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Opinions of a group of academicians about social media communication in Turkey

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine opinions of a group of academicians about social media communication. The study was designed as a descriptive study in the qualitative design using semi-structured questions. The study was conducted with a total of 12 academicians in the 24-48 age range in the health faculty of a state university in Turkey. As a result of the study, two main themes were created as positive sides of communication through social media and negative sides of communication through social media. Determination of opinions of academicians about social media communication may be important for planning the curriculum including both positive and negative effects of social media communication in the university education.

Keywords: Academician; communication; education; social media communication.

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1. Introduction

Social media applications allow their users to communicate with each other, exchange their thoughts, share information and content, and share pictures on the Internet (Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Staksrud, Olafsson & Livingstone, 2013). Evaluation and management of the effects of social media communication on users can provide them more effective utilization of social media communication in addition to reducing negativities that can be encountered.

Communication is defined as a verbal or text message transmitted from sender to receiver and encoding this message by the receiver (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). Today, communication has gained a new dimension with social media. Classical communication takes place in a real environment, while social media communication takes place in an online environment. Therefore, Facilitating and risk factors of online environments should be taken into account while assessing the impact of social media communication on interpersonal relationships.

Social media provides instant information to its users without time and place limitations and allows them to freely share their thoughts and feelings. Social media guides job seekers with applications such as social media content manager and community manager and offers them meet new people reaching entertainment or academic oriented organizations. In addition, it makes it easier to organize broad masses in accordance with the intended goals (Blanchnio, Przepiorka & Pantic, 2016; Contena, Luscalzo & Taddei, 2015; Lakhani, 2013).

In addition to above-mentioned contributions, the use of social media is capable of violating privacy of life by sharing content about private lives of people and lead users to a confrontation with legal problems (Lakhani, 2013; Qi & Edgar-Nevill, 2011). Long-term use of social media lead to Internet addiction (Hong, Huang, Lin & Chiu, 2014; Magsamen-Conrad & Greene, 2014; McBride, 2011; Yao & Zhong, 2014). Hiding true identities while creating social media accounts may cause personality disorders and reveal unrealistic self-values (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007; Seidman, 2014). Furthermore, establishing communication with other partners in the social media can lead to divorces y damaging the relationship status of partners (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Valenzuela, Halpern & Katz, 2014).

Sampasa-Kanyinga and Hamilton (2015) investigated the relationship between the use of social media and mental health problems in adolescents, Contena et al. (2015) investigated the effects of social media on its users and Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014) investigated the effects of social media on life quality and stress level of users and they reported that social media communication causes psychological stress, suicidal thoughts and attempts among its users and reduced the quality of life despite providing benefits such as entertainment. Valenzuela et al. (2014) investigated the effect of social media on marital relations and divorce and they have found that people who are not happy in their marriages use social media and suggested that the subject should be studied in depth.

In the literature, although there are studies investigated the effects of social media on interpersonal relationships in various cultures and groups, investigating the views of faculty members about social media communication is considered to be important because of their educational role. There is no other study conducted yet investigated the views of academicians in Turkey. Therefore, conducting this study is considered to be necessary in terms of its methods and results. The study was designed as a descriptive study in the qualitative design in order to determine opinions of a group of academicians about social media communication.

2. Method

This study was designed as a descriptive study in the qualitative design using semi-structured questions.

2.1. Sample and procedure

The study was conducted with a total of 12 academicians in the health faculty of a state university in Turkey in April 2016. The purpose of the research was explained and the research was administrated. Each academician participated in the study was asked semi-structured open-ended questions to collect the data. Open-ended questions were used to evaluate the experience of academicians on communication through social media. All interviews were conducted in Turkish. In order to evaluate the opinions of academicians in accordance with purpose of the study, the following questions were asked; "What do you think about establishing communication through social media?", "What do you think about encouraging communication through social media?". Quantitative data of the study were analyzed by examining social-demographic form prepared by the researchers about participants. Social-demographic form included such data as the participants' age, sex, marital status, daily internet usage and use of social media. The informative and other open-ended questions were reviewed and formulated by methodologists and experts. The participants included in the study were informed about the study and permission was obtained for interview and voice recordings.

2.2. Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Analysis of narrative transcriptions was obtained from Colaizzi's phenomenologic data analysis approach. During the analysis, participants' oral descriptions were read separately by the researchers to draw a general understanding. Significant statements and phrases related to the study objectives were found. Meanings were formulated from these significant statements and phrases. The formulated meanings were then organized into themes. Results of the data analysis were integrated into a description of the experience. To ensure credibility of data analysis, the transcripts were examined repeatedly by each researcher. Two researchers worked separately to identify the key categories of the transcripts. The researchers compared the separate coding and a general congruency of the coding was attained despite minor differences primarily due to choice of words. Differences were discussed until a final agreement was made. One theme was created by merging similar statements for every opinion. One major theme was formulated from the analysis, reflecting common opinions of participants. To achieve final validation (Colaizzi, 1978), member checking was used. After data analysis in Turkish, the participant's statements were then translated into English, keeping the original meaning. The English translation was then back-translated into Turkish by a bilingual speaker to make sure that the translation was correct. Finally, the two translations were matched for the original meaning of the Turkish version.

3. Results

3.1. Characteristics of academicians participated in the study

The participants were in the age range of 24-48 and their mean age was 31.41 ± 7.79 . 10 of the participants were women (83.3%), while the remaining 2 (16.7%) were men. 8 (66.7%) of them were married and the remaining 4 (33.3%) participants were single. The average daily internet usage time of the participants was approximately 2.66 ± 0.98 hours. 4 (33.3%) participants stated that they don't have any social media account, while 8 (66.7%) have stated that they use social media, respectively.

3.2. Opinions related to social media

After qualitative data analyses were made; two main themes were generated as follows:

1. Positive aspects of communication established through social media
2. Negative aspects of communication established through social media

Theme 1. Positive aspects of communication established through social media

The participants have suggested that individuals easily access to information through social media. They reported that social media facilitates communication between individuals living distinct from

each other in different regions and stated that social media accelerates access to information in education and search for scientific truth.

Theme 1.1. Assisting scientific and academic development

“...I think social media improves users when it is used for official and academic purposes...” (Participant 1, 27 years old).

“...I think social media improves users when it is used for official and academic purposes; because you can reach information immediately without spending too much effort. I think this is a great advantage...” (Participant, 2, 31 years old).

“...Establishing communication through social media may help users to improve themselves academically and scientifically. They can easily reach scientific information in a short time...” (Participant 3, 34 years old).

“...I think social media facilitates communication. Since most of the students use social media to reach lecture notes and relevant sources, it seems useful...” (Participant 4, 29 years old).

“...I believe social media is advantageous when used for the right purposes like following scientific developments....” (Participant 5, 30 years old).

“...I can communicate with scientific communities in different countries or I can introduce myself and I can be aware of conferences and seminars through social media. In this respect, I think social media is very useful....” (Participants 6, 24 years old).

Theme 1.2. Ensuring communication of people living in different cities/countries/continents, social support, getting closer.

“...People who live far away from each other can be aware of each by sharing their photos...” (Participant 7, 24 years old).

“...Facilitating communication between people unable to reach each other in different cities is an advantage...”. (Participant 7, 24 years old).

“...I think social media makes it easier to follow each other...” (Participant 1, 27 years old).

“...People are able to communicate with each other while in the far distance by using social media. This is a great advantage. In addition, social media allows people to get in touch with close relatives and it is speed of information sharing though social media is another advantage...” (Participant 8, 28 years old).

“...Social media can be used the purposes that will benefit the people since it provides possibility to influence the broad masses....” (Participants 10, 46 years old).

“...I can find some of my friends on social media even if I haven't seen them for a long time. Considering the advantages of social media, it is very advantageous and comfortable for me...” (Participant 9, 27 years old).

Theme 2. Negative aspects of communication established through social media

The participants included in our study stated that communication through social media the social distance between individuals is forced, face to face communication is avoided and fake relationships are established due to the communication through social media. It is reported that this situation has an adverse effect on social and family structures, it reduces personal privacy and causes internet addiction.

Theme 2.1. Pushing to the limits in communication

“...I see people more aggressive in social media since there is no face to face communication. In addition, abstract concepts are used through Twitter or Facebook. There are ongoing talks without a respondent...” (Participant 11, 48 years).

“...I think everyone does not reflect the true opinions in social media. Therefore, I can't be positive about it...” (Participant 1, 27 years old).

“...More fake relationships can arise. Showing the impossible as it is possible may show different selves. As I said, these negativities are pretending to have something that you don't have or following those you want to be, sharing their thoughts as we call cyberbully...” (Participant 12, 29 years old).

“...I think there are antisocial people trying to hide from the real world. When individuals fail in face to face communication, they try to show themselves outstanding in a different area...” (Participants, 10, 46 years old).

Theme 2.2. Abuse, addiction and uncontrolled use

“...It fact it is dangerous. In this sense, people met through social media and married came to my mind. I do not think it is very healthy. In addition, the use of social media such as Facebook may lead to child abuse...” (Participants 4, 29 years old).

“...Yes, social media has some benefits. But I think it is little overrated and used unnecessary...” (Participants 3, 34 years old).

“...It should be used only when necessary. Because it may turn into addiction...” (Participant 9, 27 years old).

“...Therefore, I don't think it is very healthy to spread in this way....” (Participants 4, 29 years old).

“...Young people don't know what they share. They are supposed to know how to use it. These may lead to divorces and defamation cases. People should be controlled when they are encouraged to use social media...” (Participant 2, 31 years old).

“...It is not safe to give personal information. I think negative about sharing photos. I think it is not appropriate for privacy....” (Participants 2, 31 years old).

“...I don't think things that should be talked face to face cannot be talked though social media. I see that people don't pay attention to privacy and confidentiality....” (Participant 8, 28 years old).

Theme 2. 3. A type of communication that prevent face to face communication

“...It is not like face to face communication. You can better understand emotions of people from their facial expressions in face to face communication. Gestures mean a lot in communication. They make you understand the other person you are communicating with. Neither Facebook nor Twitter is not like face to face communication. For example, you share your happiness if you have a moment together. You establish eye contact. But, you cannot have this on the social media....” (Participant 7, 24 years old).

“...Obviously, nothing can take place of face to face communication. This is a common fact. Face to face communication is best, because you can see facial expressions and emotions of people...” (Participant 6, 24 years old).

“...I think social media damages relationships between people...” (Participant 12, 29 years old).

“...I don't understand those trying to establish communication with others on social media. Therefore, I don't have positive thoughts about them. I think it is very valuable to see emotions, facial expressions and eyes of other people. I think communication should be face to face. It makes sense to communicate with people in different cities. However, I don't think it is realistic to reach each other through social media if you can communicate face to face....” (Participant 5, 30 years old).

"...Communication can be established through social media, but I don't think it is as effective as face-to-face communication or making a phone call. I considered Facebook and Twitter as websites to follow each other. I am not an active user of these sites. I just check my emails." (Participant 1, 27 years old).

Theme 2.4. Social isolation caused by social networks

"...I don't like communicating face to face, but I want to see my friends that I met in the past. Social media helps me when I can't find time to meet people face to face and I can easily find my friends through social media. I don't spend time to meet with my friends. I think it is advantageous to use social media when I get in touch with people with no face to face communication. In addition, since I am an official person, I don't want to have face to face communication with people. Communication through social media makes it more official..." (Participant 9, 27 years old).

"...I think communication in this way isolates people from the community and makes it difficult to enter into relationships with people and doom people to loneliness..." (Participants 10, 46 years old).

"...However, sometimes you are texting with your friend in the next room via social media. This is ridiculous, but sometimes we do it..." (Participant 7, 24 years old).

4. Discussion

Internet-based social media communication has both positive and negative effects (Campisi, Folan, Diehl, Kable & Rademeyer, 2015; Contena et al., 2015; Staksrud et al., 2013). According to a study conducted on social media, children using social media are exposed to more sexual images since social media allows its users to establish communication with more people, while another study states that social media reduces loneliness of its users (Skues, Williams & Wise 2012; Staksrud et al., 2013). Identification of advantages as well as risks of establishing communication through social media will increase the level of utilization of social media users and enable them to be prepared against the negative effects.

In our study, it was determined that academicians use social media in order to update scientific information and news, connect with other scientific people living in different countries and for educational purposes. This was an expected result since academicians were included as the participants of our study. Sobaih, Mousstafa, Ghandforoush and Khan (2016) reported that academic staff use social media for academic and educational purposes. Social media is important to academicians in their professional lives, in the use of scientific and technological developments in their academic studies since social media facilitates access to knowledge and sharing information (Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Sobaih et al., 2016). In another study conducted by Manca and Ranieri (2016), similar to our results, it was emphasized that academicians in Italy use social media for personal, educational and professional purposes as well as about their professions.

In our study, one of the positive aspects of communication established through social media was found as removing the distance between people living in different cities, countries or continents, enabling them to connect and communicate by providing social support. Academicians agree that social media is a factor facilitating their communication with close relatives living far away. According to this result, it can be said that social media provides social support by facilitating communication between people. Forbush and Foucault-Welles (2016) investigated the effect of social media on adaptation of Chinese students in the US and concluded that social media communication helps students to find each other, provides social support to them and positively contribute to these students by making them feel as part of a group. According to Mantymaki and Islam (2014), social media may contribute to continuation interpersonal relationships by supporting people to communicate with each other and it can be used to communicate with large communities in a short time (Georgescu & Popescu, 2015; Graham, Avery & Park, 2015; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Similar to our result, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) reported that social media communication is more effective

than traditional means of communication when it is necessary to contact with customers in a short time.

Academicians who participated in our research emphasized negative aspects of social media communication too often. Academicians stated that social media communication pushes the limits in interpersonal relationships, people can behave aggressively in social media, make judgement sentences without a direct respondent, individuals with aggressive behaviors use social media more frequently and these people fail in interpersonal communication with others. They think that social media users don't have true identities. Although social media users may exhibit behaviors such as lying, threatening, using rude words that damage interpersonal communication (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007), Patton et al. (2014) reported that online attacks on social media are less violent compared to verbal and physical aggression when people communicate with each other in the same environment. According to Van der Merwe (2013), the characteristics of users have effect on the occurrence of these behaviors. Drouin and Miller (2015) investigated the relationship between the use of social media and personality traits of 442 young adults with illegal social media records and determined that people with antisocial personality disorder use social media more often. This result is consistent with results of our study.

Academicians participated in our study stated that social media is open to malicious use, it can lead to addiction and may cause many negativities if not controlled. They emphasized the negative effects of social media communication and reported social media as cause of social harm, child abuse and divorces as well as reduced privacy and internet addiction. In recent years, the use of social media communication is increased. The related disorder, DSM-V is given under the section titled "Substance Use and Addictive Disorders". This diagnosis covers not only drug addiction, but also compulsive behaviors observed with substance abuse as well as compulsive behaviors (pathological gambling, sex addiction, Internet addiction, etc.) not seen with substance abuse (DSM-5). Similar to the results of our research, Blachnio et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between Facebook addiction, self-esteem and life satisfaction and reported that unconscious social media use can lead to addiction in users and as a result of the study; they stated that the level of addiction increases as the Facebook usage frequency increases. The academicians participated in the study stated that social media can lead to marital problems. Similar to our study results, Valenzuela et al. (2014) investigated the relationship between the use of social media, satisfaction in marriage and divorces and reported that the use of social media adversely affects happiness and quality of the marriage and increases the thought of getting divorced. This result obtained from our research is important in terms of uncovering vulnerabilities in family and community life by social media communication.

Another result we obtained in our study that social media may lead to child abuse and deterioration mental health and behaviors of children and adults if misused. According to McBride (2011), social media may cause psychiatric problems such as sleep disorders, depression and addiction on children and teenagers. In addition, social media can be misused by these groups by sharing unnecessary information. Van Quytzel, Van Gool, Walrare, Ponnet and Peeters (2016) investigated romantic relationships of adolescents in social media and reported that uncontrolled sharing on social media leads to jealousy and they can receive threats due to these information shared through social media. This result is considered to be significant in terms of protecting structure of Turkish society and family and drawing attention to the fact that social media can lead to child abuse.

In our study, it was concluded that social media communication is a form of communication that prevents the traditional face to face communication despite the importance of gestures and facial expressions in face to face communication. Similar to our results, VanDoorn and Eklund (2013) stated that social media communication prevents face to face communication and limits feelings of its users. Van Ouytsel et al. (2016) stated that although emotions can be easily seen in face-to-face communication, they cannot be fully reflected in the communication established through online communication technologies and it may lead to misunderstandings.

Another result of our study; social media communication may lead to isolation and loneliness. The participants of our study stated that social media communication is a facilitating factor in maintaining interpersonal relationships for those suffering from face to face communication. Similar to our result, Pierce (2009) stated that users avoiding face to face communication prefer online communication. Magsamen-Conrad and Greene (2014) have drawn attention to comfort and facilitating effect of online communication for those having difficulty in face-to-face communication. Orr et al. (2009) stated that internet-based communication technologies help individuals with limited social communication skills to freely communicate with other individuals by creating their own identities. According to Sheldon (2008) individuals having difficulties in face-to-face communication use social media to reduce their loneliness. Because establishing communication with others without the necessity of face to face communication makes them feeling better (Clayton, Osborne, Miller & Oberle, 2013; Erwin, Turk, Heimberg, Fresco & Hantula, 2004).

5. Limitations and Conclusions

In this study, there are some limitations. Results of this study cannot be generalized for academicians in other departments and countries since it was conducted with a group of academicians in a department of a university in Turkey. Another limitation of our study is including academicians, who voluntarily agreed to participate, in the health vocational school only.

Today, social media communication is an indispensable tool. Because people can develop themselves as long as they adapt to the requirements of age. In this study, we have found that many issues highlighted in the face to face communication differentiate in social media communication. According to the findings of this study, academicians, who have important roles and responsibilities in the education of community, often emphasized negative aspects of social media communication. According to them, social media is often used by antisocial or asocial people with poor communication skills. In addition, social media communication can be comfortable for people who do not like to communicate face to face. On the other hand, social media has some advantages such as facilitating communication of individuals living in different places, providing access to information and allowing them to share these information. Evaluation of social media by academicians in different countries will contribute to our results. In university education, planning a curriculum including all positive and negative effects of social media communication is considered to be significant.

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