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Research Article

Socio-digital precarity: The unequal dynamics of digital fatigue in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the invisible pressures created by digital technologies in everyday life and their unequal effects on individuals. Within the framework of the concept of "socio-digital precarity," the research approaches digital fatigue not merely as a result of screen time or individual habits, but as a reflection of structural dynamics such as the neoliberal economy, the attention economy, and performance culture. This quantitative study conducted with 807 participants from seven regions of Turkey revealed that digital fatigue significantly differs by income, age, and region, with descriptive variation by gender. Individuals with low-income and those in disadvantaged regions reported higher levels of digital fatigue, while women showed slightly higher mean scores**.** These findings indicate that digital fatigue is not an individual issue but a social problem distributed unequally. The study proposes to reconsider digital fatigue within the framework of "fatigue justice" in media and cultural studies. It offers policymakers and scholars a new perspective for discussing the ethical boundaries of the attention economy, enhancing transparency in algorithmic design, and strengthening the digital well-being of vulnerable groups.

Keywords: digital fatigue, socio-digital precarity, attention economy, performance culture, inequality

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies have become pervasive in all areas of modern life, significantly transforming individuals' practices of work, education, communication, and entertainment. As daily life increasingly unfolds through online platforms, this shift brings not only advantages but also new problems and burdens for individuals (Zuboff, 2019). One of the most tangible outcomes of this transformation is the phenomenon conceptualized as "digital fatigue." Digital fatigue refers to the mental and emotional exhaustion that arises from the constant obligation to stay connected, prolonged screen exposure, and the performance pressure encouraged by digital platforms (Dhir et al., 2018; Marciano et al., 2022).

Studies on digital fatigue have largely been grounded in psychology and health-oriented explanations. These works have focused on the links between screen time, attention disorders, sleep problems, stress, and anxiety (Marciano et al., 2022). However, such approaches often overlook the social context of the phenomenon and its relationship with inequality. Digital fatigue should not be considered solely as a personal health issue but also as a phenomenon connected to social expectations, cultural habits, and economic disparities. Therefore, feeling digitally exhausted is not only the result of screen exposure but also a reflection of broader social, economic, and cultural dynamics. At this point, Han's (2010) conceptualization of the "performance society" highlights that individuals are under constant pressure to be productive and visible, while Fraser's (2000) discussions on "representational inequality" provide a strong theoretical framework for understanding how these pressures intersect with social inequalities

Discussions on the attention economy have also become crucial for explaining digital fatigue. Platforms regard users' time and attention as the most valuable form of capital, compelling individuals to stay constantly

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connected and to produce content (Zuboff, 2019). As a result, users are positioned simultaneously as consumers, producers, and invisible laborers. Digital platforms exert pressure on individuals by forcing them to remain visible and perform continuously, thereby reproducing existing structural inequalities. van Dijk's (2006) concept of the "digital divide" reveals not only disparities in technological access but also multilayered inequalities that emerge from differences in digital skills and outcomes. Robinson et al. (2020) emphasize that these differences are crucial in shaping access to information, social participation, and economic opportunities. They argue that digital inequalities stem not merely from unequal access to technology but are deeply intertwined with broader social inequalities such as socioeconomic status, education, income, age, gender, and geographical location.

The form and intensity of digital inequalities are closely tied to each society's socioeconomic structure, cultural norms, and technological access. This study approaches digital fatigue not as individual behavior or psychological reaction but as a structural phenomenon emerging at the intersection of the attention economy, performance culture, and social inequalities. The proposed concept of "socio-digital precarity" argues that exhaustion in digital environments beyond visibility and productivity pressures is a result of power relations produced by neoliberal economies and data-driven capitalism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Santos, 2025). Thus, digital fatigue is framed not merely as a personal outcome but as an inequality shaped by global platform economies and political structures. This study approaches digital fatigue not merely as a problem that can be explained by individual screen time, but as a structural issue associated with platform design, visibility pressures, and digital inequalities. In this respect, the research aims to contribute to discussions among policymakers and platform designers regarding algorithmic transparency, ethical design, and digital well-being policies.

Turkey represents a concrete testing ground for this conceptual framework. In a country characterized by pronounced income inequality, gender roles, and regional disparities in development, digital fatigue is experienced differently across various social groups. Existing studies (Balcı & Sarıtaş, 2025; Tuncer & Levendeli, 2023) have tended to approach digital fatigue primarily in relation to individual factors such as screen time or social media use, often neglecting its connections to structural inequalities. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining digital fatigue alongside the manifestations of social inequalities within digital environments. By revealing how age, gender, income, and regional differences shape experiences of digital fatigue, the study presents a socio-digital precarity map that extends beyond individual exhaustion.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Approaches to Digital Fatigue

Digital fatigue refers to a state of cognitive, emotional, and physical exhaustion caused by constant online connectivity, intensive screen exposure, and the persistent interaction strategies employed by digital platforms (Dhir et al., 2018; Marciano et al., 2022; Reinecke et al., 2016). With the growing interdisciplinary interest in this phenomenon, the concept has been addressed within increasingly broad theoretical frameworks. Research in psychology and health sciences examines digital fatigue through the lens of individuals' mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Studies indicate that excessive screen use is associated with sleep disturbances, attention deficits, stress, and anxiety, while prolonged exposure to digital screens also leads to adverse effects on eye health and the musculoskeletal system (Almutairi et al., 2024; Marciano et al., 2022; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). These approaches demonstrate that digital fatigue is a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing both psychological and physiological dimensions.

Sociology and media studies relate digital fatigue to transformations in individuals' social roles and the cultural pressures that accompany them. Han's (2010) concept of the *"performance society"* emphasizes that individuals experience exhaustion under the pressures of visibility and productivity. Similarly, Zuboff's (2019) notion of *"surveillance capitalism"* demonstrates how digital platforms transform users' attention into economic value. Thus, digital fatigue emerges not primarily as a matter of individual choice but as a consequence of the structural pressures produced by performance culture and global platform economies.

Inequality-centered approaches reveal how digital fatigue intersects with social stratification. van Dijk's (2006) concept of the *"digital divide"* explains not only disparities in access but also inequalities in patterns of

use and their outcomes. The studies of Robinson et al. (2020) demonstrate that these inequalities become more pronounced along dimensions such as income, education, and regional differences, leading to diverse experiences of digital fatigue across different social groups.

The critical political economy approach explains digital fatigue within the context of neoliberal policies, platform capitalism, and data colonialism. From this perspective, the individual is not merely a user but also an invisible labor force whose attention, time, and personal data are continuously transformed into capital. In this way, digital platforms incorporate individuals into a surveillance-based chain of production. The concept of "*socio-digital precarity*" interprets this condition as the outcome of the unequal distribution of burdens generated by the neoliberal digital economy. Similarly, Couldry and Mejias' (2019) theory of "*data colonialism*" demonstrates how data extracted from individuals are converted into global capital accumulation, framing digital fatigue as a reflection of global power relations.

Digital Inequalities, Cultural Capital, and Socio-Digital Precarity

Digital technologies do not penetrate all segments of society equally. Individuals differ significantly in their access to information and communication technologies, in the ways they use these technologies, and in the benefits they derive from them. These differences are explained in the literature through the concept of the *"digital divide,"* which highlights the potential of digitalization to reproduce social stratification (van Dijk, 2006). The digital divide is not limited to disparities in access to technological devices. In the literature, *second-level inequalities* refer to differences in individuals' levels of digital skills, while *third-level inequalities* concern disparities in the outcomes obtained from digital use (Robinson et al., 2020). Therefore, the social effects of digitalization cannot be adequately explained through the simple opposition between "those who have access" and "those who do not." They must also be understood in relation to technological competence and the social, economic, and cultural benefits that result from digital engagement.

Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of cultural and social capital provide an important framework for explaining the digital divide. Digital skills are closely related to individuals' cultural capital; groups with higher levels of education tend to use technology more productively, whereas those with lower levels of capital often remain in the position of passive consumers (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2013). Gender also constitutes a distinct dimension of these inequalities. Women tend to experience higher levels of harassment and exclusion in online environments, which in turn exacerbates their digital fatigue (Jane, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2021).

Income inequality also leads to variations in digital media usage. Studies show that high-income groups have access to faster internet connections, more advanced devices, and a wider range of digital resources, whereas low-income groups, with limited means, expend greater cognitive effort (van Deursen & Helsper, 2015). This disparity creates notable differences not only in patterns of use but also in the quality of the outcomes achieved.

Regional inequalities further deepen the digital divide, especially in developing countries. In economically disadvantaged regions, weak infrastructure, limited high-speed internet, and inadequate educational opportunities restrict digital media use (Philip et al., 2017). In Turkey, significant disparities between western and eastern regions result in regionally distinct experiences of digital fatigue.

It is evident that digital inequalities are reproduced not only on a local scale but also globally. According to Chakravartty and Zhao (2008), in the analysis of the global media-political economy, the production of communication technologies and their economic returns have historically been concentrated in the Global North, while the Global South has largely been positioned as a site of low-cost manufacturing, labor, and a broad consumer market. In this context, Turkey occupies a position at the intersection of both regional and global inequalities; differences in digital media use are shaped not only by individual preferences but also by broader global power relations.

This study approaches digital exhaustion not as an individual issue but as a reflection of structural and cultural vulnerabilities, proposing the concept of "socio-digital precarity." The concept locates individuals' experiences of fatigue in digital environments at the intersection of the attention economy, performance culture, and social inequalities. Drawing on Standing's (2011) "precariat," it highlights the constant pressure to remain accessible and visible. Zuboff's (2019) "surveillance capitalism" and Couldry and Mejias' (2019) "data colonialism" interpret this not as individual choice but as a structural necessity of data-driven capitalism. Thus,

digital fatigue is understood not merely as a personal experience but as a vulnerability generated by global power relations.

The attention economy and performance culture are driven less by individual preferences than by the economic interests of global platform corporations. Neoliberal deregulation has granted technology companies dominance in the market, turning users' attention and interactions into invisible digital labor (Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008; Fuchs, 2014). Beer (2019) argues that social media continually pushes individuals toward performance, making visibility a new social norm. This pressure exacerbates exhaustion, particularly among young people and women. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital explains the unequal nature of visibility: groups with greater capital benefit, while vulnerable groups experience it as an added burden. Research on digital inequality (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2013; Robinson et al., 2020) shows that technology reproduces social differences, as similar digital environments yield distinct experiences across social groups.

Socio-digital precarity contributes to the literature in three keyways:

(1) it conceptualizes digital fatigue not as an individual issue but as a structural and cultural phenomenon;

(2) it links the attention economy and performance culture to broader social inequalities; and

(3) it shows, through diverse socio-demographic experiences, that digital fatigue is unequally distributed.

In Turkey, regional disparities, gender roles, and economic inequalities intensify this condition; individuals with lower income, women, and those in disadvantaged regions experience greater exhaustion. The concept diverges from both "digital fatigue" and "digital divide" perspectives. The former emphasizes individual health and psychology, while the latter highlights inequalities in access and skills. Socio-digital precarity transcends these models by locating the emotional and cognitive burdens of digital life within the wider dynamics of social inequality.

Socio-digital precarity provides a framework that transcends traditional approaches to digital fatigue and the digital divide. It explains individuals' exhaustion in digital environments not merely as a result of intensive use, but through the unequal distribution of structural pressures generated by the attention economy and performance culture. In this sense, it situates social power relations at the center and emphasizes inequalities within post-access experiences. The rationale for this concept lies in the limitations of existing frameworks in explaining digital fatigue. While the digital divide literature has made access disparities visible, psychology-based studies have largely neglected social inequalities. In contrast, socio-digital precarity addresses this theoretical gap by conceptualizing digital fatigue not as an individual concern but as a structural vulnerability produced by global capitalism.

In the context of Turkey, the findings of this study reveal that regional development disparities, gender roles, and economic inequalities influence digital fatigue at varying levels. These results move beyond the Western-centric literature, offering an original contribution to global debates through the case of Turkey. Furthermore, the research provides valuable insights for policymakers and platform designers. Digital fatigue is found to be particularly concentrated among low-income individuals, women, and those living in disadvantaged regions. Therefore, digital well-being policies should focus not only on limiting screen time but also on reducing social vulnerabilities.

This study integrates the literature on the attention economy, performance culture, and social inequality by examining digital fatigue through an interdisciplinary framework grounded in the concept of socio-digital precarity. The empirical findings reveal that experiences of digital fatigue vary across different socio-demographic groups in Turkey and indicate that structural interventions have the potential to alleviate these conditions.

Comparative analyses reveal distinct yet overlapping dimensions of digital fatigue across regions. In Europe, it is primarily linked to prolonged screen exposure, heavy workloads, and performance-oriented cultures, particularly among highly educated white-collar workers facing constant online pressure (Mikołajczyk, 2024; Syvertsen, 2020). Such conditions reduce productivity and psychological resilience while heightening stress and burnout risk (Bondanini et al., 2025; Supriyadi et al., 2025). In contrast, Asian scholarship highlights the psychological dimensions of digital fatigue, with studies from China connecting digital media use to sleep disturbances, psychological distress, and overall exhaustion (Liang et al., 2022; Puxiu et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). These findings underscore that digital fatigue operates at the intersection of

structural pressures and psychological well-being, reflecting both organizational and mental health dimensions of digital life.

The findings of the present study conducted reveal that income level and regional inequalities play a more decisive role in Turkey. Individuals with low income and those living in disadvantaged regions experience greater fatigue even with similar screen time, owing to limited digital resources and low-quality devices. This demonstrates that digital fatigue is linked not only to frequency of use but also to the quality of access. Similarly, in Latin America, limited access and low levels of digital skills in low-income regions contribute to higher levels of fatigue (Robinson et al., 2020; Zárate et al., 2023). These findings correspond with the patterns of fatigue observed in disadvantaged regions of Turkey, as evidenced by the results of the present study.

From a gender perspective, in Europe women's fatigue is often explained by online harassment and the pressure of visibility (Jane, 2017; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2021), whereas in Turkey it is more closely tied to structural inequalities intertwined with gender roles. The burden of domestic responsibilities, when combined with the pressure of online performance, intensifies digital exhaustion among women (Parlak et al., 2021).

Cross-contextual evidence indicates that digital fatigue varies systematically across gender, income, and cultural norms, positioning "socio-digital precarity" as a viable analytical framework for examining these differentiated experiences. The present study advances this framework through empirical data drawn from diverse socio-demographic groups in Turkey. The following section outlines the methodological procedures and sampling strategy used to connect this theoretical lens with the study's empirical foundation.

Existing digital fatigue research is largely structured around two approaches: psychological-behavioral models and digital inequality frameworks. Psychological models focus on individual factors such as screen exposure, distraction, and stress (Dhir et al., 2018; Marciano et al., 2022), often overlooking the social determinants of fatigue. Digital inequality perspectives highlight disparities in access and digital skills (Robinson et al., 2020; van Dijk, 2006) but pay limited attention to the emotional and cultural dimensions of digital exhaustion.

The concept of "socio-digital precarity" proposed in this study addresses these limitations by conceptualizing digital fatigue as a structurally produced and unevenly distributed phenomenon driven by the attention economy and performance culture (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Zuboff, 2019). From this perspective, digital fatigue reflects power asymmetries tied to visibility, productivity, and data-driven capitalism. By linking psychological exhaustion to inequalities of social position, gender, income, and region, socio-digital precarity reframes digital fatigue as a question of social justice.

RESEARCH METHOD

This section outlines the research design, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, measurement instruments, and analytical techniques employed in the study. The research adopted a quantitative survey design to examine the relationship between digital fatigue and socio-demographic differences. A cross-sectional model was used, enabling data collection at a single point in time and allowing comparative analyses across variables such as age, gender, income, education, occupation, and region (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The required sample size was calculated based on Turkey's 2025 population using a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$), a margin of error of ±3.5 percentage points, and the assumption of maximum variance ($p = 0.50$). Following the approach recommended by Lohr (2019), the minimum required sample size was estimated at approximately 784 respondents. The study successfully reached a total of 807 participants.

To enhance regional and socio-demographic coverage, a stratified sampling approach was employed. Primary quota targets were defined based on region and age, which served as the core stratification variables guiding participant recruitment. Other socio-demographic characteristics, including gender, education level, income, and occupation, were monitored to assess sample composition and were incorporated into post-stratification weighting procedures during the analysis phase.

Using TÜİK (2025) population statistics, each region's share of the national population was calculated, and the sample distribution was aligned accordingly. Quotas were applied to ensure a minimum number of

participants within each region-age stratum, and deviations between targeted and achieved distributions were addressed through weighting procedures.

Within the age-based quota framework, targeted and achieved numbers of participants were specified for each age group as follows: 15-24 years (targeted n = 187 / achieved n = 192), 25-34 years (targeted n = 158 / achieved n = 164), 35-44 years (targeted n = 150 / achieved n = 149), 45-54 years (targeted n = 134 / achieved n = 135), 55-64 years (targeted n = 118 / achieved n = 131), and 65 years and above (targeted n = 37 / achieved n = 36). Similarly, in line with the regional quota framework, targeted and achieved sample sizes were monitored throughout the data collection process for the Marmara (targeted n = 239 / achieved n = 228), Aegean (targeted n = 101 / achieved n = 106), Mediterranean (targeted n = 102 / achieved n = 110), Central Anatolia (targeted n = 123 / achieved n = 124), Black Sea (targeted n = 74 / achieved n = 77), Eastern Anatolia (targeted n = 62 / achieved n = 69), and Southeastern Anatolia (targeted n = 82 / achieved n = 94) regions.

Participants were invited to take part in the study on a voluntary basis through the dissemination of an online survey link via WhatsApp during the period of August-September 2025. An online, non-probability sampling strategy was employed. Dissemination was targeted to cover Turkey's seven geographical regions, and regional quota distributions were monitored throughout the data collection process. The frequency of invitations was reduced in regions where target numbers were reached and increased in regions with remaining quota gaps.

The survey link was circulated through institutional WhatsApp groups established by teachers and school administrators within the researcher's social networks, through online communities affiliated with a civil society organization, and via the researcher's personal WhatsApp status updates. As this sampling approach relied on WhatsApp use and online access, individuals without internet access or outside digital communication networks were not included. Accordingly, the findings are interpreted within the scope of an online-accessible and volunteer-based sample rather than being directly generalized to the national population.

Participants were included in the sample with attention to diversity across key socio-demographic dimensions, including age, gender, income, education, and occupation. Occupational categories were coded in accordance with the classification system of the TMYK (2020). This approach enabled systematic monitoring of the sample's socio-demographic composition and informed the application of weighting procedures in the analyses. Key demographic characteristics are presented in **Table 1**.

Data were collected using the digital fatigue scale and a personal information form. The 28-item, four-factor scale developed by Tutar and Mutlu (2024) digital addiction, psychological fatigue, physical and mental fatigue, and psychosomatic problems demonstrates high reliability (Cronbach's α = .957). In the present study, reliability analyses based on data from 807 participants indicated high internal consistency for the total scale (Cronbach's α = .929). Subscale reliabilities were also satisfactory: Digital addiction (Cronbach's α = .93), psychological fatigue (Cronbach's α = .884), physical and mental fatigue (Cronbach's α = .879), and psychosomatic problems (Cronbach's α = .812). The Personal Information Form captured demographic variables (age, gender, income, education, occupation, and region) as well as digital practices such as daily screen time and social media use.

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Mersin University Education Sciences Ethics Committee (decision no: 202, dated 13 August 2025). Participants were informed about the aims of the study and assured of confidentiality prior to participation. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and the study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles.

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26.0. After excluding incomplete or inconsistent responses, the normality of distributions was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values as well as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Descriptive statistics were followed by independent-samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine socio-demographic differences in digital fatigue ($p < .05$).

Beyond descriptive comparisons, the analytical strategy was informed by a structural perspective, incorporating considerations of attention economy dynamics, online visibility, gender, and class in order to demonstrate that digital fatigue reflects broader social inequalities rather than merely an individualized experience.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants (n = 807)

Variable		N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	336	41.64
	Female	471	58.36
Age	15-24 years	192	23.8
	25-34 years	164	20.3
	35-44 years	149	18.5
	45-54 years	135	16.7
	55-64 years	131	16.2
	65 and over	36	4.5
Educational level	High school or below	188	23.3
	Associate degree	78	9.7
	Bachelor's degree	375	46.5
	Master's degree	131	16.2
	PhD	35	4.3
Region of residence	Black Sea Region	77	9.5
	Mediterranean Region	110	13.6
	Southeastern Anatolia	94	11.6
	Eastern Anatolia	69	8.6
	Marmara Region	228	28.3
	Aegean Region	106	13.1
	Central Anatolia	123	15.2
Monthly household income	22,000 TL or below	77	9.5
	22,001-40,000 TL	148	18.3
	40,001-70,000 TL	227	28.1
	70,001-120,000 TL	190	23.5
	120,001-150,000 TL	81	10.0
	150,001 TL and above	84	10.4
Occupation	Executive/senior manager	96	11.9
	Academic and professional occupations	289	35.8
	Technician, technical staff, office and support personnel	65	8.1
	Service sector employee	36	4.5
	Skilled artisan, industrial and production worker	12	1.5
	Agriculture, livestock, forestry, and aquaculture worker	13	1.6
	Self-employed, entrepreneur, tradesperson	51	6.3
	Domestic labor/housewife	39	4.8
	Student	89	11.0
	Unemployed	42	5.2
	Retired	75	9.3
Total		807	100

FINDINGS

General Level of Digital Fatigue

This section presents descriptive findings on participants' digital fatigue and its sub-dimensions. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to show the distribution and relative intensity across dimensions. To avoid misleading comparisons due to differences in the number of items across sub-dimensions, item-based mean scores were used instead of total scores, based on the unit-weighting approach recommended by McNeish and Wolf (2020) and the true limits of the scales. In interpreting score levels, the categorization proposed by Lindner and Lindner (2024) was adopted, where scores are classified between very low (1.00-1.50) and very high (4.51-5.00).

According to **Table 2**, based on item mean scores, digital addiction ranks first (mean [M] = 3.03), followed by physical-mental fatigue (M = 3.00), psychosomatic problems (M = 2.76), and psychological fatigue (M = 2.34). Examination of the overall digital fatigue level indicates that the item-based mean score is 2.81. Considering the item mean scores, it can be concluded that participants' overall level of digital fatigue is at a moderate level. Based on the item-based mean scores presented in **Table 2**, the overall level of digital fatigue in the sample falls within the moderate range. The distribution across sub-dimensions indicates relatively higher fatigue in the digital addiction and physical-mental components and comparatively lower levels in the

Table 2. Descriptive statistics regarding digital fatigue and its sub-dimensions (n = 807)

Dimensions	Number of items	Total score (M)	Total score (SD)	Item M score	Item SD
Digital addiction	12	36.40	10.96	3.03	0.91
Psychological fatigue	7	16.36	5.82	2.34	0.83
Physical and mental fatigue	5	15.01	4.98	3.00	0.99
Psychosomatic problems	4	11.03	3.85	2.76	0.96
Total (digital fatigue)	28	78.80	22.36	2.81	0.80

Table 3. ANOVA test results of participants' fatigue levels by age variable

Age	N	M	SD	F	p	Significant difference
15-24 years	192	84.75	1.705	13.377	.000	Yes
25-34 years	164	84.45	1.708			
35-44 years	149	80.08	1.784			
45-54 years	135	74.05	1.638			
55-64 years	131	69.09	1.787			
65 years and above	36	69.05	3.357			
Total	807	78.79	0.787			

Note. n = 807 & p < .001

psychological and psychosomatic components. This pattern suggests that digital fatigue appears as a multidimensional but balanced burden rather than a condition concentrated in a single dimension or observed at minimal levels.

These patterns align with international research on digital burnout (Salanova et al., 2013; Syvertsen, 2020); however, the Turkish context reveals a more complex constellation in which socio-economic inequalities and regional disparities intensify fatigue. Thus, digital fatigue emerges not as a homogeneous psychological response but as a socially differentiated condition embedded within broader regimes of inequality. The comparative findings presented in the following subsections detail how this differentiation is structured across socio-demographic variables.

Digital Fatigue by Age Groups

The findings show that digital fatigue is most acute among younger users (ages 15-24), with levels declining steadily across older age groups. ANOVA results (F = 13.377, p < .001) confirm significant intergroup differences. As **Table 3** indicates, this gradient reflects younger individuals' heightened exposure to digital environments through academic demands and intensive social media use.

For youth, fatigue emerges not only from prolonged screen engagement but from the cultural pressures of constant responsiveness, multitasking, and maintaining online visibility. In this sense, digital fatigue can be considered as an experience associated with the social and cultural dynamics of digital environments, rather than being explained solely by duration of device use.

While middle-aged participants report comparatively moderate levels, those aged 55 and above display lower mean scores. This life-course pattern may suggest that younger generations' more intensive integration into digital environments is associated with higher fatigue levels. The variation across age groups indicates that digital fatigue may carry a generational dimension; however, further analysis would be needed to clarify how this pattern relates to broader structural inequalities.

Digital Fatigue by Gender

The analysis shows that although women report slightly higher digital fatigue than men, the difference is not statistically significant (t = 1.865, p = 0.064). Nonetheless, descriptive patterns reveal that women experience psychosomatic symptoms such as sleep disruption, headaches, and gastrointestinal distress more frequently, indicating a more embodied form of digital strain.

The absence of a statistically significant gender difference suggests that gender alone may not be a strong predictor of digital fatigue in this sample. In contrast to international research that frequently reports gendered asymmetries linked to online visibility pressures and digital harassment (Jane, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2021), the Turkish findings indicate a more nuanced pattern in which potential gender differences may depend on broader socio-economic, cultural, or regional contexts.

Table 4. ANOVA test results of participants' fatigue levels by household income variable

Income	N	M	SD	F	p	Significant difference
22,000 TL or below	77	83.23	24.58	5.390	.000	Yes
22,001-40,000 TL	148	82.04	21.24			
40,001-70,000 TL	227	80.64	23.84			
70,001-120,000 TL	190	77.92	21.02			
120,001-150,000 TL	81	75.92	19.99			
150,001 TL and above	84	68.76	20.17			
Total	807	78.79	22.36			

Note. n = 807 & p < .001

Table 5. ANOVA test results of participants' fatigue levels by region of residence variable

Region	N	M	SD	F	p	Significant difference
Black Sea Region	77	70.88	10.78	5.642	.000	Yes
Mediterranean Region	110	77.57	22.59			
Southeastern Anatolia	94	87.80	19.04			
Eastern Anatolia	69	84.43	23.60			
Marmara Region	228	79.21	21.37			
Aegean Region	106	76.54	23.10			
Central Anatolia	123	75.97	22.26			
Total	807	78.79	22.36			

Note. n = 807 & p < .001

Digital Fatigue by Income Level

The results in **Table 4** show significant income-based variation in digital fatigue (F = 5.390, p < .001).

Low-income participants tended to report higher levels of fatigue, which may be associated with the cognitive and emotional strain linked to outdated devices, slow connections, and limited technical resources. Among higher-income groups, fatigue does not disappear but assumes a different form: white-collar workers may experience exhaustion linked to continuous connectivity, accelerated work rhythms, and pervasive performance demands. Consequently, although digital fatigue declines as income rises, it persists through distinct mechanisms.

These findings suggest that digital fatigue cannot be explained solely by technological constraints and may be associated with broader socio-economic conditions, work arrangements, and everyday life patterns. In this sense, fatigue in digital environments appears to reflect income-based differences in the quality and demands of digital engagement.

Digital Fatigue by Regions

The results in **Table 5** show significant regional variation in digital fatigue across Turkey (F = 5.642, p < .001). Fatigue levels peak in Southeastern (M = 87.80) and Eastern Anatolia (M = 84.43), while the Black Sea Region reports the lowest levels (M = 70.88). Marmara, Central Anatolia, the Aegean, and the Mediterranean cluster around the national average, indicating that digital fatigue is patterned by broader regional inequalities rather than uniform digital exposure.

These disparities cannot be attributed solely to screen time. In economically developed regions such as Marmara and Central Anatolia, high work intensity and the expectation of constant online presence drive fatigue. In Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, however, limited infrastructure, poor connectivity, and lower levels of digital literacy generate a qualitatively different form of strain despite shorter screen use. Thus, digital fatigue reflects not only access but the *quality* and *conditions* of digital engagement.

International studies similarly show that inadequate devices, unstable connections, and limited digital skills increase cognitive load and frustration, intensifying digital fatigue (Castro et al., 2025; Jobs for the Future, 2022). The Turkish case aligns with this global trend, yet regional development gaps make these dynamics more pronounced. Consequently, digital fatigue in Turkey appears to display a spatial pattern that may be associated with regional socio-digital inequalities, shaped by the interaction between broader platform dynamics and local structural conditions.

Table 6. ANOVA test results of participants' fatigue levels by occupation variable

Occupation	N	M	SD	F	p	Significant difference
Executive/senior manager	96	74.40	23.18	2.882	.002	Yes
Academic and professional occupations	289	79.28	21.38			
Technician, technical staff, office and support personnel	65	82.33	22.51			
Service sector employee	36	79.97	22.19			
Skilled artisan, industrial and production worker	12	67.66	18.98			
Agriculture, livestock, forestry, and aquaculture worker	13	77.23	20.16			
Self-employed, entrepreneur, tradesperson	51	79.37	21.80			
Domestic labor/housewife	39	72.71	23.10			
Student	89	85.80	24.62			
Unemployed	42	83.45	19.50			
Total	807	78.76	22.35			

Note. n = 807 & p < .001

Digital Fatigue by Educational Level

The results show no significant variation in digital fatigue across educational groups in Turkey (F = 0.245, p = 0.912). Mean scores differ only marginally ranging from 75.77 to 79.55 indicating that educational attainment does not meaningfully predict levels of digital exhaustion. This pattern suggests that digital fatigue is not reducible to deficits in education; even highly educated individuals experience comparable strain due to the pervasive integration of digital tools into professional and academic life.

International literature presents a dual trend: lower-educated groups face greater fatigue due to limited digital skills (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2013; Robinson et al., 2020), whereas highly educated individuals report heightened exhaustion linked to constant connectivity within white-collar work cultures (Syvertsen, 2020). The Turkish sample examined in the present study reflects a convergence of these dynamics. While lower-educated users struggle with technical constraints, higher-educated groups confront the pressures of performance and 24/7 availability. Consequently, educational differences appear to be less pronounced, suggesting that digital fatigue may be linked not only to formal education but also to wider socio-economic contexts and patterns of digital integration.

Digital Fatigue by Occupational Groups

The results in **Table 6** show significant variation in digital fatigue across occupational groups in Turkey (F = 2.882, p = 0.002). Students (M = 85.80) and those in academic or professional positions (M = 79.28) exhibit the highest fatigue levels, reflecting the demands of constant online presence, multitasking, and platform-based communication. By contrast, retirees (M = 72.44), homemakers ($\bar{x}$ = 72.71), and managerial employees (M = 74.40) report substantially lower levels, indicating that digital fatigue is closely tied to the intensity of occupational engagement with digital media.

International literature reinforces these findings: students and academics experience elevated burnout due to extended screen exposure and digital pressures (Reinecke & Oliver, 2016; Salanova et al., 2013; Syvertsen, 2020). Meanwhile, lower engagement among retirees and domestic labor groups reduces fatigue but increases the risk of digital exclusion (Robinson et al., 2020; van Dijk, 2006). Although the findings generally align with global patterns, the relatively higher mean scores observed among students and academic/professional groups in the Turkish sample suggest that these groups may be more sensitive to digital demands; however, establishing that this pattern specifically stems from local institutional and cultural dynamics would require comparative and multilevel analyses.

Screen Time, Social Media Use, and Digital Fatigue

The study identifies a strong linear association between digital fatigue and screen exposure (F = 15.652, p < .001). As shown in **Table 7**, fatigue levels are lowest among individuals using screens for only 1-2 hours daily (M = 68.90) and rise considerably among those exceeding eight hours (M = 88.24). Extended online engagement correlates strongly with psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, sleep disruption, and anxiety indicating that screen time functions as a multidimensional source of cognitive and emotional strain.

Table 7. ANOVA test results of participants' fatigue levels by daily screen time variable

Screen time	N	M	SD	F	p	Significant difference
Less than 1 hour	14	78.42	20.67	15.65	.000	Yes
1-2 hours	143	68.89	19.17			
2-5 hours	347	77.24	21.37			
5-8 hours	187	83.41	22.05			
More than 8 hours	116	88.24	24.24			
Total	807	78.79	22.36			

Note. n = 807 & p < .001

Table 8. ANOVA test results of participants' fatigue levels by daily social media usage time variable

Social media usage time	N	M	SD	F	p	Significant difference
Less than 1 hour	56	63.39	19.48	37.35	.000	Yes
1-2 hours	274	70.93	19.30			
2-5 hours	338	81.70	20.99			
5-8 hours	104	92.38	21.16			
More than 8 hours	35	96.57	25.75			
Total	807	78.79	22.36			

Note. n = 807 & p < .001

As indicated in **Table 8**, social media duration exhibits a similarly pronounced effect (F = 37.357, p < .001): users with under one hour of daily exposure report the lowest fatigue, whereas those surpassing eight hours display substantially higher levels.

For younger users, the incessant flow of algorithmically refreshed content intensifies distraction, anxiety, and dissatisfaction. These findings resonate with Turkle's (2011) concept of being "alone together," wherein constant connectivity fosters superficial interactions and chronic exhaustion.

International research parallels these findings: intensive and compulsive social media use is linked to heightened fatigue, anxiety, and sleep problems (Becker & Lienesch, 2018; Dhir et al., 2018; Reinecke & Oliver, 2016). While the Turkish findings are consistent with global research linking intensive digital and social media use to elevated fatigue, the pronounced gradient observed across usage durations may suggest that contextual socio-cultural factors related to visibility and performance expectations shape how digital demands are experienced; however, clarifying the extent of this contextual influence would require comparative and explanatory research designs.

DISCUSSION

Digital fatigue has often been conceptualised as resulting from individual behaviors such as excessive screen exposure, distraction, or psychological burnout (Reinecke & Oliver, 2016; Salanova et al., 2013). This view, however, obscures how digital fatigue is embedded in broader social contexts and inequalities. A key contribution of this study is its shift from individual explanations to a structural perspective. The proposed notion of "socio-digital precarity" frames digital fatigue not as a by-product of overuse but as a form of vulnerability shaped by unequal socio-technical conditions.

Drawing on Han's (2015) analysis of the "society of fatigue," the study interprets digital exhaustion as an outcome of performance culture and visibility pressures that compel individuals to remain constantly productive and perpetually online. Turkle's (2011) account of "alone together" further illustrates how continuous connectivity fosters emotional detachment rather than meaningful interaction. Likewise, while Newport's (2019) "digital minimalism" advocates for intentional use, it reveals the limits of individualistic solutions in the face of structural asymmetries.

Within this framework, socio-digital precarity contributes in three ways. First, through the lens of the attention economy (Zuboff, 2019), it shows how platform architectures intensify exposure, making constant online presence less a choice than an algorithmic outcome. Second, visibility and performance cultures (Beer, 2019) disproportionately burden women and young people, who face greater pressure to self-display. Third, intersecting inequalities indicate that digital fatigue is shaped by income, gender, age, and region (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2013; Robinson et al., 2020).

This study advances the concept of socio-digital precarity by testing it empirically with data from 807 participants in Turkey. The findings show that low-income individuals and residents of disadvantaged regions experience significantly higher levels of digital fatigue even at comparable screen-time levels, while women display slightly higher mean scores without a statistically significant difference. These findings suggest that digital fatigue may be patterned by social inequalities rather than explained solely by individual "overuse."

The concept of socio-digital precarity addresses key gaps in existing scholarship. It shifts explanations of digital fatigue away from individual psychological accounts, reframing it as a form of social vulnerability; it links attention economy and performance culture debates directly to inequality regimes; and it provides a rare geographical contribution by empirically examining these dynamics in a context marked by pronounced regional and socio-economic disparities.

In Turkey, digital fatigue reflects not only cultural pressures or extended screen exposure but also the labor logics of global platform capitalism. Zuboff's (2019) notion of surveillance capitalism illustrates how everyday practices are monitored, converted into data and commodified. Turkish users, often unintentionally, participate in these global data-extraction systems. Their content, attention and interactions while appearing individually chosen function as digital labor that sustains platform capital accumulation (Fuchs, 2014).

Neoliberal deregulation further intensifies these dynamics. As Chakravartty and Zhao (2008) note, the global media economy systematically excludes the Global South from decision-making while positioning societies as data suppliers and consumer markets. Couldry and Mejias' (2019) notion of "data colonialism" similarly demonstrates how data extracted from users in countries such as Turkey is accumulated in global centers to generate value. Within this context, digital fatigue can be interpreted as reflecting structural pressures associated with global platform economies, rather than being reducible to individual exhaustion alone. In Turkey, it reflects a socio-digital fragility shaped by the intersection of local inequalities and neoliberal global labor regimes.

The concept additionally carries political implications. Digital fatigue is often framed as a matter of individual responsibility, yet this study argues that digital fatigue may function as an indicator of how digital engagement intersects with broader patterns of inequality. In this sense, socio-digital precarity functions not only as an academic contribution but also as an analytical tool that can inform debates on digital rights, labour conditions and social welfare.

The integration of digital technologies into everyday life has reshaped media, culture, and society, generating both opportunities and new vulnerabilities. Digital fatigue is among the clearest expressions of these vulnerabilities. This study demonstrates that digital fatigue extends beyond psychological or physiological responses, being shaped by platform design, cultural expectations, and structural inequalities. Framing the phenomenon within socio-digital precarity thus provides valuable conceptual and practical insights for media and cultural studies.

Digital platforms are intentionally designed to sustain continuous user engagement. Notifications, algorithmically curated feeds and infinite scrolling reinforce patterns of addiction rather than merely enhancing user experience (Alter, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). These design mechanisms contribute directly to digital fatigue and disproportionately affect lower-income and less-educated groups, revealing how commercially driven platform architectures intensify existing inequities.

Performance culture further illuminates the social dimensions of digital fatigue. Social media environments pressure individuals to make themselves visible, perform productivity and continuously present curated identities (Akbuğa, 2025; Beer, 2019; Han, 2015; Wang et al., 2024). This burden is particularly acute for women, youth and marginalized groups (Jane, 2017). The imperative to stay visible reinforces the need to remain constantly online, thereby deepening experiences of digital fatigue.

The findings demonstrate that digital fatigue is unevenly distributed across society. Income, education, age and gender significantly shape individuals' relationships with digital technologies. As Hargittai and Hsieh (2013) argue, digital inequality extends beyond access to encompass differences in use and in the benefits extracted from technology. Within this framework, digital fatigue emerges as an outcome of socio-economic vulnerability. In Turkey, lower-income groups experience heightened fatigue despite similar screen-time exposure, while women report greater exhaustion due to intensified visibility pressures.

The Turkish case analyzed in this study indicates both national and global dimensions of digital fatigue. While Western scholarship has largely framed digital fatigue in terms of individual experience and cultural pressures (Han, 2010; Newport, 2019; Turkle, 2011; Zuboff, 2019), research in global media political economy (Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008; Couldry & Mejias, 2019) highlights its embeddedness in broader regimes of inequality. The evidence indicates that in Turkey, heightened fatigue among low-income individuals, women and residents of disadvantaged regions reflects not only local structural disparities but also the burdens imposed by global data-labor regimes. Accordingly, the findings are consistent with an interpretation that links digital fatigue to the interaction between local inequalities and broader dynamics of global media capitalism.

The unequal distribution of digital fatigue offers three main contributions to media and cultural studies. First, it reframes digital fatigue as a mechanism reproducing social inequalities rather than an outcome of individual behavior, foregrounding structural dynamics often overlooked in mainstream media research. Second, the concept of socio-digital precarity connects performance culture and the attention economy with inequality, providing an interdisciplinary analytic lens. Third, it highlights a policy imperative: digital fatigue cannot be reduced through individual change alone but requires systemic interventions targeting platform design, visibility pressures, and digital inequalities.

From a media, culture and society standpoint, digital fatigue is not an inevitable feature of contemporary life but a form of socio-digital precarity rooted in structural inequalities. The profit-driven architectures of commercial platforms, the pressures of performance culture and existing socio-economic disparities together explain why certain groups experience fatigue more intensely. Accordingly, media and cultural studies must move beyond user-centric analyses to critically examine the design logics and social consequences of digital technologies.

These findings reposition digital fatigue as a policy-relevant issue rather than a matter of personal consumption habits. Digital platforms now function as infrastructures where attention, time and emotion are commodified, making digital fatigue a question of justice. Ensuring digital well-being thus requires policy-level action—through design regulation, access policies and protections within the attention economy. In contexts such as Turkey, where inequalities are acute, reconsidering the relationship between platform design and public policy is essential.

Within this framework, the findings of this study invite a redefinition of "digital well-being policy." Digital fatigue is most prevalent among low-income users, women and residents of disadvantaged regions, highlighting the need for equity-oriented technology policies. The concept of socio-digital precarity suggests that media policy should extend beyond access and infrastructure to address users' emotional, cognitive and social burdens. This approach expands the notion of digital rights from the right to connect to the right to be protected from fatigue, to maintain autonomy over one's attention, and to demand ethical accountability from platforms. Accordingly, the study calls for media policy grounded in justice-centered rather than purely human-centered design principles.

The cultural dimensions of digital fatigue extend beyond screen-time and are shaped by the meanings societies attach to technology. Global cultural norms that valorize constant availability and continuous updates strongly influence time management, social relations, and identity formation, especially among younger generations (Boyd, 2014; Pérez-Torres, 2024). Digital fatigue thus reflects not only psychological or physical strain but also intergenerational tensions and cultural adjustments to rapidly shifting digital norms. For media and cultural studies, it represents a key concept for understanding contemporary social transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital fatigue is not simply an individual health concern but a structural issue rooted in social inequalities. Income, education, gender and regional disparities significantly shape the distribution of fatigue, with women, low-income individuals and residents of disadvantaged regions experiencing it most intensely. These findings foreground the notion of "fatigue justice," showing that the burdens of digital engagement are unevenly allocated across society.

Addressing digital fatigue requires coordinated action between platform companies and public institutions. Platforms should be redesigned with user well-being in mind, including transparent regulation of notifications, screen-time prompts and algorithmic content flows. In line with Thaler and Sunstein's (2009) "nudge" framework, subtle design interventions—such as break reminders or late-night usage limits can help users make more mindful digital choices.

Social policy must also prioritize vulnerable groups. Strengthening legal protections against online harassment, particularly for women, expanding media-literacy initiatives for lower-income and less-educated populations, and improving rural digital infrastructure are essential steps toward reducing inequalities and promoting a more equitable distribution of digital well-being.

Educational strategies are central to mitigating digital fatigue. Digital literacy must extend beyond technical competence to include attention management, mindful media engagement and coping with online risks. Awareness programs for young people can support healthier digital practices, while policy frameworks should focus on reducing the disproportionate burdens placed on vulnerable groups.

The theoretical framework of this study reframes digital fatigue through the concept of "socio-digital precarity," highlighting how digital capitalism extracts attention, labor and time, thereby generating new regimes of inequality. In this view, digital fatigue is not simply the consequence of excessive screen exposure but a vulnerability shaped by the economic and cultural logics of digital technologies, which reproduce existing social power relations.

Future research must deepen this structural perspective. Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and ethnography can illuminate the social meanings individuals assign to digital environments. Additionally, cross-cultural comparisons are essential for understanding how digital fatigue varies across global contexts, as digital inequality manifests differently depending on cultural and economic conditions.

In conclusion, the concept of socio-digital precarity provides a framework for examining digital fatigue through the lens of social justice. The concept of socio-digital precarity offers a new theoretical direction and a useful framework for policymakers. The findings from this Turkish sample indicate that digital fatigue is shaped by global forces and local socio-economic conditions. By revealing the hidden burdens of digital life, this study supports imagining a more equitable and sustainable digital future grounded in solidarity and ethical responsibility.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Although age and regional quotas were applied, the use of a non-probability, volunteer-based online sample may have introduced selection bias and underrepresented individuals with limited internet access. The findings therefore apply primarily to digitally accessible populations. In addition, reliance on self-reported quantitative measures restricts deeper contextual understanding. Future research would benefit from longitudinal, probability-based, and qualitative approaches. Despite these limitations, the relatively large sample with regional quota controls provides a useful empirical overview of digital fatigue among internet users in Turkey.

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