društvenih mreža i teškoće u donošenju odluka o karijeri kod adolescenata: Medijatorska uloga ruminativne identitetske eksploracije

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Cilj ove studije bio je da istraži medijatorsku ulogu ruminativne identitetske eksploracije u relaciji između zavisnosti od društvenih mreža i teškoća u donošenju odluka o karijeri kod adolescenata. U istraživanju je učestvovalo 411 adolescenata, od čega su 228 (55.5%) devojčice, a 183 (44.5%) dečaci. Korišćeni su sledeći merni instrumenti: Skala zavisnosti od društvenih mreža za adolescente, Skala dimenzija razvoja identiteta i Skala teškoća u donošenju odluka o karijeri za srednjoškolce. Podaci su analizirani putem modelovanja strukturnih jednačina, a značajnost testirana putem bootstrap metode. Rezultati su pokazali da zavisnost od društvenih mreža pozitivno predviđa ruminativnu identitetsku eksploraciju i teškoće u donošenju odluka o karijeri. Pored toga, ruminativna identitetska eksploracija pozitivno predviđa teškoće u donošenju odluka o karijeri i funkcioniše kao medijator između zavisnosti od društvenih mreža i teškoća u donošenju odluka o karijeri. Rezultati ove studije ukazuju na to da zavisnost od društvenih mreža povećava teškoće u donošenju odluka o karijeri, putem ruminativne identitetske eksploracije. U diskusiji razmatran je doprinos ovih nalaza postojećoj literaturi, a date su i preporuke za istraživače i praktičare.

Ključne reči: zavisnost od društvenih mreža, ruminativna identitetska eksploracija, teškoće o donošenju odluka o karijeri, adolescencija

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