

Investigating the relationship between social networks and social health of students

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Abstract

Social networks are new media and many people, especially students, are unfamiliar with various effects of these networks on their lives; hence, it seems necessary to conduct more research on their effects on students' lives and health conditions. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between social networks and social health of a group of students. The study used a descriptive-correlational approach. The study population consisted of all the students at Islamic Azad University, East Tehran Branch, Iran, among whom 200 individuals were enrolled using simple random sampling method. Young's Internet Addiction Test and Keyes' Social Health Questionnaire were used to collect the data. The data was analyzed using one-sample t-test, Pearson correlation test, and regression analysis. Based on the findings, there was a significant relationship between the students' social networking activities and their social health.

Keywords: Social health; social networks; new media

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1. Introduction

The development and expansion of the communications industry in the present era has led to the emergence of a communication and information network called the Internet. This world-wide communication network has increased the speed and volume of global communication and information flow and has resulted in the formation of new social groups and networks, which are totally different from those formed in the real world. These virtual social networks are also called social networks (Urena *et al.*, 2019). Virtual social networks are among the most modern communication technologies presented by international providers in economic, social, cultural and political areas, which help users maintain existing social relationships, build new relationships, change and develop their websites, and share their experiences with others. They also provide users with targeted membership, activity, and contribution initiatives.

The term social health includes an individual's feelings and actions and describes his/her internal responses (emotions, thoughts, and behaviors) to various stimuli (Cheraghali *et al.*, 2013). Virtual social networks affect social health of users, especially younger ones. Keyes defines social health as an individual's personal account of the quality of his/her relationships with others. In this sense, social health refers to an individual's understanding of society as a meaningful, comprehensible and potentially useful medium which contributes to personal growth and prosperity by giving him/her a sense of belonging to society, and involvement in its development.

Today, due to the increasing use of computers and the growing Internet penetration rates, many people, especially students, suffer from various mental health and social disorders such as computer addiction. Online social networks are nowadays very popular among young people. Different generations, especially young people, use these networks to exchange their views and ideas and meet their social needs. Considering the appealing functions of these social networks and their ease of use, several researchers working in areas of culture and communication have investigated the effect of these networks on people's lifestyles.

1.1. Related research

Gavilanes *et al.*, (2018) in a study showed that social networks positively affect students' creativity levels. In addition, the study of Derakhshi, Rezaii, Razavi & Sarfaraz (2016) revealed that social networks positively affect an individual's critical thinking abilities. Gholizadeh, Nourian & Shahmohammadi (2017) investigated the relationship between the use of virtual social networks and social health of female students, and found a significant relationship between the use of these networks and social health of the studied students.

Gavilanes *et al.*, (2018) found a significant positive relationship between the use of virtual social networks with students' academic procrastination and academic anxiety levels. In his study, Farhadi, Zandkarimi & Jafari (2019) observed that the early maladaptive schemes of female students addicted to the Internet are significantly different from those of normal people. Javadinia *et al.* (2012) conducted a study entitled "the effect of virtual social networks on academic performance of students of Birjand University of Medical Sciences and Health Services". They found that students with lower GPAs spent significantly more hours surfing social networks.

In their study on the prevalence of Internet addiction among students of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, Ebrahimi *et al.* (2018) found significant correlations between Internet addiction rates with the application of Internet, the time and duration of Internet use, and student's age and gender. Shahbazi and Mirdrikvand (2014) conducted a study entitled "the relationship between Internet addiction with depression, mental health, and demographic characteristics of students of Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences". The results suggested that Internet addiction has a significant positive relationship with depression, but a negative relationship with mental health.

Zhou, Liu & Liu, (2020) found that academic self-efficacy plays a major role in predicting level of Internet addiction, and academic procrastination ranked second in this respect. In the study of Ybarra *et al.* (2005), the intensity of Internet use was higher in young people who had reported higher anxiety levels during school time. Odaci (2011) found no significant relationship between academic procrastination and Internet dependency. Akin and Iskender (2011) in a study on 300 Turkish university students entitled "Internet addiction and depression, anxiety and stress" reported that depression and anxiety are major predictors of Internet addiction.

1.2. Purpose of study

The high penetration of Internet in Iran and the increasing number of social media users have led to significant changes in Iranians' lifestyles, as well as in various aspects of their personal and social lives. Social networks are new media and many people, especially students, are unfamiliar with various effects of these networks on their lives; hence, it seems necessary to conduct more research on their effects on students' lives and health conditions. Such studies can examine these networks to raise people's awareness of the effects of such communication tools on their lives. Students are among the largest users of Facebook and universities provide students with access to the cyberspace and to various social networks. This can affect their cognitive, affective, cultural, and practical orientations and attitudes, and can change different aspects of their lives including their social health. In this study, the main question was whether there is a relationship between social networks and social health of the studied students or not. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between social networks and social health of a group of students.

2. Research method

2.1. Participants

This was a descriptive-correlational study. The study population consisted of all the students of Islamic Azad University, East Tehran Branch, Iran, among whom 200 individuals were selected using simple random sampling method. The sample size was increased to 220 to compensate for the potential loss to follow-up bias.

2.2. Data collection instrument

The incomplete questionnaires were discarded and a total of 200 male and female individuals were selected as the final participants. The data extracted from Young's Internet Addiction Test and Keyes' Social Health Questionnaire were analyzed in SPSS, and the research hypotheses were tested.

2.2.1. Internet Addiction Test:

This 20-item questionnaire is one of the most valid tests used for measuring Internet addiction. It was developed by Dr. Kimberly Young to measure the severity of internet addiction in different people.

2.2.2. Keyes' Social Health Questionnaire:

Keyes developed this 25-item scale based on his hypothetical model of social health, and confirmed the five-dimension model embedded in the scale using confirmatory factor analysis. These dimensions include social coherence, social acceptance, social contribution, social integration, and social actualization. Each dimension of social health contains five items (25 items in total). The items are scored on a five-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

2.3. Analysis

The questionnaire were analyzed in SPSS. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to confirm the five-dimension model for the 25-item scale.

3. Results

The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in the following tables.

Table 1

Distribution of participants by gender

Female	102	0.51
Male	98	0.49

Table 2

Distribution of participants by age

18-22	63	31.7
22-26	102	51.7
26-30	25	12.7
≥ 30	10	3.7

Table 3

Distribution of participants by educational qualifications

Bachelor degree	166	88.7
Master degree	34	6.7

Table 4

Statistical analysis of social health

Research hypothesis	Social health of students	3.32	0.31	3	13.03	349	0.000
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Table 5

Regression statistics

Correlation coefficient (R)	R-squared (R2)	Adjusted coefficient of determination	Estimated standard error
0.57	0.122	0.32	0.299

According to the above table, the overall correlation between the research variables is 0.57, which is a relatively moderate correlation. In addition, the obtained coefficient of determination shows that the components of social support, network relations and social network contribution predict 32% of variance of social health.

Table 6

Analysis of variance

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4.263	3	421	15.955	0.000
Residual	30.814	346	0.089		
Total	35.076	349			

Based on the Table 4-6, the significance value of 0.000 confirms the linear relationship between the variables at a 95% confidence level.

Table 7

Estimation of regression coefficients

Coefficient	Non-standard coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Sig.
	B	Standard error	Beta		
Constant	1.70	0.24		7.079	0.000
Social contribution	0.085	0.038	0.116	2.240	0.020
Social support	0.620	0.10	0.316	6.216	0.000
Network relations	0.014	0.027	0.027	0.520	0.603

The overall correlation between the research variables is 0.57, which indicates a relatively moderate correlation between these variables.

4. Discussion

The present results indicate that the qualitative and quantitative development of social relations and actions have further attracted young residents of Tehran to online settings. In other words, virtual social networks provide young users with an opportunity to socialize and share ideas with their friends in a

non-politicized environment (Ebrahimabadi, 2009). Other factors tempting young residents of Tehran to join online networks include expressing one's real self, releasing emotions, public communication, benefiting from entertaining means and content, and linking with non-Iranians in a multicultural context. The findings are also consistent with the study of Livingstone, (2008).

Social networks serve as sources of support for people. Different social networks improve public welfare. The structure, function, and quality of provided social aids and supports significantly contribute to the welfare of individuals, especially students. The structural aspect of these social supports is associated with the size of a network, intimacy of its members, family relations, frequency of member interactions, and organizational activities of members. The findings are in line with the findings of Chien Yuen and Yuen Ka (2013). They observed higher levels of social actualization, coherence, integrity, contribution, and acceptance in students who use social networks.

5. Conclusion

The present study investigated the relationship between social networks and social health of students of Islamic Azad University, East Tehran Branch. Based on the findings, the components of social support, network relations and social network contribution predicted up to 32% of variance of social health. The component of social support played the main role in explaining the variable of social health. This implies that higher levels of network relations lead to more sources of social support, which in turn result in higher social health levels.

Sharing information and news, establishing free relations, benefiting from free flow of information, controlling personal information, and benefiting from systematic equality are among the major factors encouraging Iranian students to join Facebook.

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