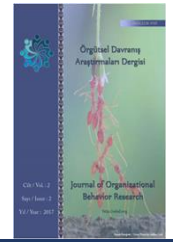




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EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE USE OF VIRTUAL SOCIAL NETWORKS AND ADOLESCENT IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to evaluate the relationship between the use of virtual social networks and the identity of adolescents and to explain the relationship between these variables. The present study is a survey and correlational type of study. The research population included all secondary school students of Kermanshah in 2018. The multi-stage cluster sampling method was used in this study. The results showed that there is a relationship between using virtual networks and adolescent identity.

Keywords: *Virtual social networks, identity, adolescents.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the key characteristics of the information age is the use of information superhighways, that the Internet is the most important of them. The Internet provides an opportunity for humans to interact with each other simultaneously, despite being physically in different locations. In addition, people communicate with other people around the world through the Internet. The Internet is considered as the newest modern mass media. This media has invented new methods for human communication (Ataei Nejad, 2013). The need to communicate in humans on the one hand and the modernization of societies and, consequently, a reduction in face-to-face communication on the other hand, have led people to turn to virtual communities in order to communicate with each other. It should be noted that the form of social interactions in the virtual world differs from that of the real world, but individuals both in real networks and in virtual networks seek to meet their need for social relations. These relations form the cornerstone of society. In other words, access to the Internet saves people from isolation, but the form of their communication is transformed from traditional (face to face) to modern (virtual) form (Akbari Tabar, 2011). Global and national statistics suggest an increase in the number of social network users on the Internet, so the way of spending leisure time in social networks by adolescents affects their quality of life and mental and social health (Niazi, 2011). Given what was stated, this study aims to evaluate the relationship between the use of virtual social networks and adolescent identity and explain the relationships between these variables.

Problem statement

The Internet is one of the most influential new communication technologies influenced all aspects of human life. The Internet has become increasingly popular among users and it has become a unique means of communication. It is now beyond the control of governments and institutions in societies (Jafari and Rouhani, 2014). In Iran, the rate of using the Internet has also grown significantly in recent years. Based on the recent statistics, the number of internet users in Iran has been increased by 20 times. Based on the latest studies in Iran, the majority of the Internet users are youths and adolescents and 30% of them chat, 22% play computer games, 35% review e-mails, and 20% are searching the World Wide Web in virtual spaces. Although growing technology has brought more comfort and welfare for families, the Internet has caused many serious problems, such as bulk production, presentation of abnormal images and contents and non-confidentiality of information. Social networks are the place for gathering of hundreds of millions of the Internet users who interact and exchange information regardless of boundary, language, gender and culture. In fact, social networks have been designed to enhance social interaction in virtual space. In general, communication is facilitated by information that is placed on people profile such as a user photo, personal information and interests (all of which provide information about people identity). Users can view others' profiles and interact with each other through various applications such as email and chat (Memar et al., 2012). With the advent of the global data network or the Internet, time, place and identity have found new definition. The Internet is, in fact, a place where people can easily communicate, contract, form groups, send messages or introduce something. In this place, the geographical boundaries have no meaning. For this reason, logical difficulties of time and place have been eliminated. Everything is in motion in the Internet and this motion is always accelerating. The fluid identity formed in such an environment separates the individual from the specified and inflexible framework that is in the outside world and allows him to manifest himself. Such a space that liberates the person from the constraints and provides him an opportunity to work in a space beyond the real world can overshadow his religious and national identity. Given what was stated on the Internet and virtual space, identity, and adolescents, the present study aims to provide evidence on the relationships between these variables in students and to answer the question of if there is a relationship between the rate of using virtual social networks and identity of the adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

In the present study, survey and correlational method is used. The survey research method is mainly used in studies where the unit of analysis is the individuals.

Research population

The research population included all adolescent secondary school students of Kermanshah living in this city in 2018.

Measurement tools

Berzonsky Identity Style Inventory: It was developed to evaluate the identity of the individuals in 1989 and revised in 1992. This test is a self-report tool consisting of 4 subscales consisting of information orientation, normative orientation, diffuse/avoidant orientation, and commitment. The identity style questionnaire is a 40-item scale, that 11 questions of it are related to



information scale, 9 questions are related to the normative scale, 10 questions are related to avoidant scale, and 10 questions are related to commitment scale used for secondary analysis and is not considered as an identity style. Its validity was confirmed by assessing the correlation with the Bennion and Adams identity status scale (1). The results showed that the acquired identity is correlated with the information orientation and commitment subscales and the delayed identity is correlated with the subscales of commitment, normative orientation, information orientation, and diffuse / avoidant orientation. Ghazanfari (2004) also obtained its reliability coefficient through Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha obtained for each of the subscales was as follows: commitment= 0.75, normative orientation= 0.72, diffuse / avoidant orientation= 0.82, information orientation= 0.76, and total scale= 0.83

RESULTS

Descriptive results:

The frequency of education in the two groups is as follows:

Table 1- frequency distribution of education level of parents

Education	Father		Mother	
	Relative frequency (%)	Relative frequency (%)	Frequency	Relative frequency (%)
Elementary	24	5.% 6	21	7.% 5
Secondary	65	6.% 17	67	1.% 18
diploma	164	3.% 44	166	9.% 44
associate	48	% 13	51	8.% 13
bachelor	44	9.% 11	42	3.% 11
master	25	7.% 6	23	2.% 6
total	370	% 100	370	% 100



Frequency of age is as follows:

Table 2- distribution of frequency of age

Relative frequency (%)	Frequency	age
3.% 37	138	13
2.% 33	123	14
5.%29	109	15
% 100	370	total

Mean score of identity style and its domains are as follows:

Table 3- score of identity style and its domains

variable	mean	SD	min	max
Information identity	53.40	93.0	39	42
Normative identity	26.31	89.2	25	35

Diffuse / avoidant identity	16.23	48.2	20	27
Commitment	43.29	44.2	25	33
Identity style (total)	38.124	79.6	113	134

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggest that the research hypotheses are confirmed and there is a significant relationship between the users of virtual networks and the identity of male secondary school students in Kermanshah. The subject of identity is one of the topics that have always drawn the attention of psychologists and sociologists, especially due to anxiety in the younger generation and the crisis of identity that is rooted in modern world developments and has overshadowed the individual, national, religious, ethnic, cultural and social identity. Nowadays, youths and adolescents need identity stability more than ever, since the issue of globalization, the issue of historical cultures and subcultures and the deprivation of third and semi-industrialized countries of information technology to maintain their identity have affected the personal, individual and social identity.

Nowadays, Iranian youths and adolescents are influenced by the religious culture of their community, respected by families and local communities. They are also influenced by educational institutions, the mass media (domestic and foreign), and the fabricated elements of the modern world and they are suffering from some economic and social problems. The results of this study suggest a significant and inverse relationship between users of virtual networks and identity of secondary school male students in Kermanshah. The results of this research are in line with those of the studies conducted by Rahbar (2014), Kianpour et al. (2014), Adlipour et al. (2014), Zahiri (2013), Shajaravi (2013), Rezaei Ghaderi (2012), Nizai and Shafaei Moghadam (2012), Mohammadi et al (2011), Hossein Zadeh (2011), Patrick et al (2015), Taylor (2012). All of them found that use of virtual social networks had a significant relationship with identity. In explaining the above result (negative impact of the use of virtual social networks on adolescent identity), Inglehart refers to the concept of silent revolution and argues that the rapid entry of new values and ideas through new information and communication technologies can cause serious disruptions in the identity of the society. Castels stated that satellites and the Internet play a determining role in forming and developing the culture and national identity of citizens (Castels, 2011) through transforming the foundation of the nature of communications. In addition, Pasteur has emphasized the role of the Internet in expanding culture and identity and the new way of building national identity. In this regard, he has analyzed the process of globalization of the media with a decline in national identity. Giddens has considered the Internet and satellites as a source of cultural diffuse, instability, and disorder. In his cultural cultivation theory, Garbner also views television and the mass media as a tool in the established industrial social order, which instead of changing, threatening, or weakening the traditional system of beliefs, values, and behaviors, serves to preserve, consolidate, or reinforce them. He argues that the main effect of television is socialization, that is, the dissemination of stability and acceptance of the current status. He believes that television alone does not minimize the changes, but it is done with cooperation of other major cultural institutions (Guanter, 2013). It influences



the worldview and value system of its viewers and gives them a unified television view of realities. Rogers presented the theory of dissemination to explain the influence of mass media on people thoughts and ideas. Based on this theory, dissemination is a process by which innovation is disseminated among members of a social system through specific channels over a given period of time (Windal et al., 2011).

According to Hoover, media is an uncontrollable language of our age. The media, as a civil society, is an active mediator of the relationships and understanding between citizens at national and international levels. Thus, it can be both a messenger of peace and security as well as the cause of war, unrest and crisis in our age. The media is the agent of communication and information, so it can play a role more than any other official and unofficial actor in joining or separating the souls and hearts and behaviors. The media knows neither the human and geographical boundary, nor discourse, cultural and civil boundary. Hence, more than any other institution, it can penetrate into crisis-causing considerations and provide an opportunity for a secure and transnational society (Ghaffari, 2011). With regard to the impact of mass media and virtual space on social identity of people, Bartel argues that virtual worlds provide people rituals, in which the more a person finds his image consistent with his real and ideal self, the more he will communicate with it. In fact, the secret to the success and attraction of users to major websites is user seeing self in front of the virtual world mirror. Hence, with regard to the identity in the virtual world, the question is how much the user likes the reflection of his image in the mirror. It was believed that people identity in the virtual space is unknown and multiple, but now users follow their defined identity offline in virtual space or define a name for themselves in offline activities. Thus, earlier definitions of identity have evolved. Accordingly, redefining individual and social identities in virtual space can be examined in various dimensions.



Research Limitations

Conducting any research is associated with some limitations that may even affect the results of the research. Some of the limitations of the research are related to researcher, but some are beyond the control of the researcher. This research was also associated with some limitations that most important of them include:

1. Some respondents did not cooperate with us and they stated “we do not believe in the effect of results of such research in our lives”. Some of them had an undesirable feeling towards completing the questionnaire that it might lead them to trouble.
2. The lack of research culture in the society, which made a number of respondents answer the questions unwillingly.
3. Since the study was conducted using survey method and questionnaire tool, the respondents might not have states the reality.

Research recommendations

1. In this research, only the relationship between the use of virtual space and identity, loneliness, academic adaptation, social health, social capital and quality of life of adolescents was investigated. It is recommended for future researchers to examine the impact of virtual space on other variables.

2. Questionnaire was used in this study. It is recommended for future researchers to use other methods, such as interviews and other qualitative methods in similar studies.
3. This research is a cross-sectional field study. It is recommended for future studies to use other methods such as longitudinal method.

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