

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS - A PILOT STUDY

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SUMMARY

Background: The definition of addiction is that it is an acquired, strong need to perform a specific activity or continued use of mood altering substances. Increasing discussion about the development of Internet addiction, which like other addictions, have their roots in depression, impaired assessment esteem and social anxiety shows that it affects all users of the global network, regardless of gender or age. The aim of the study was to assess the impact of social networking on the ongoing behavior of respondents- the first step of a study on the possibility of dependence on social networks.

Subjects and Methods: The study was based on an authors questionnaire placed on popular polish websites on February 2013. Questions related to the types and frequency of specific activities undertaken by the private profiles of users.

Results: The study involved 221 respondents, 193 questionnaires were filled in completely and correctly, without missing any questions. 83.24% admitted to using social networking sites, 16.76% indicated that they never had their own profile. An overwhelming number of respondents are a member of Facebook (79.17%), specialized portals related to their profession or work were used by only 13.89%, Our-class (6.25%) and Twitter was a primary portal for one person only. Nobody marked a participation in dating services.

Conclusion: There is a big difference between the addiction to the Internet and addictions existing within the Internet; the same pattern applies to social networking. There is a need to recognize the "social networking" for a particular activity, irrespective of Facebook, Twitter and Nasza-Klasa, which are commercial products.

Key words: addiction – Internet - social networking

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past years (first voices appeared in last decade of XX century), the concept of Internet addiction has grown in terms of acceptance as a legitimate clinical disorder often requiring treatment. There are no doubts that the Internet may be a particularly dangerous and addictive medium. Hours spent in the network is time taken from work, study or family life. Internet addiction is a growing social problem (Kwiatkowska et al. 2007, Echeburua & Corral 2010). It affects mainly people living alone and not having a steady job. Importantly, the fascination with the Internet comes to all new participants in the network, regardless of age or gender. It is difficult, however, to delve into the details of addiction, to determine what on the Internet can be the most dangerous and how to guard against this (Tsai et al. 2010). The Internet has many faces and you can do almost everything using it: send e-mails, surf sites, download files, participate in discussion groups or role-playing games, chat. It can easily be a source of addiction especially because it gathers so many resources and allows for so many forms of activity. An important role is played by the anonymity of the user, especially with socially unacceptable areas such as pornography (pointed to its more radical form). The user here gets what they want easily and without too much worry. The anonymity of the user is also a factor encouraging persons suffering from social phobia or having problems with relations in the e.g. family or

school environment to contact other people (Bracik 2012). How can we distinguish between healthy and unhealthy internet use? Each of us have very different activity on the Internet. Some people declare that it is primarily a tool of their work, and another group use it as a communication tool, the same as phone or post, which allows contact with family or friends who live far away. Addiction to the Internet is reflected in more frequent connecting to it, spending more and more time using it. It also manifests itself in obsessive thinking, and even in our dreams of what can happen on the Internet. Addicts would like to limit the use of the Internet, but they have not enough willpower. At the moment, internet addiction disorder (IAD), covers a variety of impulse-control problems such as cybersex addiction, cyber-relationship addiction, net compulsions information overload, computer addiction (Young 1998, Murali & George 2007, Shapira et al. 2003). In all that, more recently, social networking sites have begun to play a more and more important role. (Ruder et al. 2011, Elphinston & Noller 2011) Facebook, Twitter or Myspace are known worldwide; on national level there are also thousands of others such as Nk.pl or Fotka.pl in Poland. They may be general (Facebook, Twitter) or targeting a specific group (e.g. former students as Nk.pl) or designed to present an opinion and review (IMDB, TowerOfBooks, nuta.pl, opiniuj.pl, dood.pl, Yelp.com). It is said that the standard internet user spends min. 1.5 hours a day with using a profile (Social Habit 2012). There is no doubt that it affects health. The aim of the

study was to assess the impact of social networking on the ongoing behavior of respondents - the first step of a study on the possibility of dependence on social networks. Research on the development of dependence on social networking sites has been planned in three stages; the presented results are a summary of the pilot study. At the beginning interest has been mainly located to find answers as to who are the users of social networking sites and how they use the network.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The anonymous survey was developed by the authors for this particular study. It consisted of a total of 26 questions, of which four questions concerned the respondent metrics, and two referred to the remarks and future contacts to inform them of the results of the survey. The survey was placed on popular social networking sites and online forums in early February 2013 to be filled in on-line. Each user could complete the questionnaire only once; control of IP and cookies files have been introduced.

The study involved 221 respondents, 193 questionnaires were filled in completely and correctly, without missing any questions. Women accounted for the overwhelming majority of respondents (95.38%), men only a small percentage (4.62%). The respondents are mainly young people, 50.87% are people in the 20-29 age group, 20.81% in the range of 30-39 years, 14.45% in the range of 40-49 years. The smallest group was aged 15-19 years (5.2%) and > 60 (0.58%) (Figure 1).

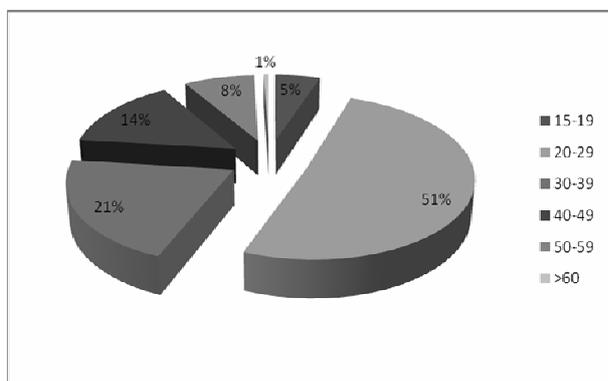


Figure 1. Age of the respondents

RESULTS

Respondents were asked about their field of interest, which is related to their work / study and the answers were as follows: economics/ business (21.39%), education (20.81%), social sciences (19.65%), sciences (16.18%), law and administration (13.29%), arts and culture (12.14%), health (8.09%), trade (7.51%), agriculture/forestry (1.73%) (Figure 2).

83.24% of all asked admitted usage of social networking sites; 16,76% have never used them before. An overwhelming number of respondents is a member of Facebook (79.17%). Present on specialized portals

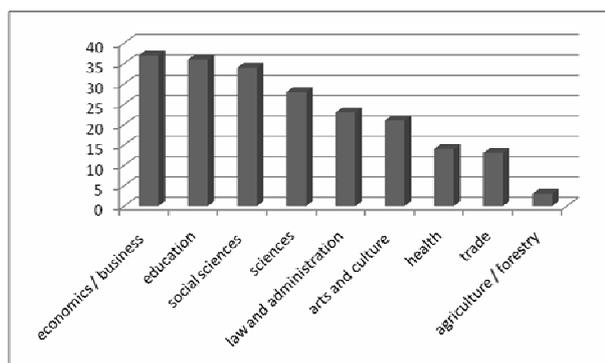


Figure 2. Respondents field of interest which is related to their work / study (multiple choice)

related to profession or work is 13.89%, Nk.pl (more popular as Nasza-Klasa) is a primary portal for 6.25% of all asked and Twitter is a primary portal for one person only. Nobody has marked participation in social networks aimed at dating (Figure 3).

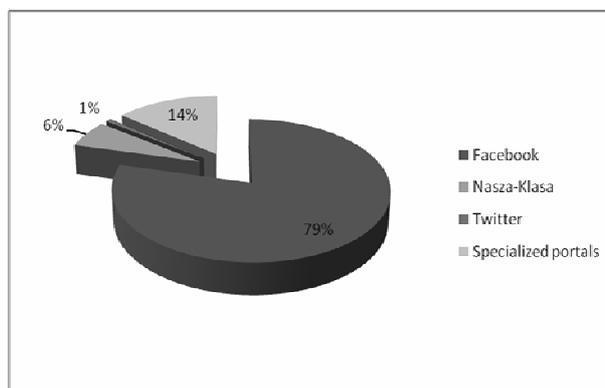


Figure 3. Which network site do respondents use most often?

Most of the participants agreed that their adventure with social portal started within 2-3 years (46, 53%) or even before that time (43.75%).

Respondents were asked which websites they open as first turning on the computer and the answers were given as follow: private e-mail box (60.12%), social networking site (34.68%), business e-mail box (15.03%), browser (9.25%); 'other' was marked by 23.12% of respondents (Figure 4).

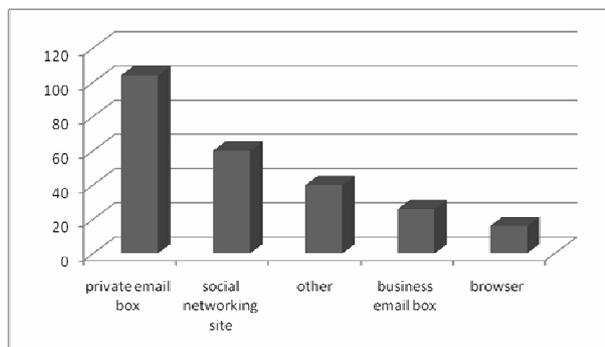


Figure 4. Which websites do respondents open as first turning on the computer? (multiple choice)

Two thirds of respondents (66.67%) admitted to use their laptop as their main tool to navigate their profile on a social network; desktop computer is used by 38.89%, smartphone by 16.67%, netbook by 7.64%. Tablet was the least chosen for this purpose (0.69%) (Figure 5).

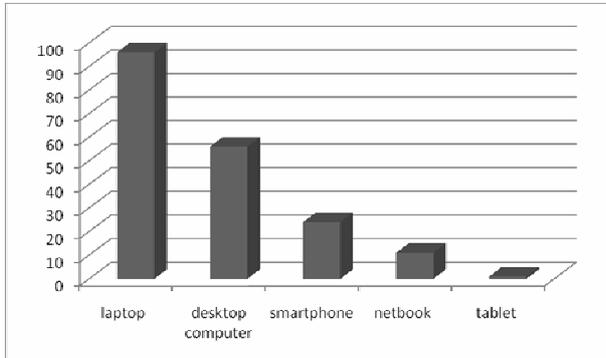


Figure 5. Main tool to navigate respondents online social profile(multiple choice)

Where do people usually surf the net being at the same time present on their profiles? The vast majority of respondents most often use the profile at home (93.75%). Work is the main place for usage of the social networking sites only for 4.86% of all studied. The lowest percentage (0.69%) has been shown by the answers: 'in the car / public transport' and 'other places (gym, shopping, park)'. What is interesting, 31.94% of respondents admitted to use at least once their profiles in public transport, 18.75% in the car as the passenger and 0.69% in the car as the driver. Still, almost half of all the group (49.31%) admitted to check their profile every few hours on a regular basis. Once a day on the social networking site is present 15.97% of respondents and a few times a week 14.58%; only 7.64% visit the website once a week or less. Noteworthy is a group of 12.50%, which is on-line all the time and every few moments check out what's happening on the site (Figure 6).

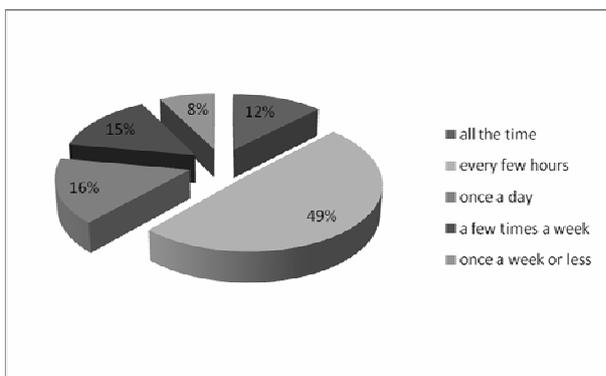


Figure 6. How often do respondents check their online profile?

Users of social networking sites frequently visit pages and fanpages that are consistent with their interests (52.08%). They send messages (with the same frequency privately and on the discussion groups) in the

same way as they check and spy on profiles of their friends (47.22%). Much less frequently undertaken activities are playing games and entertainment applications (16.67%) as well as raising the profile, uploading photos / music (15.97%). None of the respondents sought a partner with the help of the portal (Figure 7).

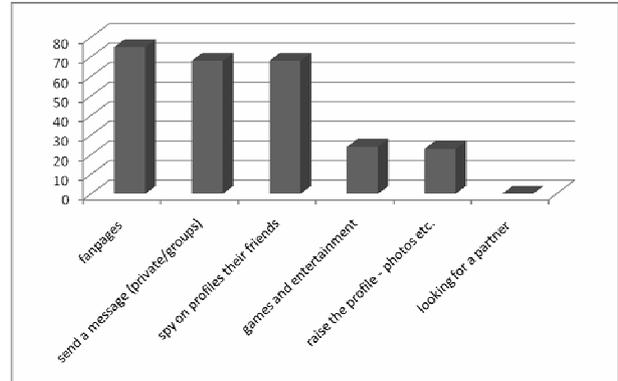


Figure 7. What kind of activity do the respondents undertake on their online profiles? (multiple choice)

Activity on the profile affects the daily routine of website users. Due to the activity, almost one quarter of the respondents happened to go to bed later and / or have trouble sleeping. 11.11% said they often prolong the use of the computer at night. 12.50% extend use of the computer and as a result cannot fall asleep, but try to control this behavior if the next day they have to get up in the morning. 31.25% admitted that such a situation may happen occasionally when something interesting is present online. For the group of 47.22% respondents good sleep is a priority (Figure 8).

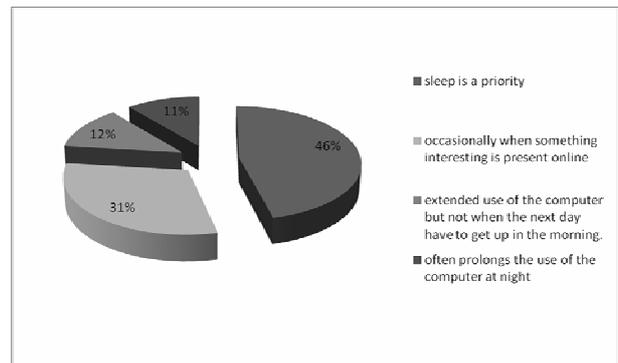


Figure 8. Do the respondents ever prolong their time at night on social network profile?

DISCUSSION

Social networks are built up on the idea of sharing, which is undoubtedly a women thing. While the number of social media users in America doubled from 2008 to 2010, the number of male users during that time dropped 3%. (Duggan & Brenner 2013). It seems that men have a different profile of social network usage. Historically and biologically males are less engaged to social media and their contacts with other users are tighter and focus stronger on their interest. The study

shows that women are definitely more active on social network's profiles and they are the main group of users whose life may be influenced by them. On social networking sites, which is not a new phenomenon on the Internet, people hide behind false information and improved photos of themselves. However, it seems that especially in the case of social networking, users become overly concerned about their image. Today it is not only about a very specific selection of photos; it's all about the response that would be obtained after placing a piece of information on the profile (Moreno et al. 2011). Activities undertaken in the framework of social networking can create and accelerate dependency with several negative consequences in people's life. Up to now, already pointed out has been the significant relationship between Facebook activity and poor sleep quality (Wolniczak et al. 2013). Our studies has actually confirmed that the activity on social networks affect sleep hygiene. Research on correlation between social networking and depression as well as anxiety seem to confirm this theory (Pantic et al. 2012, Koc & Gulyagci 2013). The term dependence on social networks appeared some time ago. The focus is on the huge impact of Facebook that already has one billion users worldwide. Scales have been developed on the basis of which such dependence could be assessed. (Andreassen et al. 2012). It is worth noting that Facebook has already ceased to be merely a portal through which you can connect with your distant friends. At the moment it is a tool for many jobs, and the main source of information about what is happening in the world. (Griffiths 2012). Our study shows that it may interfere with results of addiction recognition.

CONCLUSIONS

Women represent a larger group of users of social networking sites; therefore, they are more vulnerable to the adverse effects stemming from social networking.

Social networking has become a natural daily routine for many people from all environments and in all ages; it can easily interfere with a learned healthy habits.

Private profiles are no longer a tool for communication or expression; they are a new way of getting knowledge about what is happening around the world displacing other media. They also serve as a regular tool used in work and studies.

Acknowledgements: None.

Conflict of interest: None to declare.

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