

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

# EXPLORING SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AMONG TURKISH REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN NORWAY

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**Abstract** Social media plays an important role in the lives of refugees. In this study, we explored social media usage among Turkish refugees and asylum seekers settled in Norway. The relationship between social media usage and demographic variables has been examined. An online survey was used for data collection. The most commonly used social media platforms among participants are WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook. Among demographic variables, only age was found to have a significant relationship with social media use among participants. A significant negative correlation was detected between age and social media use.

**Keywords:**

social  
media  
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## 1 Introduction

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, “a refugee is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)). The refugee crisis has been one of the global issues in the last decades, and the number of refugees in the world has been increasing.

In this article, we focus on the social media use of Turkish refugees and asylum seekers settled in Norway. Following the failed coup attempt in July 2016, large-scale political purges have been carried out by the Turkish government that have affected all areas of society in Turkey (NOAS, 2021). Journalists, lawyers, judges, teachers, academicians, police and military personnel have lost their jobs, and the purges have driven many Turks to flee to Europe (NOAS, 2021). According to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), Turkish citizens were the largest group of asylum seekers in Norway in 2018, with 765 people seeking asylum (UDI, n.d.).

Considering the high education and previous political engagement of most of the Turkish refugees in Norway, it is reasonable to believe that this population group is familiar with and active in social media use. In contrast, previous research shows that immigrants in Norway generally have lower (education and) digital skills than the average population of Norway, even though many use social media (Guthu & Holm, 2010). New, more updated research is needed, which consider changes in the demography of immigrants and refugees in Norway. Therefore, we argue that it is especially relevant to obtain more knowledge about the social media use of Turkish refugees and asylum seekers.

As part of an ongoing research, this study explores social media usage among Turkish refugees in Norway and its relationship with demographic variables. Our research question is: Which demographics relate to social media use among Turkish refugees and asylum seekers in Norway?

## **1.1 Social Media and Refugees**

Information and communication technologies (ICTs), especially the internet, have been an integral part of modern society. These technologies have radically affected societies and also transformed the experience of international migration (Charmarkeh, 2013). Smartphones, the internet and social media platforms are crucial for refugees. These technologies help refugees access information and communication through the whole migration process. With having communication and social features, social media platforms are critically important for refugees.

Social media has the potential to help refugees develop new social networks in a new country as well as maintain social networks in their homeland. Dekker and Engbersen (2014) identified four relevant ways in which social media facilitates international migration, such as enhancing the possibilities of maintaining strong ties with family and friends, addressing weak ties that are relevant to organizing the process of migration and integration, establishing a new infrastructure consisting of latent ties, and offering a rich source of insider knowledge on migration that is discrete and unofficial.

Refugees use social media platforms not only to communicate with the social networks but also to access critical information such as asylum and possible destinations for migration, employment opportunities, living conditions and housing (Ahmad, 2020). Social media platforms and smartphones are used primarily by refugees for communication, translation, information, navigation, and representation (Kaplan, 2018). Smartphones offer important tools and applications for refugees, such as translator, map, compass, GPS, and social media apps. Refugees often access social media and other online information via smartphones (Dekker, Engbersen, Klaver, & Vonk, 2018).

Despite its benefits, social media is also one of the major sources of misinformation today. Social media can provide refugees with rumours, unrealistic or even false information (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Dekker et al., 2018). These rumours or misleading information can be about the asylum process, the length of the process to obtain a residence permit and the process for family reunification (Dekker et al., 2018).

Although internet use is quite high across Norway, ICT and social media use among refugees are not well covered in the academic literature of the Norwegian context (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Even though social media provide a relatively cheap, media-rich, and easily accessible means of communication, their use by refugees is not without challenges (Dekker et al., 2018). Therefore, this study will contribute to the literature by exploring social media use among refugees.

## **2 Methodology**

In this study, we used an online survey which was developed and administered by using SurveyXact. The survey link was distributed by WhatsApp and e-mail. The snowball sampling method was used to recruit respondents. Participants were requested to send the survey link to other Turkish refugees living in Norway. Participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary. The invitation to participate in the online questionnaire was sent in December 2021 via WhatsApp and e-mail with a link to the survey.

### **2.1 Survey Instrument**

The survey consisted of questions related to the demographics of respondents (gender, age, marital status, education level, etc.), social media usage, acculturative stress, mental well-being and life satisfaction, and included several questions about social media usage. Survey participants were asked to indicate the social media platforms they use and the average daily social media usage time. To measure social media use intensity, we used the Social Media Use Intensity Scale (SMUIS) (Cain & Imre, 2021), which was adapted originally from Social Media Use Integration Scale (Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Johnson, 2013). A five-point Likert scale was used to measure. The response items ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The survey was translated into Turkish and tested with ten Turkish refugees living in Norway before distribution.

### 3 Findings

#### 3.1 Participants

The first 100 completed responses were used for analysis in this study. Eight (8) responses were not taken into account as they could not be identified as refugees. Therefore, the participants in the study consisted of 92 Turkish refugees in Norway. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

| <b>Variables</b>                      | <b>Category</b>                                  | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                         | Female   | 28               | 30.4              |
|                                       | Male   | 64               | 69.6              |
| <b>Age</b>                            | 18-25  | 7                | 7.61              |
|                                       | 26-30  | 14               | 15.22             |
|                                       | 31-35  | 19               | 20.65             |
|                                       | 36-40  | 16               | 17.39             |
|                                       | 41-45  | 19               | 20.65             |
|                                       | 46-50  | 14               | 15.22             |
|                                       | 50+  | 3                | 3.26              |
| <b>Marital status</b>                 | Married  | 81               | 88.0              |
|                                       | Single (Never married)                           | 9                | 9.8               |
|                                       | Divorced   | 2                | 2.2               |
| <b>Level of education</b>             | Less than high school degree                     | 2                | 2.2               |
|                                       | High school degree or equivalent                 | 11               | 12.0              |
|                                       | Vocational school of higher education (2 years)  | 5                | 5.4               |
|                                       | Bachelor's degree (4 years or more)              | 52               | 56.5              |
|                                       | Master's degree                                  | 21               | 22.8              |
|                                       | Doctoral degree                                  | 1                | 1.1               |
| <b>Employment status*</b>             | Introduction programme                           | 54               | 58.70             |
|                                       | Unemployed                                       | 13               | 14.13             |
|                                       | Studying (high school, university, etc.)         | 18               | 19.57             |
|                                       | Employed (full-time, part-time or self-employed) | 35               | 38.04             |
| <b>Length of time lived in Norway</b> | Less than 6 months                               | 3                | 3.3               |
|                                       | 6 months to less than 1 year                     | 2                | 2.2               |
|                                       | 1 year to less than 2 years                      | 8                | 8.7               |
|                                       | 2 years to less than 3 years                     | 24               | 26.1              |
|                                       | 3 years to less than 4 years                     | 51               | 55.4              |
|                                       | 4 years to less than 5 years                     | 4                | 4.3               |

\* Respondents could choose more than one option

69.6 percent of the participants were male, and the remaining were female. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 60 years old (Mean= 37.4, SD= 8.3). 60.6 percent of the participants were between 19 and 40 years old, and the remaining were 41-60 years old. Eighty-eight (88) percent of the participants were married, 9.8 percent were single, and 2.2 percent were divorced.

The majority of the participants (85.8%) had higher education, with 56.5 percent having a bachelor’s degree, 22.8 percent had a master’s degree and one participant had a doctoral degree. The participants had been living in Norway between less than 6 months and 5 years at the time of the data collection.

In the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate which social media platforms they used. Among participants, the most commonly used platform was WhatsApp (100.0 percent), followed by YouTube (83.70 percent), and Facebook (80.43 percent). WhatsApp is one of the most popular social media platforms among refugees (Briggs, 2021). Table 2 shows the social media platforms used by the respondents.

**Table 2: Social media platforms used by respondents**

|           | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| WhatsApp  | 92        | 100.00     |
| YouTube   | 77        | 83.70      |
| Facebook  | 74        | 80.43      |
| Instagram | 57        | 61.96      |
| Twitter   | 52        | 56.52      |
| LinkedIn  | 19        | 20.65      |
| Snapchat  | 8         | 8.70       |
| Pinterest | 8         | 8.70       |
| TikTok    | 4         | 4.35       |
| Other     | 2         | 2.17       |

Table 3 shows the respondents’ average daily social media usage time. The majority of the respondents indicated that they use social media less than two hours a day. Forty (40) percent of the respondents’ average social media use time was one to two hours per day.

**Table 3: Social media platforms used by respondents**

|                         | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Less than 30 min.       | 5         | 5.4        |
| 30 min to less than 1 h | 16        | 17.4       |
| 1 h to less than 2 h    | 37        | 40.2       |
| 2 h to less than 3 h    | 24        | 26.1       |
| 3 h to less than 4 h    | 8         | 8.7        |
| 4 h to less than 5 h    | 1         | 1.1        |
| More than 5 h           | 1         | 1.1        |

### 3.2 Data Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation was performed on SMUIS items using IBM SPSS (version 25). The result for KMO was 0.723 that is above the acceptance level. The Bartlett's test of sphericity results were as follows: Chi-Squared= 247.370, df = 45, and  $p < 0.0001$ . Table 4 shows the results of the factor analysis. For the data of this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for overall scale scores was 0.767, and for scores on subscale 1, Social Integration and Emotional Connection (SIEC), and subscale 2, Integration into Social Routines (ISR), were 0.802 and 0.546, respectively.

**Table 4: Rotated factor matrix for social media use intensity scale**

| Statements   | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
|--|----------|----------|
| 1. I feel disconnected from friends when I have not logged into my social media sites. | .558     |          |
| 2. I would like it if everyone used social media sites to communicate.                 | .794     |          |
| 3. I would be disappointed if I could not use social media sites at all.               | .724     |          |
| 4. I get upset when I cannot log on to my social media sites.                          | .701     |          |
| 5. I prefer to communicate with others mainly through social media sites.              | .684     |          |
| 6. Social media sites play an important role in my social relationships.               | .689     |          |
| 7. I enjoy checking my social media site accounts.                                     |          | .674     |
| 8. I do not like to use social media sites. a  |          | .700     |
| 9. Using social media sites is part of my everyday routine.                            |          | .696     |
| 10. I respond to content that others share using social media sites.                   |          | .452     |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  
a Reverse coded.

### 3.3 Variables

#### 3.3.1 Dependent Variable

An overall average total score for the Social Media Use Intensity Scale (SMUIS) was used as the dependent variable. SMUIS constitutes two subscales. The first 6-item subscale is entitled Social Integration and Emotional Connection (SIEC), and the second 4-item subscale is called Integration into Social Routines (ISR) (Cain & Imre, 2021; Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013). The overall score for the SMUIS was calculated as an average of the two subscale scores. Table 5 shows Social Media Use Intensity Scale items.

#### 3.3.2 Independent Variables

Demographics of respondents of the study were used as independent variables within the regression model. Table 1 contains the demographics of respondents, such as gender, age, marital status, education level, employment status, length of time living in Norway.

**Table 5: Social media use intensity scale items**

| Statements   | M    | SD   |
|--|------|------|
| 1. I feel disconnected from friends when I have not logged into my social media sites. a | 2.83 | 1.09 |
| 2. I would like it if everyone used social media sites to communicate. a                 | 3.13 | 1.09 |
| 3. I would be disappointed if I could not use social media sites at all. a               | 2.77 | 1.08 |
| 4. I get upset when I cannot log on to my social media sites. a                          | 3.12 | 1.09 |
| 5. I prefer to communicate with others mainly through social media sites. a              | 2.89 | 1.05 |
| 6. Social media sites play an important role in my social relationships. a               | 2.96 | 1.07 |
| 7. I enjoy checking my social media site accounts. b                                     | 3.71 | 0.79 |
| 8. I do not like to use social media sites. b, c   | 3.57 | 0.99 |
| 9. Using social media sites is part of my everyday routine. b                            | 3.52 | 0.82 |
| 10. I respond to content that others share using social media sites. b                   | 3.02 | 1.01 |

M = mean; SD = standard deviation; Scale range for items: 1=strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree, a Part of Social Integration and Emotional Connection subscale, b Part of Integration into Social Routines subscale, c Reverse coded.



A general linear model was used to assess the association between social media use (SMUIS, dependent variable) and the demographic variables of the respondents. The general linear model analysis revealed that there was a significant effect of age. Results indicate that there are no significant findings for other demographic variables. Table 6 presents the results of the general linear model.

**Table 6: Results of the general linear model**

| <b>Variables</b>               | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>Sig.</b> |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|----------|-------------|
| Age                            | 1.297              | 4.106    | .046        |
| Gender                         | .161               | .511     | .477        |
| Marital status                 | .187               | .593     | .555        |
| Education level                | .169               | .535     | .710        |
| Length of time lived in Norway | .137               | .433     | .824        |

R Squared = .101 (Adjusted R Squared = -.049)

The results of the correlation analysis show that there is significant negative correlation with age and social media use (SMUIS ( $p < 0.05$ ), average daily social media usage ( $p < 0.01$ )). Table 7 shows the results of the correlation analysis.

**Table 7: Results of correlation analysis**

|                                      | (1)     | (2)   | (3)   | (4)   | (5)  | (6)  |
|--------------------------------------|---------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|
| Age (1)                              | 1.00    |       |       |       |      |      |
| Gender (2)                           | .159    | 1.00  |       |       |      |      |
| Education level (3)                  | .007    | .111  | 1.00  |       |      |      |
| Length of time lived in Norway (4)   | .183    | .096  | .010  | 1.00  |      |      |
| SMUIS (5)                            | -.211*  | -.150 | -.090 | .030  | 1.00 |      |
| Average daily social media usage (6) | -.289** | .023  | -.029 | -.114 | .049 | 1.00 |

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## 4 Conclusion

In this current study, we explored social media usage among Turkish refugees and asylum seekers in Norway as a part of a larger study. We examined the relationship between social media usage and the demographic variables of the participants. In addition to questions about social media usage among participants, the Social Media Use Intensity Scale was used in the study.

It was found that WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook were the most commonly used social media platforms among participants. All of the participants reported using WhatsApp. The duration of social media usage in a day varies. Most respondents indicated that they used social media less than two hours a day. Among demographic variables, only age was found to have a significant relationship with social media use among participants. The results indicated that there was a significant negative correlation between age and social media use.

The limitations of this current study should be acknowledged in interpreting the results. We used the snowball sampling method to recruit respondents. The sample size was limited. The study sample may not be fully representative of the refugee population in Norway. An online survey was used for data collection. Other significant variables such as income have not been collected. Interviews can give a deeper understanding of social media usage among refugees. Future studies can also examine other demographic variables affecting social media usage.

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