

## Surveying the Relationship between Addiction to Social Networks and Emotional Maturity in Students

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### ABSTRACT

Social networks provide an environment for virtual communication and play a key and ever growing role in quality of mental health. Emotional maturity is a key effective element of emotions control, behavior, and improvement of mental health. The present paper is aimed at surveying the relationship between addiction to social networks and emotional maturity of students.

A descriptive analytical study was carried with participation of 181 students in the Faculty of Medical Science, Shoushtar, Iran in 2016; the participants were selected through random sampling. Data gathering tool was a researcher-designed questionnaire of addiction to social network and Yashvir Singh & Bahargava's Emotional Maturity Scale. The collected data were analyzed in SPSS (16).

As the results showed, people with severe addiction to social networks had lower scores in terms of general emotional maturity and its subscales comparing with those with moderate addiction to social networks ( $p < 0.001$ ). Gender had no significant effect on the level of addiction to social networks ( $p = 0.347$ ). Except for the subscale emotional stability, which was identical between two genders, women had better scores in terms of general emotional maturity and the subscales.

Level of severity of addiction to social networks was related to emotional maturity of individuals. This relationship can be taken into account in preventing and treating addiction to social networks.

### KEYWORDS

Addiction to Social Networks, Emotional Maturity, Students

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### Introduction

Internet is set of computer networks which are interconnected based on standard communication protocols and provide unlimited space for exchanging different information (1). According to a website in June 2016, the average percentage of the Internet penetration rate in the world is 49.5 while Iran with penetration rate of 68.5 percent and 82801633 people ranked 13 in the world and the first one in the Middle East (2). Extensive research conducted on the

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Internet show some advantages such as keeping in touch with friends, vacation planning, financial management, meeting some training needs and etc. (3). However, other studies have shown that repeated use of the Internet will lead to some problems, including a significant decrease in physical activities and lifestyle changes in order to spend more time on the Internet; educational, occupational or interpersonal problems; neglecting friends, family, and occupation; increased sexual behavior and attitudes to the opposite sex, violence, lying to family, anxiety, depression, stress and obsessive disorders (1, 4, 5). Today, the issue of increasing use of the Internet and its consequences among young people, including students is taken into consideration as important and influential subject in their personal and social life (6, 7) because excessive and uncontrolled use of the Internet causes behavioral, mental and social disorders by affecting people's behavior and cognition (8, 9). Internet Addiction Disorder first introduced by Goldberg (1995) (10) is a chronic, recurrent and pandemic disorder (11, 12) which takes time and energy and causes problems such as lack of tolerance, withdrawal syndrome, sleep-wake disorders, chronic fatigue, weakened immune system, unusual appetite, headache, loss of self-care, vision problems, back pain and carpal tunnel syndrome (13).

In 2014, about 1.8 billion people, equivalent to 25% of the population were using social networks among more than 2.5 billion active Internet users in the world (14). These networks are sites which provide the opportunity to connect more users to each other in the form of a network of individual and group relationships through using a search engine and adding features such as chatting, electronic messaging, transmitting audio and video and etc. It allows them to share items such as information, requirements, activities and thoughts (15). The use of social networks is increasing day by day. Joining such networks provides the opportunity to communicate with people with the same or different culture (16, 17).

Studies have shown that joining social networks creates an ongoing reward to continue their application by causing feelings such as self-satisfaction and self-efficacy. On the other hand, researchers believe that those who have little ability to establish social interactions tend to use social networks more than others in order to relieve the dysthymic state. This type of use is actually a defense mechanism to cope with stress, loneliness and depression. Excessive use of social networks with the aim of removing undesirable states causes some problems such as the risk of social isolation, increased psychological dependence on these networks, ignoring real-life relationships and work and training challenges (18-20).

Another indicator which is effective on people's lives is maturity. Maturity as a natural and developmental phenomenon is a common feature between men and women (21). In this period, individual encounters with multiple physical, psychological and social transformations and changes (22). Emotional maturity is the process of controlling impulses with the mediation of "ego" and includes the person's ability to deal with reality appropriately. Emotional maturity means a person's ability to control disturbing emotions and have a balanced character which is actually caused by thinking and learning. Studies have shown that emotional maturity is effective on making proper decisions and better choices, having less stress, increasing self-esteem, having a sense of worth and belonging, intimacy, empathy, assertiveness, emotional stability,

independence, mental balance and ability to observe emotional categories (22-25). On the other hand, Kaplan and Baron believe that emotional maturity is effective on person's enjoyment of the features such as the ability to withstand a delay in meeting needs, ability to tolerate the sense of deprivation and frustration, ability to delay or revise their expectations in terms of conditions and believing in the long-term planning (26).

Various investigations have mutually studied the relationship between the impact of using Internet and social networks on the growth, characteristics and different dimensions of the character, as well as various aspects of mental health. For example, the findings of the research conducted by Poorakbaran showed that increasing use of the Internet is related to high rates of stress and anxiety (27). On the other hand, the research conducted by Azizi, et al. (28) indicates that there is a correlation between some personality dimensions such as extroversion, excitability, empiricism and Internet addiction in the way that personality dimensions of excitability and empiricism are good predictors of Internet addiction. RC HO, et al. indicated that Internet addiction is related with problems such as alcohol abuse, attention deficit and hyperactivity, depression and anxiety (11). Also, Lata Dangwal and Srivastava (29) carried out a research on emotional maturity of internet users and compared its sub-scales based on gender category; they concluded that young users of Internet do not have emotional maturity. The results of the research carried out by Tamannaefar, et al. showed that there is a relationship between neuroticism and Internet addiction (30).

Internet has become an integral part of the daily lives of most people, especially young ones after its introduction in early 1980 (31). It has affected physical, social, emotional, mental and moral aspects of users' lives. According to social networks users' access to others emotional, intellectual and social situation, it is essential that these people become matured in different fields to be able to manage their thoughts and feelings if necessary and act purposefully. Therefore, according to the importance of the subject, the researchers aimed to examine the relationship between addiction to social networks and students' emotional maturity.

### The method of the research

This research is a descriptive analytical study which was carried in the Faculty of Medical Science, Shoushtar, Iran in 2016; the participants were all students of Faculty of Medical Science, Shoushtar selected through random sampling. Considering similar studies (29), (32) the sample size was estimated 147 using

the formula  $n = \left[ \frac{z_{1-\alpha/2} + z_{1-\beta}}{.5 \times \ln \left[ \frac{1+r}{1-r} \right]} \right]^2 + 3 = 147$ ,  $r = 0.27$ ,  $Z_{1-\alpha/2} = 1.96$ ,  $Z_{1-\beta} = 1.28$ ; it

was considered 184 based on a probability of 20 percent loss. Inclusion criteria included participants aged between 17 and 25, not having significant psychological and physical disorder, being interested in participating in research and exclusion criteria included lack of response to all questions.

Data gathering tools were Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS) and a researcher-designed questionnaire of addiction to social networks. Emotional Maturity Scale was prepared by Yashvir Singh & Bahargava (1991) which contains 48 items. It was a five-point scale ranging from very high to high, unknown,

probably and never that would be respectively scored 5, 4, 3, 2, 1; getting higher score on this scale indicates a greater degree of emotional immaturity. Among these 48 items, the first 10 questions measure emotional instability, the second 10 questions evaluate emotional return, the third 10 questions relate to social maladjustment, the fourth 10 questions assess the category of personality disintegration and the last 8 questions measure lack of autonomy. The highest and lowest scores for the first 4 subscales are respectively 50 and 10, while the highest and lowest scores for the fifth subscale are respectively 48 and 8. In a research conducted by Sinha and Singh, the validity of the questionnaire against external standards; namely Student Adaptations College Questionnaire (SACQ) was 0.64. Its implementation is possible individually and collectively. When standardizing Emotional Maturity Questionnaire by Shayesteh and Sahebi on Iranian immigrants living in Australia and Canada, the questionnaire validity was 0.71 and its reliability was calculated 0.89 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (3-35). The validity of this questionnaire has been confirmed in several studies in Iran (24, 36-40).

Researcher-designed questionnaire of "addiction to social networks" is in fact a questionnaire derived from Young Internet Addiction Test. It means that after reading new books and articles, comments have been provided at the beginning of the questionnaire on how to separate the rate of general use of the Internet comparing with the rate of using social networks and other minor changes were applied in the context of the Young scale. This questionnaire includes 20 items. It is a five-point scale ranging (1. Rarely, 2. Sometimes, 3. Often, 4. Very often, and 5. Always). The minimum and maximum scores which can be achieved are 20 and 100. Therefore, if the total scores achieved by each sample are between 20-39, 40-69 and 70-100, the rate of addiction to social networks will be respectively considered moderate, high and very high. In this study, to determine the validity of the research tools, face and content validity was used. Therefore, every two questionnaires were given to 10 members of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Shushtar Branch and some of samples under investigation to be investigated in terms of content and the clarity and simplicity of statements; then, questionnaires were used after considering some comments. To determine the questionnaires' reliability, the internal consistency method (Cronbach's alpha coefficient) was used. For this purpose, questionnaires were given to 20 people who had sample features. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were respectively calculated 0.92 and 0.93 for questionnaires of addiction to social networks and emotional maturity.

After obtaining ethical approval from Shushtar Faculty of Medical Sciences and receiving official permits, the researcher was presented at the research environment and described the research purposes to qualified students. After assuring participants of confidentiality of information and receiving informed written consent, questionnaires were completed and collected. To evaluate the statistical indicators, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, etc.) were used. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to investigate the relationship between variables and t-test was used to compare means. Data were analyzed using SPSS 16.

## Findings

181 students (72.4% females and 27.6% males) participated in this study with the average age of (20.84±1.66). 60.8% of students were addicted to social networks at moderate level and 39.22% of them were addicted at high level. The levels of emotional maturity were reported high, moderate and low respectively in 10%, 44.8% and 45.3% of participants. To compare the emotional maturity in two groups of addiction to social networks at moderate and high levels, t-test was used. The research findings showed a statistically significant difference between two groups (t-test = 6.37, p-value < 0.001), while the mean score of emotional immaturity in group of addiction to social networks at high level is more than the mean score at moderate level. In terms of subscales of emotional maturity, there was a statistically significant difference between two groups of addiction to social networks at moderate and high levels (p – value < 0.001) and those with high addiction to social networks suffered more from emotional instability, emotional return, social maladjustment, personality disintegration and lack of autonomy (Table 1). According to Pearson correlation coefficient, no statistically significant relationship was found between the rate of addiction to social networks at moderate level and emotional immaturity (P = 0.363) and its subscales while this relationship was significant between the rate of addiction to social networks at high level and emotional immaturity (p-value = 0.005), social maladjustment (p-value = 0.007), personality disintegration (p-value = 0.002), and lack of autonomy (p-value = 0.021). Based on t-test, there is no statistically significant difference between men and women regarding the mean scores of addiction to social networks (p-value = 0.347) (Table 2). According to table 3, this difference is statistically significant between men and women regarding the mean scores of emotional immaturity and men’s emotional maturity was less than women’s (p-value = 0.027). In subscales, women had less emotional return (p-value = 0.046), social maladjustment (p-value = - 0.023), personality disintegration (p-value = 0.023) and lack of autonomy (p-value = 0.011) than men, but there was no statistically significant difference between men and women in terms of emotional instability (p-value = 0.709).

**Table 1.** Comparison of emotional maturity variable and its sub-scales between two groups of moderate and high levels of addiction to social networks

Variable	Addiction to social networks	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	t-test	DF	P-Value
Emotional immaturity	High	71	195.61	19.84	6.37**	110	0.000
	Moderate	110	170.54	28.84			
Emotional instability	High	71	39.68	5.87	5.95**	122	0.000
	Moderate	110	33.30	7.67			
Emotional return	High	71	41.90	5.35	5.78**	123	0.000
	Moderate	110	36.33	6.87			
Social maladjustment	High	71	40.27	4.77	5.33**	115	0.000
	Moderate	110	35.39	6.70			
Personality disintegration	High	71	43.23	5.60	5.11**	119	0.000
	Moderate	110	37.88	7.57			
Lack of autonomy	High	71	30.52	4.06	4.06**	179	0.000
	Moderate	110	27.95	4.30			

\*\* significance level at 0.01

**Table 2.** Comparison of addiction to social networks among men and women

Variable	Gender	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	t-test	DF	P-Value
Addiction to social networks	Women	131	38.94	12.98	-0.942	179	0.347
	Men	50	41.05	14.54			

**Table 3.** Comparison of emotional maturity variable and its sub-scales among male and female students

Variable	Gender	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	t-test	DF	P-Value
Emotional immaturity	Women	131	178.82	33.90	-2.22*	179	0.027
	Men	50	188.55	22.78			
Emotional instability	Women	131	36.80	9.10	-0.375*	69	0.709
	Men	50	37.32	6.54			
Emotional return	Women	131	38.14	7.49	-2.01*	179	0.046
	Men	50	40.32	6.11			
Social maladjustment	Women	131	36.44	7.40	-2.31*	69	0.023
	Men	50	39.09	5.34			
Personality disintegration	Women	131	39.24	8.74	-2.30*	179	0.023
	Men	50	41.86	6.00			
Lack of autonomy	Women	131	28.20	5.14	-2.57*	179	0.011
	Men	50	30.02	3.88			

\* significance level at 0.05

## Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between addiction to social networks and students' emotional maturity in Shushtar Faculty of Medical Sciences. The research results indicated that the relationship between emotional maturity and addiction to social networks is significant and the more emotional maturity, the less addiction to social networks. Moreover, in subscales, those with high addiction to social networks show more emotional instability, emotional return, social maladjustment, personality disintegration and lack of autonomy comparing with those with moderate addiction. This finding is consistent with the results of the little research conducted in this regard which of course have investigated any kind of addiction to Internet. For example, the results of research carried out by Dangwal and Srivastava (2016) showed emotional immaturity in young Internet users (29). The findings of a study carried out by Visala and Rawat (2016) (32) indicated that Internet users with less use of Internet have higher emotional maturity and the probability of emotional instability and personality disintegration is more. In explaining such finding, it can be said that the relationship between emotional maturity and Internet use and their impact on each other are likely mutual. On the one hand, spending more time on social networks reduces individuals' intimate relationships with peers, family and community leading to loss of skills and their abilities to recognize and understand emotional stimuli, solve problems and ultimately lack of growth and emotional immaturity by reducing

individual's power to cope with everyday real-life challenges (38, 39, 41). On the other hand, emotional immaturity may lead to social isolation by reducing features such as self-esteem, empathy and assertiveness skills. People with emotional immaturity may pay attention to Internet connection in order to overcome social isolation because they believe that in addition to providing necessary social support and more flexibility than face to face communication, online Internet provides the ideal environment for social interaction with others (22, 40, 41). Based on the findings of this research, men's emotional maturity was less than women's. In subscales, women had less emotional return, social maladjustment, personality disintegration, and lack of autonomy than men, but there was no statistically significant difference between men and women in terms of emotional instability. These findings are consistent with the results obtained from studies conducted on this field. Among these studies, some only compared the general emotional maturity in both genders and concluded that the average level of emotional maturity in women is higher than in men (42-44). The results of research carried out by Wani & Masih indicated lack of difference in general emotional maturity and its subscales based on gender category; however, personality disintegration in male students was more than in females (23). The results of research carried out by Dangwal and Srivastava showed that women had more general emotional maturity, emotional stability and independence than men (29). Researchers state that women's believing in the long-term planning, their ability to withstand a delay in meeting needs, ability to tolerate the sense of deprivation and frustration, ability to delay or revise their expectations in terms of conditions and less feelings of hopelessness when facing with difficult circumstances are due to higher level of emotional maturity in women than men (23). However, the findings of some research are not consistent with the results of the present study. For example, findings of the research conducted by Noorani, et al. indicated that there was no difference between general emotional maturity and its subscales in men and women (33). This difference in results may be due to small population studied in the mentioned study. Singh et al. (2012) concluded that general emotional maturity and its subscales in men are better than in women. They believe that presence and more social interactions and consequently men's facing with more challenges in life lead to higher level of emotional maturity in men than women (45). Lack of comprehensive demographic variables can be considered as one of the limitations of this study.

### Conclusion

The research results showed that the rate of people's addiction to social networks has a reverse relationship with their emotional maturity. However, it is not clear that whether low emotional maturity leads to increased tendency to social networks by affecting behavior or overuse of social networks causes insufficient emotional growth by influencing healthy and effective social communications. Today, people are faced with different problems in their daily lives. Lack of emotional maturity reduces people's ability to deal with anxiety, stress and frustration and causes problems such as psychosomatic disorders. Therefore, study about emotional life of people as an emerging descriptive science is on the rise. On the other hand, the growing use of social networks forms a part of people's normal everyday life in different ages and places. Hence, it seems necessary to pay attention to these categories and provide basic data in

this regard. The results of this study can lay the groundwork for future studies as well as various interventions designed for triple prevention of addiction to the Internet and social networks.

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### Notes on contributors

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