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EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE USE OF VIRTUAL SOCIAL NETWORKS AND FEELING LONELINESS AND ADJUSTMENT IN ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to evaluate the relationship between the use of virtual social networks and feeling loneliness and adjustment of adolescents and investigated the relationship between variables. The present study was a survey and correlational study. The research population included all secondary school adolescent students of Kermanshah, who were living in this city in 2018. The multi-stage cluster sampling method was used in this study. The results showed that there was a relationship between using virtual networks and feeling loneliness and adjustment of adolescents.

Keywords: *Virtual social networks, Feeling loneliness, Adjustment, Adolescents.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the key characteristics of the information age is the use of information highways, among which, Internet is the most important one. 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. 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 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 of social relations. These relations form the cornerstone of society. In other words, having access to 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). Given what was stated, this study aimed to evaluate the relationship between the use of virtual social networks and feeling loneliness and adjustment of adolescents and has explained the relationships between these variables.

Statement of the Problem

Internet is one of the most influential new communication technologies influencing all aspects of human life. 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 of societies

(Jafari and Rouhani, 2014). In Iran, the rate of using internet has also grown significantly in recent years. Based on the recent statistics, the number of internet users in Iran has increased by 20 times. Based on the latest studies in Iran, the majority of 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, 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 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's 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). The use of virtual space in addition to psychological traumas such as isolation, also causes physical harms. The results of the study conducted by Robert Crowat over the last years on internet paradox, revealed that using the Internet reduces one's relationship with his family and reduces the social circle around the individual and increases feelings of loneliness and depression (Chalapi, 1996). Man is a social being and it is almost impossible for him to continue living individually. Desirable social education, human relationships with others, and the ability to adapt to the environment are the most important factors of happiness (Eliot, 1999; Translated by Shokrkon, 2006). Adjustment, especially social adjustment, are relative concepts that differ from one society to another under the influence of cultures and beliefs. Human behavior is influenced by various factors such as family, school, peer group and other social factors and human personality will reach perfection if there is proper balance and interaction between him and his environment. Social pressures clearly have a great impact on an individual's behavior. High engagement of youths and adolescents with this technology lead to obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, and other psychological disorders. However, due to the novelty of this type of addiction, few studies have been conducted on it and it is likely that other harmful effects will be discovered in the near future. Given what was stated on Internet and virtual space, loneliness, adjustment and adolescents, the present study aimed to provide an evidence of the relationships between these variables in students and sought to answer the question whether virtual social networks are associated with loneliness and adjustment of adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

In the present study, survey and correlational method was used. The research population included all secondary school adolescent students of Kermanshah, who were living in this city in 2018. Sampling Method: In this study, multistage cluster sampling was used. Accordingly, firstly, Kermanshah city was divided into three municipal districts (three clusters) and several neighborhoods were selected in each district based on the urban community map using cluster sampling method. Then several streets and alleys were selected from the selected neighborhoods using convenient randomized sampling. Then, the considered people (girl or boy aged 15 to 25



years) were randomly selected from the alleys selected by referring to their homes and asking them to answer the questions of the questionnaire.

Measurement tools

Feeling loneliness questionnaire

Objective: Assessing the level of feeling loneliness of people

Method of scoring and interpretation

This questionnaire consists of 20 questions aimed at assessing the dimensions of citizenship behavior of people (altruism, conscientiousness, chivalry, politeness and kindness, civil virtue). It is scored on a Likert scale, in which scores 1, 2, 3, and 4, are respectively assigned to the options never, rarely, sometimes, and never.

Option	never	Rarely	Sometimes	never
score	1	2	3	4

However, the questions 1, 5, 9, 10, 15, 16, 19, 20 were reversely scored in this way:

Option	never	Rarely	Sometimes	never
score	4	3	2	1

To obtain the total score of the questionnaire, the scores of all the questions were summed up. The total score would range from 20 to 80, so the mean score of this questionnaire is 50. A score above the mean indicates a more severe feeling of loneliness, and vice versa.

Reliability and Validity

In the study conducted by Dlavar et al. (2006) to assess the validity of the questions, the correlation coefficients between each item of the questionnaire were calculated and total score and the calculations were obtained at the significant level. Therefore, the validity of the questions was acceptable. Reliability was obtained 0.88 using Cronbach's alpha method and the correlation coefficient between depression and feelings of loneliness was 0.67. Therefore, the concurrent validity of the questionnaire was confirmed.

Youth Adjustment Inventory

Objective: Separating secondary school students with good adjustment (in terms of emotional, social and educational adjustment) from secondary school students with poor adjustment

Questionnaire introduction and its application

This questionnaire aims to separate high school students (age group of 14 to 18 years) with good adjustment from secondary school students with poor adjustment in three emotional, social, and educational domains.

The final form of this questionnaire includes 60 questions (20 questions for each domain). The examined domains include:

1. Emotional adjustment: High score represents emotional instability and low score represents emotional stability.



2. Social adjustment: High score represents dominance and low score represents aggression.
3. Educational adjustment: High score represents poor educational status and low score represents interest in education and school.

Questionnaire scoring method

The questionnaire can be manually scored. For answers representing adjustment, score of zero will be assigned; otherwise, 1 will be assigned. The table below shows the key answers representing lack of adjustment. The Adjustment questionnaire was designed for the aim of counseling secondary school students in the age group of 14 to 18 years. The total score of questionnaire represents an individual's adjustment modes.

Validity and reliability of the questionnaire

A 60-item questionnaire in the final form was implemented on a sample of 1950 first, second and third grade secondary school students (1200 boys and 750 girls), selected randomly. The results of these calculations showed that this distribution was not different from the normal distribution. The validity coefficient was determined in three ways as follows:

Questionnaire reliability coefficient

Methods used	emotional	Social	educational	total
Split-half	94.0	93.0	96.0	95.0
Test-retest	96.0	90.0	93.0	93.0
Kuder-Richardson 20	92.0	92.0	96.0	94.0

Analysis of questions revealed that the reliability coefficients for each question were determined by biserial correlation method. In this effort, internal correlations were calculated among three domains and correlation matrix was obtained:

Correlation matrix of three domains of adjustment

domains	1	2	3
1	-	20.0	19.0
2	20.0	-	24.0

RESULTS

In this chapter, the data obtained from the research have been analyzed and descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. Data were analyzed using SPSS, version 20, software. For descriptive goals, descriptive statistics methods (mean and standard deviation for quantitative variables and frequency and relative frequency for qualitative variables) were used. For final analysis, correlation and regression coefficients were used.

Descriptive results:

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

Table 1- The frequency of education of parents' education

Education	father		mother	
	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

The frequency of age was as follows:

Table 2- frequency distribution of age

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

The mean score of feeling loneliness was as follows:

Table 3- score of feeling loneliness

Variable	mean	SD	Min	Max
Feeling loneliness	89.51	70.2	45	55

The mean score of social adjustment and its domains were as follows:

Table 4- score of social adjustment and its domains

Variable	mean	SD	Min	Max
Emotional	7.7	82.0	7	9
Social	52.6	10.1	5	8
Educational	14	0	14	14
Social adjustment (total)	22.28	65.0	27	29

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION



The Internet and virtual space as a global phenomenon provides a space for users to get all the information and services they need whenever and wherever and for as long as they want. The characteristic of this new system is the combination of different media and its potential for interaction. New communication technologies and its information highways, especially the Internet and satellites, have led to a transformation in the intensity and extent of human communication around the world, and have created a qualitative change in the way of creating human communications. The results of this study showed that the research hypotheses were confirmed. Thus, there was a significant relationship between users of virtual networks and loneliness of academic adjustment of secondary school boy students in Kermanshah. The results showed a significant relationship between the use of virtual networks and users' feeling loneliness. The results of this hypothesis were in line with those of the research conducted by Kadivar Motlaqgh (2015), Malek Ahmadi and Jafaryan (2011), Salimi et al (2011), Anitabar (2014), Amerkam and Inver Isibolan (2012), Naplok Westroik (2014).

In explaining this result, it can be stated that feeling loneliness describes one's cognitive awareness of weakness in social and personal relationships, leading to the feelings of sadness, absurdity, or regret. As the study revealed, women felt more loneliness than men, and this may be due to the fact that the realm of interpersonal relationships of girls was more restricted and controlled by cultural institutions and parents than boys in our country. In fact, due to the presence of masculine culture in Iran, social networks have selected women to compensate their shortcomings and feelings of inferiority. A woman who has not been so successful in her real relationships, will be able to establish wide relationships and express her feelings through internet. Many of the barriers in the real world preventing social and intellectual presence of women are eliminated in the virtual world. When people turn to social networks, they are attracted by this space and their interaction with real world is reduced gradually, so they will feel more loneliness. In fact, social networks provide a fun and safe life for a number of people, denied in the real world. People who have not been successful in real interpersonal relationships are now able to establish wide relationships and express their emotions through social networks without revealing their faces. Moreover, people who use the WhatsApp network, are more likely to feel loneliness than those who do not use it. In explaining this result, it can be stated that by reducing the interpersonal relationships in the real relationship space due to some limitations such as shyness and anxiety and the increased feeling of loneliness, demand for virtual relationships and friendships will increase, since they can hide their identity and reduce anxiety caused by others' attention. Thus, users who are feeling more loneliness will turn to use virtual social networking applications such as WhatsApp. Another result of the research suggested that the use of virtual networks has significant relationship with users' adjustment.

The results of this hypothesis were in line with the results of the studies conducted by Adlipour et al (2014), Danaei Moghaddam et al (2013), Salimi et al (2011), Yasemi Nejad et al (2011), Memar et al (2012), Malek Ahmadi and Jafariyan (2011), Amerkam and Inver Isibolan (2012), Johnson & George (2014), Naplok & Cetroick (2014). The results of the above studies revealed that the use of virtual social networks caused feelings such as loneliness, depression, social isolation, avoidance of the real world, identity crisis, problems in interpersonal interactions, negative impact on academic performance, and problem in academic activities, and reduced



national belonging and social security. In explaining this result, it can be stated that adjustment is the relationship that every living thing establishes with its environment relative to the present status. As adjustment questionnaire actually measures people's adjustment problems and a high score means having problem in adjustment, it can be said that WhatsApp users are people who are not able to adjust themselves with environment and existing norms and rules in the real world. It can be also stated that there is no difference between girls and boys. This is probably due to the fact that high number of students is still not employed so that their job adjustment based on their gender can make a difference in their jobs. There are numerous studies showing that social networks reduce people satisfaction with life and promote jealousy and loneliness. Researchers have provided much evidence that social networks are harmful. A study conducted by the Copenhagen Success Research Institute found that when users leave social networks like Facebook and WhatsApp, they experience higher satisfaction, lower stress, and more social life. The results confirmed the results of the studies that reported less use of social networks helps mental health. The research team of this institute asked the 1095 Danish Facebook and WhatsApp users to leave the social network for one week to investigate the effect of social media on people moods. According to Guardian, those who did not use these social networks experienced lower stress by 55%. They enjoyed more of their lives during this time and got less angry. Using social networks can lead to compare oneself with peers, which can lead to increased dissatisfaction. These networks constantly bombard people with the good news of others, but many of us see the dark sky and rain when we look out of our window. This makes the virtual world, where everyone shows the best aspects of their lives artificially, to seem bright and happy, so that it conflicts with the user's normal life. Using social media by students has sometimes been a big part of their lives. However, some people have acknowledged that they are happy with the results of their efforts to leave the social networks, because instead of checking out Whatsapp, they can interact more with their surroundings and see that the world is not limited to social networks and people can be happy without using them.



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; the most important of them were:

1. Some respondents did not cooperate with the researcher and they stated "we do not believe in the effect of results of such research in our lives". Some of them were feeling fear that completing the questionnaire might make them troubles.
2. The lack of research culture in the society, made a number of respondents answer the questions unwillingly.
3. Since the study was conducted using survey method and questionnaire tool, respondents might not have stated the reality.

Research recommendations

1. In this research, only the relationship between the use of virtual space and identity, loneliness, academic adjustment, social health, social capital and quality of life of

adolescents have been investigated. It is recommended for future researchers to examine the impact of virtual space on other variables.

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

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