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Original Article



The Relationship Between Social Network Use and Students' Quality of Life

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Abstract

Background: The availability and use of various social networks influence individuals' lives. This survey aimed to determine students' quality of life and its relationship with internet and social networks use in the shadow of the COVID-19 outbreak. **Methods:** This descriptive survey was performed on 350 eligible students from Alborz University of Medical Sciences in 2021. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. Data were collected using three questionnaires covering socioeconomic status, social networks, quality of life, and a sociodemographic checklist. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. **Results:** In this study, the average age of participants was 22.42 ± 2.8 years, with an average daily social network usage of 3.76 ± 2.11 hours. The mean quality of life score was 62.9 ± 16.9 , and the mean score for social network engagement was 49.87 ± 9.3 . A significant association was found between social network scores and both the type of social network used and the average time spent on these platforms. Within the dimensions of social network use, the type of social network (B=-0.230) served as a negative predictor, while 4-5 hours of daily social network use (B=0.196) served as a positive predictor for quality of life scores. **Conclusion:** The study findings indicate a significant connection between the use of the Internet and social networks and students' quality of life. Therefore, it is imperative to address the time spent on and the type of social networks that is particularly important. **Keywords:** Internet, Social networks, Quality of life, Students

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Introduction

University admission is a key indicator of the transition from adolescence to adulthood (1). This transition from a familiar to an unfamiliar environment leads to an imbalance and affects many aspects of a person's life (2).

Student life is a critical period (3), which increases the need to use the Internet and social networks for learning and social goals (3,4). According to some research, young adults spend a lot of time on online social interactions, create peer relationships based on their interests, seek entertainment, acceptance and identity, and end up being part of a virtual community (5).

Over the past decade, the use of social networks has increased dramatically, so the current generation is called the Internet or network generation (6). Internet use has increased to more than 2.5 billion active users worldwide (7). According to Alexa statistics, social networks are extremely attractive in Iran despite the existing restrictions (8). In a study by Hanifah and Sumita in 2011, most students were aware of virtual social networks (9).

Today, various social media such as Telegram, Instagram, and WhatsApp are available (10), which have affected different parts of social life (11), hence leaving numerous positive and negative effects on various fields including cultural, psychological, economic, quality of life, social interactions, professional and family life, efficiency and quality of leisure time (10).

As a key health indicator, quality of life is an allencompassing notion (12) that can be affected by physical health, personal growth, psychological status, level of independence, social relations, and environment (13). This indicator has an extensive range of effects on an individual's life and the whole of society (14). Accordingly, the present era is labelled the era of improving the quality of life (15).

The individual's range of physical and mental quality of life is affected by the user's experience with social networks (16). Moradi and Jamshidi in 2018 stated that social



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networks improve the quality of life (17). Also, Hanna LaValle et al reported a negative correlation between social network usage and quality of life (5). Meanwhile, Qian et al reported that different types of internet use had different impacts on the quality of life (18). In a systematic review, a relationship was found between depressive symptoms in young adults and their use of social media (19).

Based on the mentioned materials and the existence of contradictions in the results, as well as the importance of the quality of life of students who are the future makers of every country, the present study aimed to determine the relationship of Internet use and social networks with quality of the life of students of Alborz University of Medical Sciences.

Methods

This descriptive-analytical, cross-sectional study was carried out on a sample of students (n=350) from Alborz University of Medical Sciences in 2021. Situated in Alborz province near the capital, Tehran, this university comprises six faculties including medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, health sciences, nursing, and paramedicine.

Sample size

According to the study by Santini et al (20) and using a correlation coefficient of 0.15, with $\beta = 0.2$ and

 α = 0.05, the required sample size was calculated to be 345 participants, following the formula provided. To account for a potential 10% dropout rate, the sample size was increased to 350. Each faculty contributed to the sample in proportion to its student population.

$$n = \left(\frac{Za + Z\beta}{C}\right)^2 + 3$$

c = 0.5 ln[(1+r)/(1-r)]

Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria include being Iranian male and female students, age range of 18 to 29 years, having passed at least one semester, having no history of psychotropic or illicit drugs, having no history of antidepressants, having no history of physical or mental illnesses according to student's record files and statements, and having a smartphone.

Exclusion criteria

The exclusion criteria include refusing to participate in the study, withdrawing from studying, and the occurrence of stressful events during the study, such as the loss of parents or inability to complete the questionnaires.

Data collection tools

Data were collected using three questionnaires and a checklist as follows:

Personal Profile Checklist

Personal Profile Checklist covered participants' characteristics including age, gender, nationality, marital status, education, field of study, semester, job, smartphone, using social networks, type of social network, and mean time spent on social networks per day (in hours).

The Socio-economic Status Questionnaire

The Socio-economic Status Questionnaire, created by Ghodratnama in 2013, includes five primary items along with six demographic questions. It was designed to evaluate four aspects of socio-economic status including income level, economic class, education, and housing conditions. Responses are rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from very low (1) to very high (5). Eslami et al validated this questionnaire in Iran, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 (21).

Social Networking Questionnaire

Jahanbani's 2018 questionnaire, consisting of 19 items, was utilized to evaluate social media usage. This instrument encompasses three dimensions: frequency of use, types of use, and user trust in social media. Each item is rated based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from very low to very high. Jahanbani validated the reliability of the questionnaire with a Spearman's correlation coefficient of 0.90, and its internal consistency was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 (22).

Short Form Survey-36

Ware and Sherbourne developed the Short Form Survey-36 (SF-36) in 1992 in the United States, and its validity and reliability have been tested across various patient groups (23). The SF-36 includes 36 items across eight dimensions: physical functioning, role limitations due to physical health, role limitations due to emotional health, energy/fatigue, emotional well-being, social functioning, pain, and general health. These subscales are combined to form two overall scales—physical health and mental health. A lower SF-36 score reflects a lower quality of life, while a higher score reflects a better quality of life. In Iran, Montazeri et al (2005) verified its validity (0.58 to 0.95) and reliability (0.77 to 0.9) (24).

Procedure

After receiving the required university permits and ethics approval from the university's ethics committee, we commenced our study. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, university classes were online, hence, the list of students was received through the Vice-Chancellor for Education. After identifying the eligible students, the consent form was sent through available online networks such as social media channels of the Student Vice-Chancellor, the student research committee, and other student forums. Students who were willing to participate The students were assured that all their information remained confidential, that they were under no obligation to join or remain in the study, and that choosing not to participate would not result in any penalties or academic issues.

Statistical Analysis

Information was recorded in SPSS version 25 and analyzed using descriptive-analytical tests including independent samples test, ANOVA, and linear regression.

Results

The present study evaluated the information of 350 participants of Alborz University of Medical Sciences. The participants' mean age was 22.42 ± 2.8 years, and the mean time spent on social networks was 3.76 ± 2.11 hours per day. Furthermore, quality of life had a mean score of 62.9 ± 16.9 , and the social networks score was 49.87 ± 9.3 (Table 1).

Based on the findings, the mean score of social networks was significantly related to the variables of type of social network use, the mean time spent on social networks, and smoking (P<0.05), But there was no significant relationship with the variables of gender, age, marital status, educational level, field of study, and alcohol consumption (P>0.05). The mean score of social media was higher in smokers. In addition, Tukey's post hoc revealed that the score of social networks in people who used all social media was higher than those who used only WhatsApp (P<0.001) or Telegram (P<0.001). Social media scores were lower in people who used the Internet for 0-1 hour than those who used it for 2 hours or more than 8 hours (P<0.001) (Table 2).

To determine the relationship between quality of life and social networks, linear regression was used, and Dummy coding was performed for qualitative variables. The results showed that predictor variables determined 8.2% of the variance of the criterion variable. Of dimensions of social network variable, type of social network use (B = -0.230)was a negative predictor, and variables of non-smoking (B=0.149), socio-economic status (B=0.126), and 4-5 hours of using social networks per day (B=0.196) were positive predictors of quality of life score. The specific usage of social networks was associated with a reduction of 9.45 units in quality of life. On the other hand, factors like non-smoking (77.55 units), a one-unit increase in socio-economic status (203.4 units), and using social networks for 4-5 hours daily (80.55 units) corresponded with an increase in quality of life scores (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 1. Frequency distribution of individual-social characteristics of students participating in the study in 2021

Variable		Number	Percent
Cardan	Male	138	39.4
Gender	Female	212	60.6
A	18-23 years	250	71.4
Age	24-29 years	100	28.6
Mean ± SD	22.4 ± 2.8		
	Married	45	12.9
Maritai status	Single	305	87.1
	Undergraduate	130	37.1
Grade	Master's	9	2.6
	PhD (Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy)	211	60.3
Alcohol consumption	Yes	34	9.7
Alcohol consumption	No	316	90.3
Carabia a	Yes	46	13.1
Smoking	No	304	86.9
Variable		Mean	Standard deviation
The mean duration of social network use		3.76	2.11
	Physical function	84.0	20.5
Quality of life	Restrictions on role play for physical reasons	65.8	37.1
	Restrictions on role play for emotional reasons	51.1	42.0
	Energy and freshness	58.2	18.8
	Mental health	63.0	19.0
	Social performance	69.4	24.8
	Physical pain	76.6	21.2
	General health	65.5	17.2
	Physical health	73.0	17.4
	Mental health	56.6	20.8
	Total score	62.9	16.9
	Rate of use	16.3	3.3
Cogial poterral	Type of use	16.3	3.3
Social network	The level of trust in users	17.2	4.2
	Total score	49.9	9.3

Discussion

Students go through a distinct shift from adolescence to adulthood during their university years (24). Successful transition to university is critical to their well-being (2) and affects their health (24). Students tend to use the Internet because it furnishes them with information and research needs (25) and use social networks for communication (2) (26).

In the present study, the mean time of social network use was 3.76 ± 2.11 hours per day, close to the global mean in 2021 at 145 minutes (about 2 hours and 41 minutes) (27). Regression analysis showed that the type of social network use was a negative predictor of quality of life, and 4-5 hours of social network use was a positive predictor

Variable	Social networks	Mean (Standard deviation)	F	t	P value
Gender	Male	49.5 (8.5)	1.005	-0.637	0.525 *
	Female	50.1 (9.8)	1.985		
Age	18-23 years	50.1 (9.3)	0.145	0.000	0.387 *
	24-29 years	49.2 (9.3)	0.145	0.866	
	Married	48.4 (9.1)	0.059	1 110	9 0.264 *
Marital status	Single	50.1 (9.3)	0.058	-1.119	
	Undergraduate	51.1 (9.4)			
Grade	Master's	49.1 (12.8)	1.696		0.185**
	PhD (Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy)	49.2 (9.1)			
	Medicine	49.1 (9.1)			
Field of Study	Midwifery	49.5 (10.3)			
	Counseling in midwifery	46.9 (11.6)			
	Operating room	52.4 (19.6)	1.079		0 377 **
Tield of Study	Anesthesia	49.2 (9.2)			0.377
	Nursing	51.2 (8.1)			
	Laboratory sciences	52.5 (9.3)			
	Health	52.6 (10.7)			
Alcohol use	Yes	51.5 (9.7)	0.491	1 093	0.275 *
	No	49.7 (9.3)	0.491	1.055	
Smoking	Yes	53.3 (9)	0.157	2 707	0.007 *
	No	49.4 (9.3)	0.157	2.707	
The type of social network used	WhatsApp	45.2 (8.7)	17 107		
	Telegram	45.1 (7.9)			< 0.001**
	Instagram	48.9 (8.6)	17.107		< 0.001
	All items	52.5 (9)			
The mean duration of social network use	0-1 hours	37.6 (7.4)			
	2-3 hours	47.3 (7.9)			
	4-5 hours	53.5 (8.3)	29.365		< 0.001**
	6-7 hours	54.7 (6.7)			
	8 hours and more	54.8 (10.2)			

Table 2. The relationship between social networks in students participating in the study in terms of individual social factors in 2021

* Independent Samples Test; ** ANOVA.

of quality of life. Numerous studies have shown the relationship between the amount and type of Internet use and its positive and negative outcomes (28). The results also highlighted that the links between routine usage and emotional connection to the three health-related outcomes differ among specific social groups (29). Social networks affect different parts of a person's social life (11), leaving positive and negative effects on various aspects, especially the quality of life (10). Research has shown that the use of social networks is associated with improved social welfare. Therefore, the physical and psychological aspects of quality of life may be affected by the experience of users with social networks. Moreover, individuals differ in their experiences and motivations for using Internet-based social networks, the number of times they use them, and the impact of social networks on their health and quality of life (17). They concluded that the intensity of social networking and chat improved students' understanding of their quality of life (30). Moradi and Jamshidi stated that participation in social networks increased healthrelated quality of life (17). Khalaila and Vitman-Schorr, in their study on older adults, found that the Internet and social networks had a positive role in their quality of life (31). Naeinian et al, in a study on high school students in Tehran, found that high Internet use reduced the quality of life (32). In a study by Ragheb et al on nursing students, they found that inappropriate use of the Internet had a negative impact on students' quality of life (33). These results are consistent with the results of the present study.

Another variable that was significantly related to the quality of life was gender. Being a female was a negative predictor of quality of life. Men and women are significantly different in terms of their quality of life (28). Health, employment, happiness, and life satisfaction, Table 3. The relationship of social networks with the quality of life of students participating in the study in terms of demographic factors in 2021

Predictive variable	В	SE	Beta	t	P value	
Constant	433.583	115.062		3.768	>0.001	
Age	1.853	2.982	0.039	0.622	0.535	
Gender (female)	-844.34	16.928	-0.126	-2.058	0.041	
Alcohol use	-15.886	28.925	-0.037	-0.549	0.583	
Not smoking	55.778	25.947	0.149	2.150	0.033	
WhatsApp	1.099	31.813	0.003	0.035	0.972	
Instagram	-6.914	30.542	-0.016	-0.226	0.821	
All items	-33.235	22.871	-0.121	-1.453	0.147	
Socio-economic status	4.203	2.006	0.126	2.095	0.037	
The mean time spent on social media per day (hours)						
0-1	-7.478	37.404	-0.013	-0.200	0.842	
4-5	55.805	19.377	0.196	2.880	0.004	
6-7	3.184	28.252	0007	0.113	0.910	
8 and more	15.543	32.771	0.031	0.474	0.636	
Social network						
Use network social	-9.450	3.199	-0.230	-2.954	0.003	
The level of user trust	3.966	2.070	0.125	1.916	0.056	

which comprise quality of life, are affected by the social status of the society and vary between men and women (34). Fanni et al and Shams Alizadeh et al reported a better quality of life in men as compared with women (35,36).

In the present study, socioeconomic status was a positive predictor of quality of life. At a given time, quality of life may be considered a function of social, economic, political, welfare, health, educational, environmental, and psychological conditions (30). In other words, quality of life is a multi-dimensional concept comprising material conditions of life, work, health, and socioeconomic status (37). Hovsepian et al examined the impact of socioeconomic factors on health-related quality of life in Iranian students and reported improved quality of life when socioeconomic inequalities are eliminated (38). Dong et al, in their study on the rural adolescent population of China, reported a lower quality of life in students with poor socioeconomic status (39).

Conclusion

According to the results of this study, the duration of Internet use per day was associated with increased quality of life of students while the type of social network use, unfavorable socioeconomic conditions, and smoking were associated with reduced quality of life. Since students build countries' future, policymakers should address the time and type of social network students use.

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SE	Adj R ²	R ²	R
19.95825	0.082	0.129	0.359

recognize and appreciate the mentioned entities and all participants in the study.

Authors' Contribution

Conceptualization: Zohreh Mahmoodi, Fatemeh Aliverdi. Data curation: Fatemeh Aliverdi, Zahra Mehdizadeh Tourzan. Formal analysis: Farima Mohamdi, Leila Amini, Zohreh Mahmoodi. Investigation: Zohreh Mahmoodi, Fatemeh Aliverdi. Methodology: Zohreh Mahmoodi, Farima Mohamadi. Project administration: Zohreh Mahmoodi. Resources: Leila Amini, Zahra Mehdizadeh Tourzan. Software: Farima Mohamadi. Supervision: Zohreh Mahmoodi, Fatemeh Aliverdi, Zahra Mehdizadeh, Leila Amini Tourzan. Validation: Zohreh Mahmoodi. Writing-original draft: Zohreh Mahmoodi, Fatemeh Aliverdi, Zahra Mehdizadeh, Leila Amini Tourzan.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Ethical Approval

Informed consent was collected from all participants in the study, and all methods adhered to relevant guidelines and regulations. The Ethics Committee of Alborz University of Medical Sciences approved all experimental protocols (Abzums.Rec.1399.234). Relevant guidelines and regulations were observed throughout the study.

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