



DARK SIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA; THE NEW DRUG FOR NEW GENERATION, ARE THEY ADDICTED?

Tiwa Park

Faculty of Business Administration, Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, Thailand

e-mail: send2aeh@yahoo.com

Abstract

Social media has become an increasingly important part of all cultures around the World. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Multiply and other social media sites have swept the nation and have come to dominate the millennial generation way of thinking and behaving. Social media allows interactive dialogue and social interaction with many people who in this day spend a lot of great deal online such as working, leisure, entertaining, and so on. Many cannot deny that using internet is helped to find the great deal of information and spend less time to do so. Until today there are still surprisingly few studies conducted on the subject matter of symptoms of Internet addiction and what can and cannot be classified as such, making this so called pathological sickness debatable. Many claimed that social media is merely a channel or medium that leads to other addictions. Therefore, many researchers have been working on the benefit of using internet. However, in this study the researcher searched for the negative part of using this tool as the dark side of technology. The study would be identified the issue of negative side of using it as well as factors that could be caused the addictive part. Using survey both online and in person had helped the researcher got more information in this part. Finding found amazing results even though it was insufficient to determine or prove the stated hypotheses. However the data collected can be useful when conducting further study on the online behaviors of undergraduates studying at one of the Private Universities. The fact that 70% of the samples are addicted which is an issue to be concerned, because being addicted to the internet means demonstrating a certain degree of psychological impacts, which can further leads to other issues.

Keywords: social media, addiction, personality

Introduction

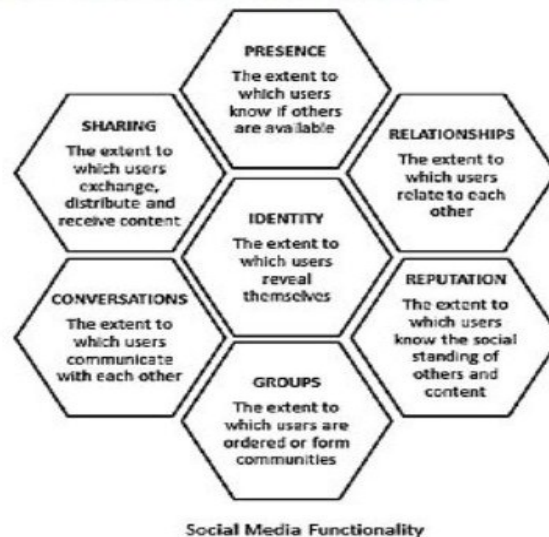
Social media has become an increasingly important part of all cultures around the World. Social media sites have swept the nation and have come to dominate the millennial generations way of thinking and behaving. Using social media has the pro and con for doing so, however, we cannot deny that having social media in this day more and more negative sides have been revealed.

What is social media?

Daniel Nations (2012) states that in order to define the definition, he divides it into two terms; one is social and the other is media. "Media is an instrument on communication, like a newspaper or a radio" whereas the social is a social which combines together is "a social instrument of communication." In addition, the definition of social media by Andreas Kaplan

and Michael Haenlein (2010), social media is “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations, which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” Furthermore, Kietzmann also developed the honeycomb framework in order to facilitate the understanding of social media. It allows users to further examine the specific features of social media, the user experience, and implications. As seen in figure 1, the “honeycomb framework” is based on seven building blocks: identity, conversations, presence, sharing, relationships, reputation, and groups Keitzmann et al (2011).

Figure 1 honeycomb framework (Keitzmann, 2011)



Many people believe that excessive doing something is considered as addictive such as drinking a lot of alcohol-addict to alcohol, spending time to shop-addict to shopping, taking sleeping pills-addict to the drug, spending a lot of time online-addict to social media, and so on.

What is social media addiction?

Dorland’s Medical Dictionary for Health Consumer (2007) defines the word “addiction” as “the state of being given up to some habit or compulsion” and “strong physiological and psychological dependence on a drug or other psychoactive substance”. People can be addicted to many things, such as sex, drugs, gambling, shopping, and now even the internet, Any addictions are affiliated with uncontrollable urge, and therefore resulting in a loss of control and engrossment with use. As suggested by Greenfield (1999), the using internet can be a product alterations in mood, nearly 30% of internet users admit that they use internet in order to alter so as to relieve a negative mood, as a result suggesting that it could be addictive and can produce negative effect like those of drugs.

Who are social media addicts?

The criteria for psychoactive substance addiction used in the American Psychological Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV) are being adapted by Kimberly Young (1996) in order to be applied to internet use (table 1).

In addition, Griffiths (1998) suggested that addiction needs to meet six criteria:

1. *Salience*: internet usage dominants the person’s life, emotions and behavior

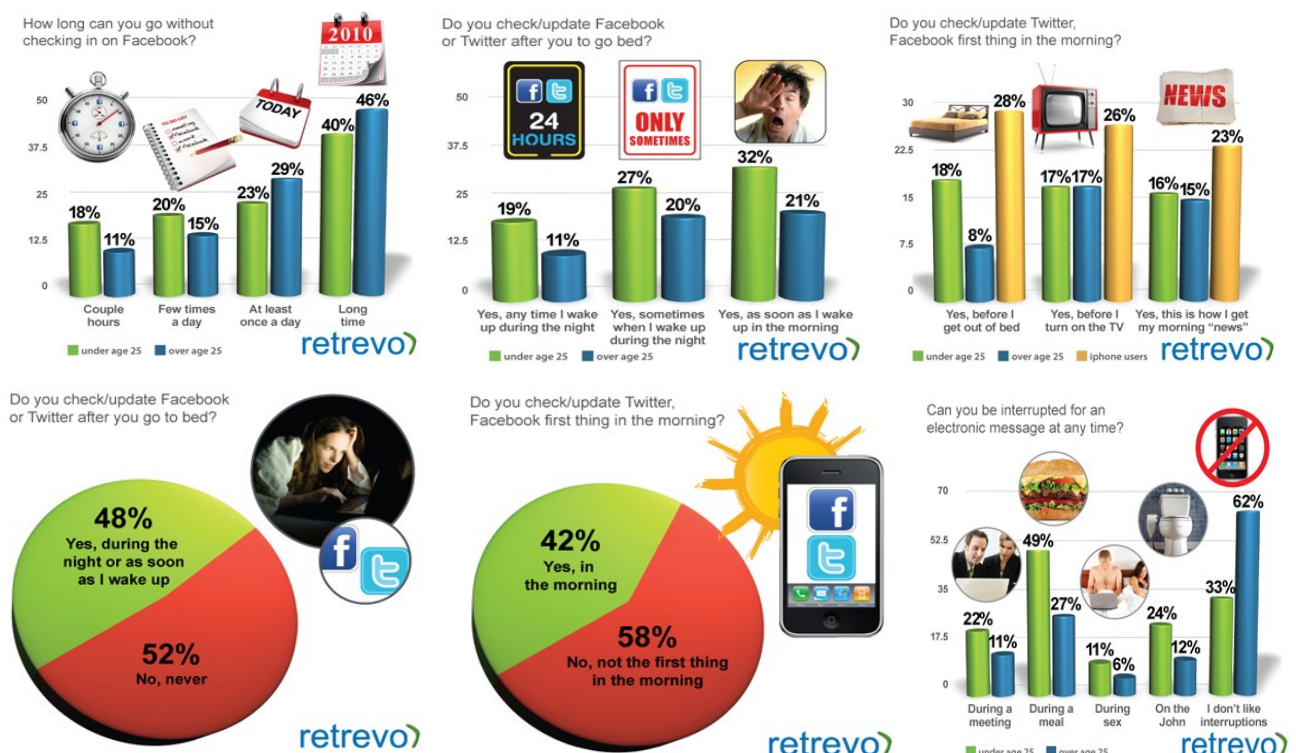
2. *Mood modification*: user experiences mood alteration when using internet
3. *Tolerance*: to achieve the same effects on mood, increase in amount of internet use is needed.
4. *Withdrawal symptoms*: user experiences unpleasant feelings or physical effects when stop using internet
5. *Conflict*: internet usage causes conflicts with those close to the user or with everyday life
6. *Relapse*: relapse into earlier patterns of behavior

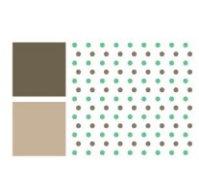
Table 1: Diagnostic Criteria for Internet Addiction (Young, 1996)

Questions
1. Do you experience a tolerance in that you have a need for increased amounts of internet use to achieve the desired effect OR do you find there is a diminished effect with continued use of the same time spent on the internet?
2. Do you spend longer period of time on the internet than you intended?
3. Do you spend a great deal of time in activities to stay on-line longer?
4. Have you given up any social, occupational, or recreational activities because of the internet?
5. Have you continued to use the internet despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent problem that is likely to have been cause or exacerbated by the internet?
6. Have you made unsuccessful attempts to cut down how much time you spend on-line OR do you have a lack of desire to cut down the amount of time you spend online?
7. Do you experience withdrawal symptoms when you are offline?

Source: adapted from Kimberly Young (1996)

Figure 2 Statistics with regards to Social Media Addiction

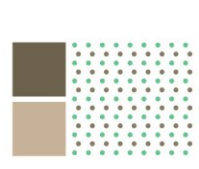




Griffiths (1998) also suggests that most of the survey-based studies on internet addiction should be revolved around these criteria instead of just the amount of time spending on-line. There are a few studies conducted on the subject matter of symptoms of Internet addiction and what can and cannot be classified as such, making this so called “pathological sickness”. The main study worth mentioning regarding social media addiction was conducted by University of Maryland professor Dr. Susan Moeller, who was experiment with her own college students by conducting the research by asking the students how they used the internet each day (24 hours) and then write a report about their reflections on the experience. Some of the students that participated in the experiment did utilize the word “addiction” when describing their experience however most reflecting more on the shift of availability and mobility of information and relationships with family and friends. When discussing this study however media psychologist Stuart Fischhoff commented “All these technologies have potential for terrific use and for terrific abuse...Everyone is a potential addict – they’re just waiting for their drug of choice to come along, whether heroin, running, junk food or social media. All those substances can be streetcars of desire.” This quote once again highlights the potential for addiction, however every individual has their own poison so to speak, leaving some more vulnerable than others for potential addiction to social networking outlets.

Why is social media addictive?

Based on the Adam N. Joinson, the author of *Understanding the psychology of internet behavior*, the social media have evolved from tools to behavior, in which Adam applied the idea of affordances introduced by the cognitive psychologist, Gibson, to the link between properties of social media and social behaviors. For example, social media has created a whole new way of communication and interaction; however the cost of the new way of communication is the loss of verbal cues. Therefore, the reason underlying the addictive properties of social media can be traced back to the attributes that it provides. As proposed by Kimberly Young (1996), the three aspects of the internet that makes it so addictive and appealing are: anonymity, convenience, and escape or the ACE Model. Firstly, anonymity, which can creates opportunities for self-discloser as well as some degree of protection from social anxiety. This is especially true for people who are experiencing hard time communicating face to face with others (McKenna and Bargh, 2000). However being anonymity is highly addictive behavior, which interpret that people who often get too submerged in the virtual world, that they lose their real self and the ability to survive in the real world. Secondly, convenience, which is an obvious reason why internet is addictive is due to the convenience it brings to daily lives. It becomes the tool to carry out daily lives tasks and an important entertainment providing tools (Boase, Horrigan, Wellman & Rainie, 2006). People nowadays are able to communicate in real time despite the distance, shopping, banking, and tickets booking are all made easy for them. Lastly, ACE model, which ACE model is sparse because it focuses on the attributes the internet provides instead of individual users, as those attributes only appeal to some people. Therefore, whether or not it is just the attributes the medium provides that causes addiction or individual personality traits. On the other hand, an alternative approach is a research conducted by Craig, Emily, Mia, Arseneault, Mary, and Robert (2009), they found that personality correlates with competency factors associated with Facebook usage. The research titled “*Computers in Human Behavior*” has focused on applying the five dimensional traits to the ways users use Facebook. The results demonstrated a positive relationship between personality and the Facebook usage. In addition Gombor and Vas (2008) compared the internet affinity and the Big Five personality factors between the medical students in Hungarian and Israeli by using various literatures to prove



how different personalities can be used the internet differently and how some can be prone to social media addiction (Gorbor & Vas, 2008; Kuss and Griffiths, 2011). These two researches have proven that both internet addiction and the attributes of the internet can be caused possible addiction amongst users.

Problem Caused by Addiction

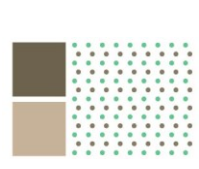
There are many negative psychological affects that could be triggered by the heavy usage of internet. Internet addiction can lead to many risks and problems as suggested by various researchers as well as writers. Rasmussen (2000) and Widyanto and Griffiths (2006) associate internet addiction with depression and social introversion as well as found that playing gambling online and triggering Internet Behavior Dependence (IBD) addiction can often lead to escalating other negative impacts in daily lives, especially marriage, employment, and relationship (Greenfield, 1999; Rasmussen, 2000; Widyanto & Griffiths, 2006).

Many studies found the consequences of being addicted to the internet such as a loss of confidence in real lives, depressed and loneliness. In the other words, people try to escape from reality because they get stressed out from work or depression and loneliness (Kimberly S.Y., 2009). According to Leo Sang-Min Whang (2004) indicates that people can be addicted into certain categories: internet addicts, possible internet addicts, and non-addicts. The study has shown that the internet addicts get depressed and loneliness easier than other groups (Whang, 2004, p.143). The stress they get from work normally stems from tension and pressure in working environment. This may be developed sense of disconnection and isolation from others. Compare to their online communication, they can unreservedly express their feelings, which leads to increasingly difficulty in face-to-face communication since they are so reliant on communication through computer screen and consequently became addicted. If the addiction gets too severe, it can lead to other psychological problems afterwards (Song, Larose, Eastin, Lin, 2004, p.384).

It is an undeniable fact that there is no clear reason as to why social media are addictive, because many factors have to be taken into account. For instance, the internet attributes that make social media addictive as proposed by Young or the user's personality. Nonetheless, social media as mentioned above is just a mean of communication or a tool. The tool does not have the mind of its own, it is the user who controls the tool, and therefore the user determines whether or not is social media addictive. This study is focused on the correlations between social media users' personality types, their social media usage pattern, and the level of social media addiction that might be triggered.

Rationale of Research Question and Hypothesis

The literature demonstrates the linkage between personality traits, by utilizing the Big Five Dimensions of Personality (McCrae & Costa, 1997), and the cause of social media addiction, leading to various negative impacts on users (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). It suggests that extrovert and neurotic are two traits that influence drastically on the aspects of social media usage (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975), which are either more or less prone to be addicted to social media. According to Hamburger (2002), neurotic people, who are anxious, overly emotional, and insecure, are positively related to social media addiction, compared to extraverts which are more out-going, are negatively related to social media addiction (Hamburger, 2002). Therefore, proposing that personality traits are related to the cause of social media addiction as well as the tendency of being addicted.



Research question

(1) What is the correlation between social media addiction and personality, based on the Big Five Dimensions of Personality amongst Thai people age 18-25.

(2) To what extent do addicts and non-addicts use social media, and what purposes do they rate as more important.

Hypothesis

(1) There is a positive correlation between social media addiction and personality

(2) Compared to people who are extroverts, neurotics have higher tendency of getting addicted to social media.

(3) Compared to people who are addicts, people who are non-addicts use internet for a longer period of time.

Methodology

The questionnaires being used in the research is based on O. P. John and L. P. Naumann (2008) *Big Five Inventory (BFI)* and the Internet Addiction Test developed by Kimberly Young (1996). The questionnaires will be divided into three sections: a) the level of addiction, b) the personality types based on the big five personality test, and lastly, c) social media usage. It will be distributed via online survey as well as face-to-face survey, to a random of 200 students currently attending one of the international universities (Bangkok, Thailand), age 18-25. Gender will be disregarded, due to the fact that the research focuses solely on three main variables, personality, level of addiction, and social media usage. The original questionnaire designed by O. P. John and L. P. Naumann (2008) would be used to support the categorizing of research samples into five dominant personality types which are extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. The questionnaire is comprised of lists of characteristics that may or may not apply to the respondents. The respondents will rate the content correspondently based on the BFI scoring scale, depending to what extent do they rate the characteristics statements listed and described on the list as 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*).

According to The Center for Internet Addiction Recovery, the internet addiction test developed by Dr. Kimberly Young, is the “*first validated and reliable measure of addictive use of the internet*”. The IAT will be used to determine the level of internet addiction, by rating each internet using related behavior using a 0 (*does not apply*) to 5 (*always*) scale, with a scoring based on a 100 point scale, whether it is mild (20-49), moderate (50-79), or severe (80-100), based on a 100 point scale. However the survey will refer people with a score of 20-49 as non-addicts and 50-100 as addicts. The last section of the survey is designed to find out respondents’ social media usage, the activities that they are most engaged with, and the purpose of using social media. The focus of the study is limited to one of the international universities (Bangkok, Thailand) Students, age ranging from 18-25, with other cultures and social factors neglected.

Research Results

The research was conducted at one of international universities in Bangkok, Thailand by 200 surveys distributed to undergraduates through internet as well as face-to-face. The research question was to find out whether or not there is a correlation between a person’s personality according to the big five personality dimension and his/her potential of being addicted to the internet. The data indicated that there is no significant relationship between a person’s

personality and the tendency of being addicted. However, the data does show that the highest level of addiction occurs in people who are under the personality of conscientiousness 83.3%, followed by extroversion 78.7%, then Neuroticism 72.7%. Participants who fall into the conscientiousness personality trait demonstrated a higher percentage of addicts compare to other personalities, on the other hand people who fall into openness have a lower percentage of addicts within the personality group. This has shown that the hypothesis 1 which states that, comparing to people who are extroverts, neurotics have higher tendency of getting addicted to social media, to be wrong. In total, out of 200 samples, there were 140 addicts and 60 non-addicts, presented with this data we could conclude that more than half of the populations are addicts, without realizing.

The second research question was to what extend do addicts and non-addicts uses social media, and what purposes do they rate as more important. As shown in table 2, in regards of people who are addicts, most of them tend to spend 1-5 hours per week on using social media, whilst 37% of people who are addicts spend more than 25 hours per week on using social media. This data shows a contradiction, due to the fact that logically speaking people who are addicts naturally would spend more time on the internet, however with the data being presented, most addicts and non-addicts spend 1-5 hours per week online. Therefore, the result does not support hypothesis 3 which states that comparing to people who are addicts, people who are non-addicts uses internet for a longer period of time, because people who are addicted to the internet might not necessary spend more time online compare to people who are

addicted, as a result the researcher can conclude that the number of hours spent online per week does not relate to the level of addiction.

Table 2 shows the purpose of internet usage between addicts and non-addicts, as shown there is no significant difference in the usage pattern. Both addicts and non-addicts mostly uses social media to connect with current friends, however the data shows slight difference in the second ranking usage.

	Addicts	Addicts Percent	Non Addicts	Non Addicts Percent
Stay in touch with current friends	82	58.6	32	53.3
Stay in touch with family members	3	2.1	2	3.3
Connecting old friends	17	12.1	6	10.0
Connecting others to share interests	12	8.6	12	20.0
Making new friends	5	3.6	-	-
Reading other's comments	6	4.3	-	-
Seek information	13	9.3	7	11.7
Other	2	1.4	1	1.7
Total	140	100.0	60	100

Table 2 Purpose of Internet Usage (Addict)

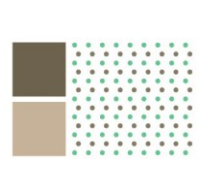


Discussion and Conclusion

The results presented in this research are insufficient to determine or prove the stated hypothesis 1, furthermore, hypothesis 2 and 3 are proved to be incorrect. The results are not preferred, however the data collected can be useful when conducting further study on the online behaviors of undergraduate students. The fact that 70% of the samples are addicts is an issue to be concerned, because being addicted to the internet means demonstrating a certain degree of psychological impacts, which can further leads to other issues. It would be potentially useful if more researches can be done specifically targeting the behaviors behind this group of people. Due to the fact of the research results in this study has demonstrated a similar online usage pattern with non-addicts, therefore more in depth research should be conducted in order to be able to find out which group of people is more prone to internet addiction. Nevertheless, with the data collected the researcher was able to prove that the amount of time spent online is not necessarily a determinant of whether or not a person is addicted to the internet. In addition, the purpose of social media usage shows very slight difference between addicts and non-addicts, as a result more in-depth research should be done on the motives on using social media behind these two groups of people, survey alone is not enough to prove the relationship between personality and the level of internet addiction.

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