

Young Entrepreneurship in the Digital Age: Young People's Entrepreneurial Journeys through Social Media

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This study examines how young entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in their entrepreneurial processes, focusing on the opportunities and challenges these platforms present and the psychological mechanisms that influence their experiences. Using Q methodology, the study explores young entrepreneurs' self-expression, idea and skill development, feedback reception, and the impact of social media's competitive environment. The research sample consists of 20 Turkish young entrepreneurs (aged 18–34) who actively engage in entrepreneurial activities through social media. The Q method analysis findings highlight three key factors shaping entrepreneurs' perceptions: Opportunities of Social Media, Psychological Impacts of Rivalry and Feedback, and Critical Perspective. Social media was viewed as a double-edged sword, simultaneously enabling creativity and networking while presenting challenges such as trust and psychological pressures. Gender-based differences emerged, with women emphasizing collaboration and opportunity while men focused on competition and feedback. Furthermore, the content analysis findings revealed both positive and negative perceptions, underscoring the dual role of social media as a driver of innovation and a source of stress. This study contributes to the growing literature on social media and entrepreneurship by offering a culturally contextualized understanding of how Turkish young entrepreneurs navigate the opportunities and challenges of digital platforms.

Key words: social media, young entrepreneurship, Q method

Introduction

Nowadays, young people have the opportunity to venture into the world of entrepreneurship through social media platforms. As digital natives, they naturally adopt and use technol-

ogy (Manurung et al., 2024). Social media not only provides young individuals with important opportunities to express themselves personally and professionally, but also serves as a fertile ground for the development of their creative processes, and a gateway to a global audience (Miniesy et al., 2022).

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Received December 18, 2024



Young people have the potential to develop and implement creative ideas using social media platforms. They not only use these platforms for communication but also to create entrepreneurial opportunities (Masnawati et al., 2022). For example, platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have become spaces for young entrepreneurs to market their products, build their brands, and reach a global customer base (Hidayat et al., 2022; Subiakto, 2023). These platforms offer low-cost entrepreneurial opportunities, providing young people with significant advantages in the business start-up process (Khalili et al., 2024; Park et al., 2017).

Utilizing the Q methodology, one of the qualitative research designs, this study examines how young entrepreneurs develop their entrepreneurial ideas using social media platforms and which psychological mechanisms come into play in this process. Specifically, the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the opportunities offered by social media platforms to young entrepreneurs, their potential to accelerate their entrepreneurial processes, and their psychological effects. The focal points of this study include themes such as young entrepreneurs' self-expression using social media platforms, developing their entrepreneurial ideas and skills, the feedback provided by social media, and the effects of the competitive environment.

The study is situated in the Turkish entrepreneurial context, which offers a rich sociocultural setting where a digitally active youth population, characterized by high internet usage rates and daily engagement with social media platforms (Dijital, 2015), navigates entrepreneurship amid both challenges and emerging opportunities. Türkiye, with its rapidly expanding digital market, remains underrepresented in scholarly research on youth entrepreneurship and social media use. Moreover, cultural values in Türkiye, such as collectivist orientation,

high value placed on social reputation, and sensitivity to others' opinions, may significantly shape how young entrepreneurs present themselves, interpret feedback, and respond to digital visibility (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2007). These dynamics can influence entrepreneurial motivation, self-expression, and risk-taking behavior in ways that differ from individualistic settings. By focusing on this context, the study not only addresses a geographical gap but also contributes to understanding how culture mediates digital entrepreneurial experience. This geographical gap has also been noted by regional scholars, who emphasize that research on digital entrepreneurship remains largely Western-centric and that the specific dynamics of countries like Türkiye are significantly underexplored in the current literature (Boz & Serinkan, 2022; Eysel & Sağlam, 2021).

Development of the Digital Age and Young Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is recognizing opportunities in the environment and implementing plans for these opportunities in daily life (Çetinkaya Bozkurt, 2011). In the traditional business world, entrepreneurship depended on significant capital investments and physical resources; however, this process has changed significantly with the opportunities offered by the digital age. The rise of digital platforms has also created an essential space for entrepreneurship. These platforms have reshaped the processes of starting businesses, promoting brands, and reaching large audiences (Masnawati et al., 2022). Especially for young entrepreneurs, social media, one of the digital platforms, has become a tool that transforms entrepreneurship processes by providing low-cost and broad reach (Eysel & Sağlam, 2021; Kwiatek et al., 2021).

The process of young entrepreneurs developing their business ideas using social media has accelerated with the advantages of the

digital age. Young people, defined as digital natives, have essential opportunities to spread their business ideas quickly through social media platforms. These platforms also allow them to showcase their creativity (Troise et al., 2022). For example, 60% of young entrepreneurs use social media as an effective tool to find freelancers (Tata Consultancy Services, 2022). Young entrepreneurs are known to use social media intensively for various entrepreneurial purposes, such as marketing, networking, and knowledge acquisition (Al Harrasi et al., 2021). Thus, the usage of social media among the young generation is seen as the best way to expose young people to business involvement (Abd Majid et al., 2020). This growing pattern of usage highlights social media platforms becoming increasingly central to the entrepreneurial activities of young people. In addition, research has shown that women entrepreneurs increasingly use social media for business development and funding opportunities. This usage provides greater access to resources, visibility, and networks, which can contribute to their sense of empowerment in entrepreneurial settings (Miniesy et al., 2022; Olsson & Bernhard, 2021). The impact of social media platforms on entrepreneurship is not limited to business development. According to HubSpot's State of Marketing Report (2024), 71% of entrepreneurs use social media as a marketing channel. These platforms allow entrepreneurs to find customers and increase their interactions with them. In addition, social media platforms enable young entrepreneurs to collect and analyze data with tools such as e-commerce and social media analytics (Alay, 2023; Zhao & Collier, 2016).

Young entrepreneurs face a variety of challenges as well as advantages offered by social media. The nature of social media, which requires constant innovation, can create pressure for young entrepreneurs. It can also be

challenging to make a difference and create a sustainable business model in these highly competitive platforms (Arena et al., 2023).

Psychological Mechanisms Triggered by Social Media in the Entrepreneurship Process

Social media also has a significant impact on the psychological world of young entrepreneurs. Understanding the psychological processes such as creativity, motivation, self-confidence, and coping with stress, which play important roles in this digital entrepreneurship system, is crucial. One of the factors triggering entrepreneurs' psychological reactions is the feedback they receive through social media. As a platform of constant feedback for entrepreneurs, social media offers opportunities and challenges from a psychological perspective. Creativity, motivation, and self-confidence are critical factors in entrepreneurs' success. Positive feedback can help entrepreneurs develop creative ideas and increase their self-confidence and motivation (Khalili et al., 2024; Manurung et al., 2024; Park et al., 2017), while negative feedback can lead to stress, anxiety, and decreased business performance (Troise et al., 2022; Singh, 2020).

Similarly, while the competitive environment on social media platforms may enhance motivation for some young entrepreneurs, Nambisan and Baron (2021) highlight that it can also generate intense pressure due to expectations of constant content production and the need to maintain visibility. This ongoing demand may negatively affect their performance by increasing role conflict, perceived stress, and ultimately leading to burnout. Young entrepreneurs are constantly forced to observe the success of other competitors on social media, and this can sometimes lead to a loss of self-confidence and fear of failure. Moreover, under the pressure to succeed on

social media, they may feel compelled to constantly innovate and be visible (Arena et al., 2023; Olsson & Bernhard, 2021). This dilemma created by social media use reveals how success and stress coexist in the digital world. Therefore, young individuals who engage in entrepreneurship on social media platforms must also deal with their own psychological processes. However, positive feedback and supportive networks through social media can help young entrepreneurs overcome these challenges (Al Halbusi et al., 2022).

This study aims to examine young entrepreneurs' views on the opportunities and challenges presented by social media platforms in their entrepreneurial processes. In this context, the study aims to reveal how young entrepreneurs construct their entrepreneurial identities and shape their creativity, motivation, and self-confidence through social media by examining their social media use and psychological dynamics. Therefore, the study aims to explain the establishment of a balance between opportunities and challenges faced by young entrepreneurs through social media platforms. Given the subjective and interpretive nature of the research questions, the Q methodology was adopted as it enables the systematic exploration of participants' viewpoints by combining qualitative depth with quantitative structure. This method is particularly suited to uncover shared patterns of meaning in how individuals make sense of complex and contested phenomena, such as the dual role of social media in entrepreneurial journeys, and allow for the identification of diverse perspectives that may otherwise remain hidden in traditional survey approaches. Accordingly, the research questions of the study are given below:

What are the opinions of young entrepreneurs about the opportunities and challenges offered by social media platforms in their entrepreneurship processes?

What are young entrepreneurs' perceptions of the entrepreneurial dynamics of social media as reflected through the Q statements?

Is there a gender difference in young entrepreneurs' opinions?

What are the reasons for young entrepreneurs choosing Q statements with extreme values?

Method

Research Design

This research is a mixed design study in which the Q method is applied. Q method is a type of mixed research based on quantitative and qualitative research methods that reveals the opinions and perceptions of individuals on a topic in order of priority. With this feature, the Q method offers a holistic evaluation based on the combination of the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research (Rodl et al., 2020). In Q-method research, qualitative data are collected after quantitative data are collected from the participant group. This method generally consists of Q statements and Q strings containing the personal thoughts of the participants (Demir & Kul, 2011). Using the Q method determines which factor each participant most closely aligns with, based on their factor loading values. Factors refer to groups with the same opinions (Yıldırım, 2017).

Participants

The study group in this research consisted of 20 Turkish young entrepreneurs (18-34 years old) who engage in entrepreneurial activities through social media in Türkiye. Participants were recruited using a criterion sampling strategy, a purposive sampling technique in which individuals are selected based on specific pre-established criteria. The inclusion cri-

teria for this study were as follows: 1) aged between 18 and 34 years old; 2) self-identifying as an entrepreneur; and 3) actively using social media platforms as a central part of their entrepreneurial activity, such as marketing, branding, selling, or monetizing content. Exclusion criteria included: 1) individuals younger than 18 or older than 34; 2) individuals who used social media solely for personal or entertainment purposes; 3) individuals who were not engaged in any income-generating or business-related activity through social media. Potential participants were identified through digital platforms and online entrepreneurship forums and were invited via direct messages and email. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through online platforms, depending on the participants' location and availability. According to Cairns (2012), the Q method is mostly used in participant sample sizes between 12-40 people. Therefore, 20 participants of this research can be considered sufficient. The average age of the participants was 23.4 ($SD = 0.88$). Nine

of them were male and 11 were female. The participants' entrepreneurial fields included managing an education page, producing social media content, running a gaming channel, editing videos, launching business ventures, promoting cosmetics as influencers, developing software as freelancers, trading toy cars, furniture, and white goods, engaging in the stock exchange, selling clothing, and practicing photography.

Data Collection Tools

In this study, the Q method form developed by the researcher in line with the literature review, expert opinions, and a pilot study was used as the data collection tool (Table 1). The Q method form consists of three parts (instructions, Q statements and Q grid). During the preparation of the Q statements, the researcher reviewed the literature and created 62 items. The researcher developed the initial 62 Q statements based on a thematic framework constructed from a comprehensive

Table 1 *Stages of the research*

| | |
|------------|---|
| Step One | 62 items were generated from the literature review 34 items were generated from semi-structured interviews A total of 96 items were formed |
| Step Two | Consultation with experts in the field 36 items were selected Items were categorized into seven dimensions Content validity was verified |
| Step Three | Reached 20 young entrepreneurs between the ages of 18-34 who are engaged in entrepreneurship activities on social media |
| Step Four | Participants completed Q sort with a 36-cell grid Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants |
| Step Five | Q sort analysis was utilized with PQMethod 2.35, and content analysis was utilized with Maxqda |

the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants following the Q-sorting process, focusing specifically on the reasons behind the placement of these extreme statements. These interviews focused specifically on the reasoning behind the participants' placement of statements at the +4 and -4 positions. The researcher asked open-ended questions such as "Why did you agree/disagree with this statement so strongly?", and "What does this statement mean to you personally?" The interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim. This approach aimed to provide deeper insight into the personal interpretations and subjective meanings underlying the most salient viewpoints.

Data Analysis

The data in the Q-grid were analyzed with the PQMethod 2.35 statistical program. This software facilitates the correlation and factor analysis of participants' responses, enabling the identification of shared viewpoints and the extraction of factors that represent distinct perspectives within the data set (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this study, analysis procedures followed standard Q methodological steps, including factor extraction using centroid method and varimax rotation, which enabled the grouping of participants with similar sorting patterns. Each extracted factor was then interpreted using the composite Q-sort (factor array) and supplemented by qualitative interview data gathered after the Q-sorting process, allowing for a deeper understanding of the subjective viewpoints. The data obtained through semi-structured interviews were analyzed by content analysis using Maxqda 24. To ensure confidentiality during the initial stage, participants were assigned anonymous identifiers (e.g., P1, P2). The audio recordings were then transcribed

into written format. To enhance consistency and reliability, the content analysis process included an additional independent coder. Two coders thoroughly reviewed the transcripts multiple times, identifying keywords and phrases. Using Miles and Huberman's (1994) coding methodology, the data were systematically coded. A coding booklet was created, individual coding completed, and inter-coder reliability calculated, achieving a value of 0.87, which supports the reliability of qualitative studies.

Ethics Committee Permission Information

The research was carried out after the university ethical board approval was obtained in Türkiye, and the informed consent form was presented to the participants (IRB: E-10042736-659-1185122).

Findings

To address the first research question, Q-method analysis was conducted with 20 participants and 36 statements. Factor analysis of the Q-sorting data identified three main factors among the 20 participants. In line with Q methodology's person-centered approach, factor analysis was applied not to the items but to the participants' overall sorting patterns. Unlike traditional variable-centered approaches, this by-person factor analysis reveals clusters of participants who share similar perspectives based on how they sorted the Q statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The factor loadings of the participants and the factors to which they contributed the highest loadings are presented in Table 3.

In line with the inductive nature of the Q methodology, the factor analysis conducted using PQMethod software revealed three distinct factors based on shared patterns in participants' Q-sorts. These factors emerged

Table 3 *Participants' factor loadings*

| Participant | Factor Loading 1 | Factor Loading 2 | Factor Loading 3 | Highest Factor |
|-------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| P1 | 0.71 | 0.12 | 0.08 | Factor 1 |
| P2 | 0.68 | 0.18 | 0.06 | Factor 1 |
| P3 | 0.20 | 0.75 | 0.14 | Factor 2 |
| P4 | 0.15 | 0.78 | 0.12 | Factor 2 |
| P5 | 0.22 | 0.14 | 0.74 | Factor 3 |
| P6 | 0.25 | 0.20 | 0.70 | Factor 3 |
| P7 | 0.69 | 0.10 | 0.11 | Factor 1 |
| P8 | 0.61 | 0.22 | 0.15 | Factor 1 |
| P9 | 0.18 | 0.68 | 0.12 | Factor 2 |
| P10 | 0.16 | 0.72 | 0.10 | Factor 2 |
| P11 | 0.21 | 0.12 | 0.71 | Factor 3 |
| P12 | 0.26 | 0.14 | 0.69 | Factor 3 |
| P13 | 0.67 | 0.15 | 0.10 | Factor 1 |
| P14 | 0.65 | 0.12 | 0.15 | Factor 1 |
| P15 | 0.19 | 0.73 | 0.11 | Factor 2 |
| P16 | 0.17 | 0.74 | 0.12 | Factor 2 |
| P17 | 0.22 | 0.18 | 0.70 | Factor 3 |
| P18 | 0.24 | 0.19 | 0.72 | Factor 3 |
| P19 | 0.63 | 0.14 | 0.11 | Factor 1 |
| P20 | 0.70 | 0.12 | 0.10 | Factor 1 |

from the data through statistical correlations among participants' responses. Once the factor loadings were examined and the distinguishing statements identified, the researcher interpreted and named each factor based on its underlying conceptual meaning and the defining viewpoints it represented. Factor 1 highlights young entrepreneurs' emphasis on the creativity-enhancing and business opportunity-generating aspects of social media. This factor was strongly supported by participants who focused on the opportunities provided by social media (45%). Therefore, it has been labeled as *Opportunities of Social Media*. Factor 2 represents perspectives influenced by the competitive nature of social media and the psychological impacts (such as stress, reduced self-confidence, decreased motivation) associated with social comparison and online feedback (30%). Accordingly, this factor was

labeled *Psychological Impacts of Rivalry and Feedback* to emphasize the internal consequences of these externally driven social dynamics. Finally, Factor 3 reflects the perception of social media as a platform that limits creativity, provides insufficient support, and does not offer a reliable environment. Since it encompasses critical viewpoints (25%), this factor was named *Critical Perspective*.

The Z-scores and rankings of responses to the Q-statements were analyzed for the second research question regarding young entrepreneurs' perceptions of the entrepreneurial dynamics of social media. The findings related to the analysis results are presented in Table 4.

High Z-scores (2.0 and above) represent prominent and strongly supported ideas within that factor. Low Z-scores (-1.0 and below), on the other hand, indicate that participants

Table 4 *Z-scores and rankings of Q statements*

| Q Statements | Factor 1 | | Factor 2 | | Factor 3 | |
|--|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| | Z | Ranking | Z | Ranking | Z | Ranking |
| 1. Social media greatly contributes to finding entrepreneurial ideas. | 1.93 | 1 | 0.25 | 23 | -1.00 | 24 |
| 2. Social media is ineffective in helping me find entrepreneurial ideas. | -1.70 | 26 | -0.40 | 32 | 1.50 | 9 |
| 3. Social media helps me improve my entrepreneurial ideas. | 0.98 | 13 | 0.20 | 24 | -1.20 | 27 |
| 4. Spending too much time on social media prevents me from developing my entrepreneurial ideas. | -1.95 | 27 | -0.10 | 29 | 1.75 | 7 |
| 5. Social media allows me to evaluate my existing entrepreneurial ideas from different perspectives. | 1.06 | 12 | 0.35 | 21 | -1.30 | 29 |
| 6. Social media helps me connect with other entrepreneurs. | 1.30 | 9 | 1.35 | 6 | -1.25 | 28 |
| 7. Building a professional network through social media is usually not as effective as meeting face-to-face. | -1.50 | 25 | 0.10 | 26 | 1.90 | 6 |
| 8. Social media plays a significant role in finding mentors and experts in entrepreneurship. | 1.22 | 10 | 0.50 | 18 | -1.15 | 26 |
| 9. Social media is not a reliable platform for collaboration. | -0.30 | 20 | -0.20 | 30 | 2.05 | 5 |
| 10. Social media provides me with great advantages in joining entrepreneurial communities. | 1.38 | 8 | 0.55 | 17 | -0.35 | 17 |
| 11. Social media helps me express myself in the entrepreneurial process. | 1.14 | 11 | 0.60 | 16 | -0.80 | 22 |
| 12. Sharing my entrepreneurial ideas on social media increases my fear of failure. | -0.60 | 21 | 0.05 | 27 | 1.30 | 10 |
| 13. Sharing my entrepreneurial ideas on social media boosts my confidence. | 1.14 | 11 | 0.45 | 19 | -1.10 | 25 |
| 14. Seeing others' successes on social media reduces my self-confidence. | -0.85 | 22 | 1.35 | 6 | 1.30 | 10 |
| 15. Social media is a platform that motivates me during my entrepreneurial journey. | 1.75 | 3 | 1.50 | 5 | -1.35 | 30 |
| 16. Positive feedback I receive on social media increases my entrepreneurial motivation. | 0.80 | 16 | 1.65 | 4 | -0.15 | 15 |
| 17. Receiving negative feedback on social media decreases my desire to be an entrepreneur. | -1.35 | 24 | 1.20 | 7 | 1.28 | 11 |

Table 4 continues

Table 4 continued

| Q Statements | Factor 1 | | Factor 2 | | Factor 3 | |
|--|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| | Z | Ranking | Z | Ranking | Z | Ranking |
| 18. Feedback received on social media is effective in improving my entrepreneurial ideas. | 0.95 | 14 | 1.50 | 5 | -0.25 | 16 |
| 19. Feedback received on social media does not significantly contribute to improving my entrepreneurial ideas. | -1.98 | 28 | 1.10 | 8 | 1.20 | 14 |
| 20. Feedback received on social media is not sufficient to test my ideas. | -1.10 | 23 | 0.95 | 9 | 1.20 | 14 |
| 21. Social media helps me improve my marketing skills. | 1.68 | 4 | 0.40 | 20 | -1.40 | 31 |
| 22. Social media does not sufficiently contribute to developing my entrepreneurial skills. | -1.95 | 27 | 0.15 | 25 | 1.60 | 8 |
| 23. Social media helps me promote my business ideas. | 1.46 | 7 | 0.30 | 22 | -0.90 | 23 |
| 24. Social media does not help me improve my skills in finding customers. | -0.25 | 19 | -0.30 | 31 | 2.10 | 4 |
| 25. Social media is not effective in improving my communication skills. | -2.00 | 29 | 0.04 | 28 | 2.20 | 3 |
| 26. Social media encourages me to compete with other entrepreneurs. | 0.70 | 17 | 1.75 | 3 | -1.40 | 31 |
| 27. Competing with other entrepreneurs on social media negatively affects my motivation. | -2.50 | 33 | 0.80 | 11 | 1.25 | 12 |
| 28. Being competitive on social media helps me achieve better results in my entrepreneurial projects. | 0.85 | 15 | 1.95 | 1 | -1.50 | 33 |
| 29. Competing on social media makes me feel pressured in my entrepreneurial process. | -2.35 | 32 | 0.85 | 10 | 1.22 | 13 |
| 30. Competing on social media makes me more ambitious about entrepreneurship. | 0.65 | 18 | 1.85 | 2 | -1.45 | 32 |
| 31. Social media helps me discover innovative ideas. | 1.53 | 6 | 0.70 | 14 | -0.50 | 19 |
| 32. Social media does not help me make my entrepreneurial ideas more creative. | -2.10 | 30 | -0.50 | 33 | 2.45 | 1 |
| 33. Seeing too much content on social media hinders my creativity. | -2.20 | 31 | -0.60 | 34 | 2.35 | 2 |
| 34. Social media encourages me to try new things in my entrepreneurial projects. | 1.61 | 5 | 0.65 | 15 | -0.70 | 21 |
| 35. Social media inspires me to create creative solutions. | 1.84 | 2 | 0.75 | 13 | -0.40 | 18 |
| 36. Social media helps me learn about innovative technologies for my entrepreneurial projects. | 1.46 | 7 | 0.79 | 12 | -0.60 | 20 |

generally disagree with these statements or that these statements are less prominent within that factor. Among the respondents who see social media as an opportunity (Factor 1), the Q statement "Social media greatly contributes to finding entrepreneurial ideas." received the highest Z score ($Z = 2.70$). In Factor 2, which focuses on the competitive environment of social media and the psychological effects of feedback, the Q statement "Being competitive on social media helps me achieve better results in my entrepreneurial projects." received the highest Z score ($Z = 1.95$). Among participants with a Critical Perspective (Factor 3), the Q statement "Social media does not help me make my entrepreneurial ideas more creative" had the highest ranking ($Z = 2.45$).

Within the scope of the third research question, it was examined whether there is a difference in the opinions of young entrepreneurs in terms of gender. The analysis results are given in Table 5.

Since the majority of the female participants showed significant alignment with factor 1, it can be said that women have similar views. The fact that the opinions of male participants are distributed across three different factors with closer loadings indicates that there are greater differences of opinion among male participants. In addition, a difference was found between men and women. While female participants emphasized the opportunity aspect of social media more (Factor 1), male participants emphasized the competition and feedback themes more (Factor 2). Factor 3, on the other hand, emerged as the category with the least expressed opinions among both women and men.

Content analysis was conducted for the fourth research question: 'What are the

reasons for young entrepreneurs choosing Q statements with extreme values (+4 and -4)?' Based on the qualitative data collected through interviews, two main themes (Positive Perceptions and Negative Perceptions) and six sub-themes were identified. The findings and examples related to the main themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 6.

Under the main theme of *Positive Perceptions*, participants highlighted several advantages of social media in the entrepreneurship process. The sub-theme *Creativity and Inspiration* revealed that social media serves as a valuable tool for discovering innovative ideas and developing creative projects. Additionally, the sub-theme *Motivation and Feedback* emphasized the impact of positive feedback from social media on boosting participants' motivation during their entrepreneurial journeys. Lastly, the sub-theme *Connections and Networking* underscored the critical role of social media in building professional networks and creating new business opportunities, further solidifying its importance in entrepreneurial activities.

Under the main theme of *Negative Perceptions*, participants highlighted several challenges and discomforts associated with social media use. The sub-theme *Competition and Pressure* revealed that the competitive environment and the pressure to gain popularity on social media were seen as negative factors. Similarly, the sub-theme *Misinformation* emphasized the participants' concerns about unreliable information circulating on social media, which complicates the process of identifying trustworthy sources. Finally, the sub-theme *Negative Tone* indicated that participants were discomforted by the overly negative focus on social media's downsides.

Table 5 Factor distribution according to gender variable

| Gender | Factor 1 (%) | Factor 2 (%) | Factor 3 (%) | Total Number of Participants |
|--------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------------------------|
| Women | 55 | 25 | 20 | 11 |
| Men | 30 | 45 | 25 | 9 |

Table 6 *Main themes and sub-themes*

| Main Theme: Positive Perceptions: Advantages of Social Media in the Entrepreneurship Process | Examples |
|--|---|
| Sub-themes | |
| <i>Creativity and Inspiration</i> | I can generate creative ideas thanks to social media, which is why I ranked certain statements as +4. |
| <i>Motivation and Feedback</i> | The supportive comments I receive on social media motivate me. That's why such statements are the most important to me. |
| <i>Connections and Networking</i> | I use social media to expand my connections, so I evaluated related statements as +4. |
| Main Theme: Negative Perceptions: Challenges and Discomforts of Social Media | Examples |
| Sub-themes | |
| <i>Competition and Pressure</i> | The pressure to be popular bothers me, which is why I ranked these statements as -4. |
| <i>Misinformation</i> | Misinformation makes it harder to determine which sources to trust. These statements do not reflect my experience. |
| <i>Negative Tone</i> | The portrayal of social media with a negative tone bothered me, as I view it as a completely positive tool. |

Discussion

This study examined how Turkish young entrepreneurs (18-34 years old) perceive and utilize social media platforms in their entrepreneurial processes, considering opportunities,

challenges, and psychological dynamics. The research addressed four specific questions: the perceived opportunities and challenges of social media, participants' evaluations of Q statements, gender-based differences in perceptions, and the reasoning behind selecting extreme values (+4 and -4) in Q-method anal-

ysis. The findings were grouped into three factors: *Opportunities of Social Media*, *Psychological Impacts of Rivalry and Feedback*, and *Critical Perspective*, providing a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced role of social media in entrepreneurship. Participants primarily framed social media in terms of what it enables, how it affects them, and what it lacks. This clustering suggests that social media, for participants, is a space to be psychologically navigated, creatively utilized, or consciously questioned. Together, these findings provide important insights into how young entrepreneurs experience the role of social media in their entrepreneurial journeys.

The findings related to the first research question indicate that young entrepreneurs view social media as a double-edged sword in their entrepreneurial journeys. While many participants acknowledged its role in offering creative opportunities and facilitating access to diverse networks, others highlighted the inherent challenges, such as misinformation and superficial interactions. These findings align with recent studies demonstrating that social media is both an enabler and a disruptor in entrepreneurial contexts (Fan et al., 2021; Miniesy et al., 2022). Participants frequently emphasized how positive feedback and motivational content on social media bolstered their confidence and encouraged idea generation. However, concerns regarding the credibility and sustainability of connections formed online were also prominent, reflecting previous findings that digital trust remains a critical challenge (Kılıç & İspir, 2020), alongside the pressure created by the competitive environment on social media for entrepreneurs (Arena et al., 2023). In the Turkish context, this dual perception of social media may be influenced by the coexistence of high digital engagement among youth and ongoing skepticism toward unregulated or overly com-

mercialized online spaces. While young entrepreneurs are eager to leverage the visibility and opportunity that social media offers, they are also sensitive to the risks of misinformation, public scrutiny, and performative competition (Turhan, 2023). This tension reflects a broader cultural tendency to navigate digital spaces with both ambition and caution, especially in environments where online credibility and social image can directly impact entrepreneurial legitimacy.

The second research question focused on understanding young entrepreneurs' perceptions of the entrepreneurial dynamics of social media as reflected through the Q statements. The findings revealed distinct patterns across the three factors. Notably, the largest proportion of participants (45%) aligned with the Opportunities of Social Media factor, indicating that many young entrepreneurs view social media as a significant opportunity and strongly agree that it contributes to finding entrepreneurial ideas. This perspective aligns with recent research indicating that social media platforms facilitate the discovery of entrepreneurial opportunities by providing access to diverse information and networks (Troise et al., 2022). This finding provides insight to the literature by highlighting that young entrepreneurs do not use social media solely for communication or promotion, but actively treat it as a space for ideation and inspiration. It extends previous work by positioning social media as a starting point for entrepreneurial creativity, rather than merely a support tool in later stages of the entrepreneurial process. In the Turkish context, social media serves as a primary space where young entrepreneurs initiate and shape their creative ideas. Moreover, the widespread reliance on social media among participants illustrates that it is an accepted and legitimized component of the entrepreneurial landscape among younger generations.

Participants focusing on the competitive environment, identified as the second most common pattern in the data (30%), acknowledge that being competitive on social media helps them achieve better results in their entrepreneurial projects. However, this competitive atmosphere can also lead to psychological pressures, such as stress and anxiety. Studies have shown that while social media competition can drive performance, it may also contribute to mental health challenges among entrepreneurs (Arena et al., 2023; Olsson & Bernhard, 2021). While the competitive environment motivates individuals to strive for better results, its psychological pressures (such as fear of failure) are less pronounced in Türkiye. This may stem from the collectivist culture, where societal expectations and communal success create a shared sense of resilience against such pressures.

Participants with a critical perspective believe that social media does not enhance the creativity of their entrepreneurial ideas. This sentiment reflects concerns that social media interactions may lack depth, limiting meaningful engagement and creative development. These findings highlight the polarized perceptions of social media among young entrepreneurs, with some viewing it as a critical enabler of creativity and entrepreneurial idea generation, while others perceive it as insufficient for fostering meaningful innovation and deeper engagement. Research supports this view, suggesting that superficial interactions on social media can hinder the creative process (Park et al., 2017). This finding contributes to the literature by drawing attention to a less represented but important segment of entrepreneurs who resist the dominant narrative of social media as inherently beneficial. Their critical stance reveals a growing need to explore not only how digital platforms support entrepreneurship but also how they may constrain creativity or fail to align with the

deeper cognitive and strategic needs of some entrepreneurs. These findings are particularly meaningful in the Turkish context, where face-to-face trust and relationship-based networking remain culturally significant (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2007). Given the enduring importance of interpersonal credibility in professional interactions, the limitations of social media in fostering deep, creative engagement may be more pronounced. It is likely that participants who expressed a critical stance in this category did so because they perceived social media as incompatible with the depth, authenticity, and relational nuance they associate with entrepreneurial ideation.

The third research question examined gender differences in perceptions of social media's role in entrepreneurship. Female participants predominantly emphasized the opportunity aspects of social media (Factor 1), reflecting its value in generating ideas and facilitating collaboration. In contrast, male participants were more focused on competition and feedback themes (Factor 2), highlighting the motivational yet potentially pressurizing nature of digital platforms. Previous studies have shown that women tend to leverage social media for networking and resource sharing (Miniesy et al., 2022), and that men are often driven by performance and competitive dynamics (Eriksson & Strimling, 2023). Although Eriksson and Strimling (2023) explored this tendency in everyday social contexts rather than entrepreneurship, their findings on higher competitiveness and preference for competitive environments among men may help explain the stronger emphasis on rivalry and feedback observed in male participants' responses. What this study uniquely adds is a deeper insight into how these gendered orientations manifest in the subjective interpretations of social media's role in entrepreneurship. Through the lens of Q methodology, it reveals that male and female entrepreneurs

not only use digital platforms differently but also assign them fundamentally different entrepreneurial meanings, viewing them either as collaborative opportunity spaces or as arenas for comparison, recognition, and pressure. In Türkiye's collectivist culture, where societal expectations influence entrepreneurial behaviors, these gendered perceptions may be shaped by traditional gender roles. In such cultural contexts, traditional gender roles tend to encourage men to act with autonomy and competitiveness, while women are often oriented toward collaboration and opportunity development within socially accepted frameworks (Dedeoğlu, 2000).

The fourth research question was aimed to understand why young entrepreneurs assigned extreme values (+4 and -4) to certain Q statements. Fan et al. (2021) identified social media's empowering role in entrepreneurship through its capacity to foster idea generation and connectivity. In line with their findings, the present study shows that, under the theme of Positive Perceptions, young entrepreneurs perceive social media as a source of creativity and inspiration, motivational feedback, and networking opportunities. These findings not only support but also expand upon Fan et al.'s conclusions by providing a more nuanced understanding of these functions within the context of young entrepreneurship. Conversely, negative perceptions underscore challenges such as competitive pressure, misinformation, and discomfort with overly critical portrayals of social media. These findings resonate with research indicating that while social media supports entrepreneurial efforts, it also introduces stress and trust-related challenges, especially for micro-operated businesses (Sawy & Bögenhold, 2023). While Sawy and Bögenhold (2023) highlight stress and trust-related issues, the present study expands on these insights, underscoring how social media may pose multifaceted challenges. These polar-

ized responses reveal how digital platforms are interpreted not only through strategic utility but also through emotional resonance, shaping how individuals experience support, pressure, visibility, and vulnerability in their entrepreneurial journeys. In the Turkish context, where collective norms, social image, and external validation often play a significant role in shaping entrepreneurial behaviors, such polarized experiences of social media may be intensified. For many young entrepreneurs, the visibility and performative nature of digital platforms are deeply intertwined with cultural expectations around success, credibility, and self-presentation, which may strengthen both the motivating and pressurizing aspects of social media engagement.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample consisted of 20 young entrepreneurs from Türkiye, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or other cultural contexts. Second, while the study examined gender-based differences, other demographic variables such as education level, business sector, business size, age, or entrepreneurial experience were not included. Finally, the qualitative component of the study focused exclusively on participants' explanations for the statements they placed at the extreme ends of the Q-sort distribution, which may have limited the scope of interpretive insights.

Future Research

Future research could focus on examining the role of specific social media platforms in entrepreneurial processes to provide a deeper understanding of platform-specific dynamics. Experimental methodologies may

be utilized to investigate potential causal relationships between social media usage and entrepreneurial outcomes. Moreover, comparative studies involving diverse age groups, professional backgrounds, and cultural contexts would offer valuable insights into the multifaceted impact of social media on entrepreneurship. Finally, future research could benefit from exploring how different educational backgrounds or industry types influence young entrepreneurs' use of social media and their entrepreneurial experiences.

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