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Social Networks Use, Loneliness and Academic Performance among University Students

Abstract

The world is extensively changed by Social Networks Sites (SNSs) on the Internet. A large number of children and adolescents in the world have access to the internet and are exposed to the internet at a very early age. Most of them use the Social Networks Sites with the purpose of exchanging academic activities and developing a social network all over the world. But the excessive internet usage can lead to negative outcomes such as poor school performance, depression and loneliness. According to these findings, the main aim of this research is to investigate whether internet addiction is related to academic performance and loneliness among the university students. The Emotional and Social Loneliness Scale, Scale for Social Networks and a personal information sheet were administered to a sample of 120 (61 female, 59 male) university students. The results indicated that internet addiction was positively associated with loneliness among students. At the same time we found a significant positive relationship between social networks and loneliness, but negative relationship between social networks and low academic performance. There was no correlation between social networks, loneliness and high academic performance. It has been concluded that internet addiction predicts loneliness among university students.

Keywords: social networks, internet addiction, academic performance, university students

Introduction

It is known that communication connects people with one other. It enables collaborative activities that influence our way of living. Methods for communication are not stagnant, but rather change over the course of time as a function of technology development. People have shifted from exclusively face-to-face communication with individuals in immediate physical proximity to methods of interaction over great distances. For example, the advent of the telephone and the internet revolutionized interpersonal communication.

The world is changed by the internet in an extensive way. The internet became an important part of our daily life. Internet gives us many options of communicating, such as e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms and social networking sites (SNSs). Kaplan (2005) describes it as a web-based service that gives individuals the chance to construct personal profiles and communicate with their list of connections. Social networks caused an increase of the live virtual communities through which people can communicate, share information and see each other.

There are some differences between social networks on the internet and social networks in real life. Social networks on the internet are more flexible than in real life. Some studies showed that it is easier to join social networks on the internet than to be included into groups and be effective in those groups in the real life (On, Chang & Wang, 2011). While social networks in real life include people who always meet each other and create strong connection, the Internet lets people who

have never met or seen each other be part and join the same networks. In addition, the internet makes communication easy via overcoming time and play limitations.

Today there are many popular social networking sites around the world such as Facebook, Twitter, My Space and Google Plus. The uniqueness of the social networking sites is providing users with the possibility to present them using their profile picture and personality information. It also allows users to express their feelings on the network. Social networking sites are only useful when people are really using them as application to stay connected with friends and family and share experiences, memories, happiness and sadness. However, it becomes dangerous when people are addicted to it.

Most of the networking site users are college and high-school students. College age users (between 18 and 25 years old) constitute the biggest age group, of approximately 30% of the total user population. One-third of the population of the social networking sites users are college students. The studies showed that a large number of children and adolescents in the world have access to the internet and are being exposed to the internet at a very early age. Common online activities include completing schoolwork, playing online games or reading and writing emails. The internet provides some educational benefits including access to information across a wide variety of topics, establishing educational links and communicating with peers. But excessive internet use can lead to negative outcomes such as poor school performance, social isolation, depression and loneliness.

The relationship between social networks and loneliness

Loneliness is a universal common experience. It has been described as a negative feeling that appears when there is a discrepancy between what one wants in terms of interpersonal affection and intimacy and what one, in fact, has. This discrepancy can result from the changes in the personal and social needs and desires (Weiss, 1973).

Loneliness has been defined as "the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively and qualitatively" by Preplan and Perlman (1982). According to the research findings, loneliness has a correlation with social skills of (Kaplan, 2005), introversion (Kraus, 1993), depression and anxiety (Fox et al., 1994), internet use (Kaplan, 2002).

According to researchers' findings, social network using has a relationship with anxiety (Shapiro et al., 2000), introversion (Young, 2007), increased level of depression (Cao, Su, Liu & Goo, 2007), anxiety (Sealy, Phillips & Stevenson, 2002), daily life problems (Young, 2007), shyness (Ross, Orr & Orr, 2009), loneliness (Monahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003).

Students who feel lonely use the social network mostly for communication purposes. Sometimes spending too much time on the internet leads them to loneliness. University students who are in the period of young adulthood are in need of developing close relationships.

Lonely students believe that they have problems regarding making friends, introducing themselves, joining groups and enjoying parties, so they have a high tendency for internet usage and at the same time they experience loneliness.

Researchers indicated that students who use social networking sites for a longer period of time had insignificant relationship and minimized the verbal communication to those who use them lesser (On, Chang & Wang, 2011). Today, traditional communication is neglected while benefits of the social networking sites have increased. Now it is clearer why depending of social networking sites too much might increase loneliness among young people.

Social networks and academic performance among students

Today, the process of education plays a vital role in building a modern society. Education is a unique investment of personal and academic performance. The theory and practice showed that the good academic record over the years predicts the future success of the person.

Studies have shown that the other variable related to the internet addiction is the academic achievement. Most of the students used the social networks to exchange academic activities and develop social network all over the world. They want to communicate and share their learning experiences with their peers. But some of them used social networking sites for fun, to play interactive games, visit unrelated websites and chat in chat rooms. All of these have been determined to impact the study habits of the students in a significant decrease in their academic performance. While some studies have indicated that spending long hours on the social networking sites leads to low academic achievement (Anderson & Dill, 2000), others state that there is a negative association between the internet usage or addiction and perceived impact on academic success (Anderson, 2001; Robles, McDaniel, Webb, Herman & Witty, 2010).

According to these findings, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships between social networks, loneliness and academic performance in Macedonian university students.

Methods

Participants

The sample of students was randomly selected and all of them participated voluntarily. Participants were 120 university students aged between 21-23 years. The mean age of the students was calculated as 21.50 (SD=8.97). Among the participants, 61 were female (51%) while 59 were male (49%). Study group of the research were third-year students who studied psychology at the State University of Tetova in Tetovo and Skopje.

Data collection tools

Within the scope of the study, Personal Information Form constructed by researchers, Loneliness Scale for determination of loneliness levels of students and scale for Social Network for determination internet and social network addiction status were used among university students.

Personal information form

This form includes gender, age and academic success.

Academic performance

Students were asked to self-report their grades during their studies at the University. Academic success level ranged from 6-10 and we divided students into two groups: 60 students with academic success lower than 7.50 (M=7.08) and 60 students with academic success higher than 7.50 (M=8.36).

Loneliness

The Social and Emotional Loneliness scale (SELS) was used. This scale, developed by Adorić Ćubela and Nekić (2002), is used to measure general loneliness level. The scale was composed of 36 items (13 items for social loneliness and 23 items for emotional loneliness). It is a seven-point linker type scale. The total score range from 36 to 252, with higher scores indicating greater loneliness. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency was 0.76.

Scale for social network (SSN)

The scale developed by Bodroza, Popov and Poljak (2004) was used with the participants. The scale aiming to determine internet addiction in students is composed of 42 items. It is a five-point linker type scale. According to the sum of scores, the range of total score is from 42 to 210, in which the higher score proves higher level of internet addiction. Internal coefficient of consistence (Cronbach's Alpha) was 0.82.

Data procedure and data analysis

Data collection tools were administered by the researchers during the winter semester of the 2015-2016 academic year. The instruments were applied to the students in classroom settings by getting permission from the instructors. The period for answering the scale lasted for 45 minutes.

The data was analyzed using SPSS 17.0 for Windows package program. In this study, the significance levels were accepted as .01 or .05.

Results

The results indicated that there was positive and significant relationship between internet addiction and loneliness (r= .401, p< .01) among university students. Also, the results showed that the internet addiction positively predicted emotional loneliness (r= .330, p< .01) and social loneliness (r= .374, p< .01).

There was a positive and significant relationship between loneliness and low academic performance (r= .325, p< .05), internet addiction and loneliness (r= .600, p< .01) and a negative and significant relationship between internet addiction and low academic performance (r= .150, p> .01). Also, in this group we found that the internet addiction positively correlated with emotional loneliness (r= .299, p< .05), but there was a negative correlation between internet addiction and social loneliness (r= .250, p> .05). In contrast, there was strong negative relationship between loneliness and high academic performance (r= .112, p> .01), internet addiction and high academic performance (r= .002, p> .01) and internet addiction and loneliness (r= .009, p> .01).

Discussion

The results of this study showed that there was a strong correlation between internet addiction levels of 21-23-years-old adolescents enrolled in the higher education process and levels of loneliness. According to this study, the usage of social networking sites is playing a significant role in causing loneliness in university students. At the same time, emotional and social aspect of loneliness was found to positively predict internet addiction. That means that an individual who is having way too insufficient social relations in terms of quality and quantity will be addicted to the internet. This finding implies that the students who are lonely would more likely become addicted to the internet and would also feel more lovely, happy and important while on the internet.

The benefits of using social networking sites include making new friends, growing friendship and personality development. It also improves the user's way of communication (Ellison, Seinfeld & Lampe, 2007). Nelda and Annan (2000) found that students who were pathological users of social networking sites had more academic, social and interpersonal problems as well as lower self-esteem.

Also, when we look at the results of the study, it is clear that students with low academic performance are more inclined to use the social networking sites, because they feel lonely and more isolated in real life. They cannot express themselves, experience difficulty in sharing feelings and having social communication. So they may prefer chatting with internet friends, because that is less stressful compared to face-to-face relationships (Peter, Altenburg & Schouten, 2005). The internet may be used as a defense mechanism in order to cope with loneliness.

At the same time the results in our study showed that social networking sites are not playing a significant role in inducing loneliness among students with high academic success. This means that according to our study there is no correlation between social network usage, loneliness and academic performance. Internet was negatively associated with high academic success, perhaps because the students use it to obtain academically related information or to discuss educational matters on it. We think that they are more satisfied with their real lives and do not use the internet for social communication. High achieving students may be engaged in a variety of virtual and real learning behaviors, which was effective in their educational process.

Conclusion

The present study summarizes that there is a significant positive relationship between social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter or Internet, loneliness and academic success among university students. It can be concluded from the findings that excessive usage has converse relation to students.

Students who feel lonely in real live are more likely to use online communications in order to form close relationships with those they met online. Social networking sites are tools which help them polish and maintain relationship, create online personal where they alter their identities and pretend to be someone other than themselves or to complete course assignments.

Some limitations of this study should be kept in mind while examining the results. First, the sample was restricted to university students who studied psychology in Tetovo and Skopje, so the results may not be general to all

Macedonian university students. Further research should be carried out with more group representatives including students from all the universities in Macedonia. At the same time further studies should be conducted with different demographic variables such as religion, ethnicity, family size, socioeconomic status and different personality traits.

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