



## Social Media Addiction: The Case of University Students

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### Keywords

Social networking websites, Addiction, Need, University students, Internet.

### Abstract

Today, nearly every individual has internet connected devices like smartphones, laptops, computers etc. The easy-to-use feature of internet connected devices have enabled people to explore the virtual world regardless of physical limits and borders. The advances in internet technology have also led investors to create social networking websites where people can easily communicate and interact with each other via their smartphones, laptops and tablets. However, this constant use of internet and social networking websites has caused people to spend more time with their devices when compared with the past. Taking this information into account, the main aim of this study is to explore and analyze the habits of Ardahan university students about social networking websites use. Focus group interview method was used in the study. The data were recorded and transcribed into words. The results showed that majority of university students thought that social networking websites are becoming an addiction, while few students stated that these websites can be described as need.

### Article History

Received  
15 Oct, 2017  
Accepted  
1 Dec, 2017

## 1. Introduction

With the globalization and the growth in international (or within the same community) contact opportunities beyond face-to-face communication such as social and electronic media, computers and smartphones have become a unique mate of modern human beings. Today, people use these technological devices for different purposes like communication, buying goods online, booking a hotel reservation, earning money, conducting research, downloading different materials for various needs like listening to music, watching video, searching academic or hobby information. Beside fulfilling their needs, people also use internet for hobby purposes like playing online games, meeting new people, sending and receiving messages or sharing personal information like “status on Twitter” or “photos on Instagram”. Taking all these functions into consideration, it is no doubt to express that technology, especially the internet has interwoven the people’s lives in with a growing speed which results somehow in addiction. Among the tools used by people via internet is, without any doubt, are the social networking websites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Since the communication technology has developed, social networking websites has become the largest virtual world where

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people build and reflect social relations with the help of technological mediators like smartphones, computers and even smart TVs.

Moreover, the use of Social Networking Websites does not seem to be limited to communication and social activity purposes. As one can easily guess, these social networking sites may not have the same call to teenagers, adults and students equally. They have become a more practical medium for their users apart from basic communication and interaction purposes. Taking the time spend on social networking websites into account, users seem to be more addicted apart from its fun purposes. Therefore, this study aimed to explore students' perceptions on the use of social networking websites and their places in their lives either as an addiction or a need.

## **2. Internet and Social Network Addiction**

With the development of technology, internet has surrounded all over us via technological devices like smartphones, computers, tablets and smart TVs. With the opportunity to connect the limitless world of internet, people has become more intense users of such mediators. However, this opportunity seems to have led people to get addicted to sources and opportunities of internet. For instance, Kuss et al. (2013) state that %99.8 of young generation use internet at school or at home. Similarly, Lam, Peng, Mai and Jing (2009) discovered that people use internet mainly for entertainment and fun purposes (%45.1), following with information and knowledge search (%19.9) and peer communication (%15.8). Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are among the most frequent used websites among young generation who has a regular internet access (Lenhart et al., 2011). Moreover, among the social networking websites used by young 13-17 years old generation, Facebook stands in the first rank with a percentage of %71 (Lenhart, 2015). According to Kuss et al. (2013) adolescents use social networking websites for offline network establishment.

When it comes to gender issue in social networking websites, boys' preferences seem to be different from girls, where girls tend to use more visual websites like Instagram and Snapchat, boys prefer video-games based sites to fulfil their needs (Lenhart, 2015). Kuss et al. (2013) claim that social networking websites is a threat for young generation as they have the potential to be addicted. Similarly, Kuss et al. (2013) claims that the probability of internet addiction may also lead to social media addiction as well.

The percentage of internet addiction among young generation is between %0.3 and %25 within the criteria describing internet addiction as a term. Adolescents with internet addiction show the same characteristics like; procrastination, lack of control, excessive Internet use and inability to control this excessive use, inattention to social and academic life (Adiele & Olatokun, 2013). Moreover, Internet addiction show some similar symptoms like emotional sensitivity, obsessive compulsion and depression (Kelleci & Inal, 2010). According to Kelleci and Inal (2010) internet addicts create a fake world to themselves where they are totally isolated from their friends beside their social environments. So, it can be concluded that such individuals may result in dangerous social incapability to interact with their peers, friends and even relatives.

Social Networking websites have become more and more popular within the last years. Social networking websites have begun to offer features like shopping, entertainment, education and searching for various things online, beside its communication and information feature. However, with the wide range of features and opportunities offered, social networking websites have become an inevitable part of individuals' lives which means that people have become more accustomed to their features that enable them to spend their times unconsciously online. Kuss and Griffiths (2011) claim that this excessive use of internet and social networking websites has led individuals to become addicts.

Taking all this related literature into consideration, the main aim of this study is to explore the habits of university students about using social networking websites, and their thoughts about those websites in terms of addiction or a need concept. As the study field is new and undiscovered deeply, this study will also help to broaden the horizon of the researchers who intend to gain more insight about the field.

### **3. Methodology**

The main aim of the study is to explore university students' perceptions and attitudes on the use of social networking websites in general, so qualitative method was used as it was the most effective and appropriate method to explore insight into the matter discussed in this study. Trumbull (2005) states that qualitative research method is an inductive way, helping to create a new perceptive through depicting experiences and daily lives of people. Similarly, Hsin-The and Maria (2007) claim that the simplest way to discover the human nature and the social outcomes is to investigate their experiences. Selecting the qualitative method in current study, focus group interview was used as an instrument to collect data, because, interviewing people with a natural setting helps them to unfold their personal thoughts and beliefs about a particular issue. However, Susan, Janet and Cheryl (2009) emphasize the importance of the focus group interviews as they capture the authentic voices of participants in which the data becomes the symbol of the group dynamics.

In the current study, we used open ended questions to gather data on the issue. In open ended questions, the participants are not urged to choose an item from the pre-determined list. The respondents were free to state their own answer without being constrained by a fixed set of possible responses. So this helped us to cope with the difficulties in determining the exact answer on their perceptions towards Facebook. The students' perception on using Facebook as an educational setting was taken into account. The content of the interview included warm-up questions and then followed by open-ended questions which enabled participant to express what they think about Facebook to be used as an educational setting. The students were also asked to feel free to join the group interview conducted.

The focus group interview, which lasted approximately 40 minutes for each group interview, was facilitated by an assistant professor. A brief information was given at the beginning of interview and the group was encouraged to respond to all questions. Focus group interview was digitally recorded and transcribed into words.

#### 4. Participants

The participants of the current study were the university students from different departments at Ardahan University. There were both males and females in the group with the ages ranging from 18 to 24. The participants were regular social networking websites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) users. As they had been using those social networks for a long time, they had the chance to think over the questions asked during the interview.

#### 5. Results and Discussion

The data of the study is analyzed with regard to the views of students about the use of Social Networking Websites in general. Firstly, the students are asked, as mentioned before, to share the general experiences on social networks. The first questions also covered the habits of students about using specific social networking websites and their choices. Then, the questions were changed in logical orders, specified on the use preferences and their times they spent on social networks. The results showed that students have been using social networking websites, including Facebook twitter and Instagram approximately for 4 years. The reason why they are using those old websites for 4 years seem to be that they are young and they had the chance to own an internet connected devices when they are 18 or 19. The results showed that the main aim of students to use social networking websites is the communication issues. The participants firstly stated that they want to keep in touch with their friends by sharing videos, pictures and such kinds of things.

*My main aim is to communicate with my friends and relatives because it is the easiest way to keep in touch and follow.(1)*

*I have the chance to follow and meet people on social networks, so I can say that it helps me to socialize more than any other activities.(2)*

*Social networking websites help us to communicate people who are far away from us, for example I have both friends and relatives abroad and I can communicate with them easily just with a mobile phone.(3)*

As seen above, students' spend their times on social networks for communication reasons which are already accepted by the majority of people and the founders of those websites. After learning their main aims in using social networks, the students were asked to express their views whether social networks are a kind of addiction. The results were surprising in the sense that some students agreed that it is a kind of addiction while other didn't accept that expression;

*I think, social networking websites are useful but I feel curious about the posts and sharings when I cannot connect for 3-4 hours. (4)*

*Facebook, for example, is the main tool to follow the pages I like, these pages include sports, news or hobbies, so when we give a break at the school, I unconsciously find myself surfing on Facebook. It is just like a habit. (5)*

*I feel nervous even when I am out of battery. I just look for a charger, It is not because I will call someone, it is because I will miss the notification of*

*the application which includes like, comment, or sharing on social networks. (6)*

*When I go out for a lunch or dinner at a restaurant or a cafe, the first thing I ask is not the menu, but the wi-fi password. (7)*

Again as seen above, students think that social networking websites are becoming an addiction for them. Although they use those websites and applications for fun and hobby purposes, they feel stresses when they do not find an opportunity to connect and follow. They think that the notification from those websites and applications are the most distinct features of their mobile phones to catch attention. That means, when they just hand in their mobile phones the first thing they do is to check the social networking websites and applications as they seem to be addicted to use beyond hobby purposes. However, many of the students (25) stated that they don't see social networking websites as addiction but need. When asked to express their feelings about using social networks, they seemed to give emphasis social networking websites to their practical use. They think that the social networking websites help them to kill time besides its social function. They also stated that people should not feel addicted as it serves for simple social issues. When they are asked whether Facebook is an addiction or a need, they stated that it is a need that can both be used for social or hobby needs.

*I like social networks, I use both Facebook and Instagram, but I don't feel addicted to it. I just check my account either in the morning or just before going to bed. (7)*

*We didn't use to have these websites 10 years ago, so it is useless to behave as if we were addicted to it. I don't mind ignoring the notifications, social networks are not in the center of my life. (8)*

*Facebook is not suitable socializing. I am sure most of the students prefer face-to-face communication. It can be used for other purposes like pages, groups or following celebrities but these can be done from simple internet browser as well. (9)*

Students claim that social networking websites are both addiction and need. As widely used by young generation, social networking websites are becoming the most frequently used technological tool. Taking this into consideration, it can be said that, in the near future the "need" issue will gradually leave its place to addiction. Because, an individual can do nearly everything that normal internet browsers already offer like watching video, reading news, uploading and downloading pictures, and even shopping that some social networking websites have begun to offer like Facebook. Besides their addiction and need issues, very few students (5) stated that social networking websites are totally useless and should not be used for any purposes. When they were asked about the use of social networks in general they stated that they don't use them and do not plan to use ever.

*...No, I do not use Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, because internet as well as smartphones takes too much time and people become addicted to them. I see that many people have begun to isolate themselves from real*

*life, killing the real interaction that is supposed to happen between their friends, peers or relatives. (10)*

*It can sometimes be used for hobby or communication purposes but I believe that people one day will get bored from those websites and as I do in my life, they will stop using those websites, new other websites for different purposes will become popular.(11)*

Very few students during the interview rejected the idea of addiction or need about social networking websites. Their excuses and reasons were nearly the same, claiming that virtual interaction will gradually kill the real life communication. Besides, they believed that these websites will come to an end one day by losing their popularities.

## **6. Conclusion**

It is quite natural to explore that most of the students are actively using social networking websites for different purposes and most of them think that these websites are becoming an addiction. They were also found, from their own self-reports, to be using social networking websites for various activities directly or indirectly related to their daily lives. As young generation have begun to use internet-connected mobile device more often when compared with the past, they are in seek of exploring new applications and websites for their psychological and physiological needs. This opportunity to connect internet no matter where they are, have led university students to become more addicted to technology and addiction to technology have transformed their addiction to social networking addiction where they seem to create a virtual world that they can chat, search or express themselves freely whenever they want. To sum up, although their social benefits for people, social networking websites are becoming an addiction for young generation with regard to its “easy to use” feature. Moreover, the field of social networking websites is new when compared with other fields and needs to be explored more to gain insight about.

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