

Social Networks Usage among Youth in the Kyrgyz Republic

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Abstract:

According to statistics, in 2012 there were 767514 social network users in the Kyrgyz Republic, which is the second largest network in Central Asia, after Kazakhstan. The majority of users are females – 60%, mostly of young ages – 19-24. In the scope of this research, it was aimed to study the influence of social networks on the thinking abilities of students, if they consider SN as helpful in education, the level of trust to information on SN and money spend on SN by students. Also, since SN is getting more and more popular among students, the SN addiction level was investigated. Data was collected using online survey forms among youth. The total sample size included into analysis comprised 71 users. We believe that the obtained results will help us to shed a light to the problem of SN usage by students in educational context.

Keywords:

Social Networking Sites, Education, Kyrgyz Republic

Использование социальных сетей среди молодежи в Кыргызской Республике

Аннотация:

Согласно статистическим данным, в 2012 году в Кыргызской Республике было 767514 пользователей социальных сетей. Сеть кыргызских пользователей является второй по величине сетью в Центральной Азии после Казахстана. Большинство пользователей - это женщины - 60%, в основном молодые люди - 19-24 лет. Данное исследование было направлено на изучение влияния социальных сетей на мыслительные способности учащихся, возможности использования социальных сетей в образовании, уровень доверия к информации в социальных сетях и затраты на Интернет среди молодежи. Кроме того, так как социальные сети становятся все более популярным среди студентов, был исследован уровень зависимости. Данные были собраны с использованием онлайн-форм опроса среди молодежи. Общий объем выборки, включенный в анализ, составил 71 пользователя. Мы считаем, что полученные результаты помогут нам пролить свет на проблему использования социальных сетей студентами в образовательном контексте.

Ключевые слова:

Социальные сети, образование, Кыргызская Республика

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, there are many ways to communicate, and social networking sites (SNS) became one of the most effective ways of communication. Social networking services are Web 2.0 internet based applications, where the content is generated by users [19]. Popularity of SNS can be explained by the fact that SNS provide opportunity not only to meet strangers, but also for self-presentation and friendship performance [6]. According to [4], by the April, 2016, there were almost 8163 billion active SNS users. An average time, spent in the most famous SNS – Facebook was about 1000 minutes monthly per visitor [5]. In 2015, it was estimated that if a Facebook were a country, it would be a country with the largest population [22].

The growth of popularity of these services brought to increase of researches on this field. Mostly, the studies have been conducted concerning what attracts millions of people to social networks and what are the consequences (positive or negative) of this interest, especially among young people. One of research areas concerning SNS was use of services for education. SNS, as a very fast way of communication and due to interest of youth to it, could be used as a learning tool. However, many researches showed that it can also distract students' attention from courses. Other researchers were concerned with the privacy and trust issues, since SNS content is filled by users, and trust to information on SNS becomes a matter. Research by [3], based on survey conducted in 16 states of the United States, came to the conclusion that there are two main threat in SNS: sexual violence and privacy violation. Another research by [18] showed that SNS might affect the cognitive skills such as thinking and decision making characteristics of people. The majority of active social networking audience showed impairment of memory and analytical skills.

In the Kyrgyz Republic, in 2012 there were 4 most popular SNS, of which 3 were Russian SNS, namely, MoiMir, Odnoklassniki and VKontakte, and Facebook. Overall, there were 767 514 accounts from Kyrgyzstan, of which 12% were registered on Facebook (97 400 users) [14]. In June, 2016, the number of Kyrgyz Facebook users reached 360 000 [8], and users from the Kyrgyz Republic comprise the second largest network in Central Asia, after Kazakhstan. Mostly, Kyrgyz people become members of SNS at age between 19-24 [14]; however, this number decreases year by year.

Research by [7] showed that although in the Kyrgyz Republic there is an increase of Internet usage, the computer literacy rate is at the moderate level. And with the emerging of social networking sites, there are several problems have been encountered. The aim of this study is to outline advantages and disadvantages of social networking sites use in the country, as well as determine whether SNS have a potential to be used as an educational tool in the country.

2. RELATED WORKS

Progressive increase of popularity of social networking services among young people brought an idea of using these platforms as an educational tool. In [15], affordances of social software were considered and emerging pedagogical models, which use Web 2.0, were presented. Researchers from United Kingdom [10] developed principles of learning using social media based on the results of survey, which was conducted in four universities in UK. The results of

the study suggested that the main problem in using social media as an educational tool is due to separation of learning space and personal space. That is, students mostly consider social media as a personal space. In the study by [25], Facebook groups were created to be used as learning management system (LMS). Although students' perception of Facebook as an LMS was mostly positive, they were concerned with the privacy issues. However, there are many evidences that social networking sites distract students' attention from studying. Thus, a study by [12] showed that students who had an account in SNS spend less time studying. According to study by [21] in 263 middle schools, students' attention was distracted from tasks every 6 minutes in averaged, including distractions by social media. The review of literature by [13] provided comprehension in several dimension of social networking usage, including negative consequences of SNS usage and potential SNS addiction. Results, obtained in many studies such as [9], [23] and [11] revealed that SNS usage has negative impact on academic achievement of students. However, these results a controversial, since other studies such as [20] show that SNS has no or positive impact on students' GPA.

In addition, many researches were conducted concerning effect of social media on cognitive skills of youth. For example, results of research by [18] revealed that along with decrease in academic achievement, there were relationship problems in real life. In the study by [1] it was indicated that there was a difference in attention control among active and active SNS users. That is, those who were using social media actively were less likely to ignore distractors. The impact of SNS use on verbal ability, working memory, and spelling were investigated by [2]. The findings showed that use of Facebook positively affected mentioned skills. Also, the dual effect of engagement with SNS was shown in the research by [24], which suggests that use of SNS, as any other behaviors, can become bad use habits, which turn into addiction.

In the Kyrgyz Republic, there is a lack of researches concerning use of social media. Review showed that in the research by [14] popularity of social networks were investigated, along with the number of users. However, no information on impact of SNS on cognitive skills of youth and perception of these services by Kyrgyz users is available.

3. MATERIALS AND METHOD

3.1. Research Goals

Quick adoption of social networking sites all around the world brought many question on why people and teenagers particularly, are becoming members of these sites, what attracts them and how it affects their real life, and particularly – their education. According to Chaffey, 2017], by the April, 2016, there were almost 8163 billion active SNS users. According to Internet World Stats service, in June, 30, 2016 there were 360 000 Facebook users in the Kyrgyz Republic [8]. In the scope of this research, it was aimed to study the influence of social networks on youth, particularly, on:

- thinking abilities of students
- if they consider SNS as helpful in education
- the level of trust to information on SN
- how much money do users spend on SN
- SN addiction level was investigated.

Data was collected using online survey forms among youth. The total sample size included into analysis comprised 71 users. We believe that the obtained results will help us to shed a light to the problem of SN usage by students, particularly in educational context.

3.2. Procedure

For the study, a quantitative method was utilized. A questionnaire, which included 19 questions, was developed. Survey questions include 4 demographic questions; questions on how often and for what purpose SNS are use; 5 point 7 Likert type questions concerning users' attitude toward SNS usage; 6 questions on addiction to SNS. Survey was conducted using Google forms, survey questions were given in Russian and Kyrgyz languages. Questionnaire was distributed online.

Responses were further analyses using SPSS package.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

For the study, the questionnaires were distributed via e-mail and social networking services. There were 71 participants of age between 14 and 35 years old, of which 52.1% were female, 47.9% are males. Most of them (64.8%) are students of vocational or higher educational institutions (Table 4).

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	37	52.1
	Female	34	47.9
Age	14-18	8	11.3
	19-24	58	81.7
	25-28	3	4.2
	29-35	2	2.8
Education	Secondary	1	1.4
	Vocational	18	25.4
	Incomplete higher	43	60.6
	Higher	9	12.7
Occupation	Business	9	13.7
	In education	6	8.5
	Student	46	64.8
	Unemployed	10	14.1

Also, there are representatives of business (13.7%) and education (8.5%). In addition, 14.1% of respondents are unemployed.

4.2. Influence of Social Networks on the Thinking Abilities and Anxiety and Attention of Respondents

The aim of this test was to determine if there is a dependence of cognitive skills such as thinking abilities, anxiety and attention of respondents on their gender, educational level and time they spend on the social networking services.

First, the independent samples t-test was conducted to test if the cognitive skills of male and female respondents differ. This difference was found to be statistically significant at 95% confidence level. The results of the tests showed that females feel more addicted to SNS than males (with $\mu = 2.06$ for females and $\mu = 2.46$ for males). However, the difference of SNS influence on thinking was not significant ($\rho > 0.05$). Results are given in the **Table 2**.

Table 2. T-test on dependence of respondents' cognitive skills on gender

Questions	Sig.	Mean
How do you feel yourself when not in SN?	.009	Female –2.46
		Male – 2.06
My thinking abilities are getting lower because of SN	.747	Female –3.09
		Male – 3.16

Next, the dependence of respondents' cognitive skills on their educational level was analyzed using ANOVA test. The results revealed that educational level impacts the way people feel when they do not use SNS for a long time. That is, the higher the level of education, the less people feel uncomfortable when not in SNS for a long time. The impact of the education level on thinking abilities was found to be not statistically significant on 95% confidence interval (**Table 3**).

Table 3. ANOVA on dependence of respondents' cognitive skills on education level

Questions	Sig.	Mean
How do you feel yourself when not in SN?	.000	Vocational – 2.33
		Incomplete higher – 2.09
		Higher – 3.00
My thinking abilities are getting lower because of SN	.147	Vocational – 3.33
		Incomplete higher – 3.02
		Higher – 3.00

Last, dependence of respondents' cognitive skills on time they spend on SNS was analyzed. The only factor that was found to be significant was the ability to pay attention to people around during SNS usage. That is, the more people use SNS, the less they pay attention to real environment (**Table 4**).

Table 4. ANOVA on dependence of respondents' cognitive skills on time spent on SN

Questions	Sig.	Mean
How do you feel yourself when not in SN?	.107	1-2 hours – 2.00
		3-4 hours – 2.38

		5-6 hours – 2.09
My thinking abilities are getting lower because of SN	.229	1-2 hours – 3.75
		3-4 hours – 3.18
		5-6 hours – 2.91

Thus, gender, educational level and time spent on SNS do not affect thinking abilities of respondents. On the other hand, gender and time spent on social networks affect people’s attention to other people while they are surfing social networking sites. Also, reactions of male and female respondents, as well as respondents of different educational level, differ when they do not use SNS for a long time.

4.3. Level of Trust to Information on Social Networks

The level of trust to information on social networking sites was analysed using the 5 point scale question. The results revealed that people mostly believe to 50-80% of information posted on SNS – 81.7% of respondents. The percent of those who believe to less than 20% of information on SNS was 8.4%, while the percent of respondents who fully trust this information was 9.9% (Table 5).

Table 5. Level of Trust to Information on Social Networks

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	0%	3	4.2
	20%	3	4.2
	50%	30	42.3
	80%	28	39.4
	100%	7	9.9
	Total	71	100.0

Thus, there was a moderate level of trust.

Using the same independent variables as in the previous sections, the hypotheses were tested. Results showed that education level of respondents does not impact the trust level. Also, the trust level was found insignificant in formation of the trust to information published in social networking sites. However, the difference of trust level between male and female respondents was statistically significant, with $\mu = 3.18$ for females and $\mu = 3.78$ for males (Table 6).

Table 6. T-test on dependence of students’ trust to information on SN on gender

	Sig.	Mean
How much do you believe to info in SN?	.008	Female 3.18
		Male 3.73

Thus, the trust level of male respondents was higher than this of female respondents.

4.4. Social Networks addiction level

To analyze the social network addiction level of respondents, three questions were chosen. Two questions were 5 point Likert type questions, with 1 being “totally disagree” and 5 - “totally agree”; one question had 5 points time scaling. The first question was on whether respondents can avoid surfing social networks for a long period of time. The second question was on whether respondents pay attention to people around when they are using social networking sites. The last question was on time, till what time respondents surf social networks at night. As independent variables, the gender, education level and time users spend on SN were used. Results show that male and female respondents’ attention level to the real world while using SN differ significantly, with $\rho = 0.009$, $\mu = 2.53$ for females and $\mu = 2.22$ for males. In addition, male respondents have less control over time they spent on SN at night, with $\rho = 0.000$, $\mu = 2.43$ for males, while $\mu = 1.56$ for females (Table 7).

Table 7. T-test on dependence of SN usage on gender

Questions	Sig.	Mean
I can avoid surfing in SN	.063	Female 2.74
		Male 3.19
Do you pay attention to people around while in SN?	.009	Female 2.53
		Male 2.22
How long do you surfe in SN at nights?	.000	Female 1.56
		Male 2.43

On the other hand, the education level of respondents has an impact on the respondents’ resistance to use of SN, the significance was 0.002. The mean of responses was $\mu = 4.00$ among respondents with higher education level, $\mu = 3.00$ among respondents with vocational education, $\mu = 2.79$ among respondents with incomplete higher education (Table 8).

Table 8. ANOVA on dependence of SN usage on educational level

Questions	Sig.	Mean
I can avoid surfing in SN	.002	Vocational – 3.00
		Incomplete higher – 2.79
		Higher – 4.00
Do you pay attention to people around while in SN?	.089	Vocational –2.50
		Incomplete higher –2.40
		Higher –2.00
How long do you surf in SN at nights?	.896	Vocational –2.17
		Incomplete higher –1.95
		Higher –2.00

Analysis of dependence of research questions on time that respondents spend on SN showed that the more users spend time on SN, the more they pay attention to people around, with $\rho = 0.000$ and average attention level among respondents who spend 1-2 hours on SN being $\mu = 1.75$, among respondents who spend 3-4 hours on SN the average is $\mu = 2.27$, and among respondents who spend 5-6 hours on SN average is $\mu = 2.68$.

Table 9. ANOVA on dependence of SN usage on time spent on SN

Questions	Sig.	Mean
I can avoid surfing in SN	.352	1-2 hours – 2.25
		3-4 hours – 3.00
		5-6 hours – 3.05
Do you pay attention to people around while in SN?	.000	1-2 hours – 1.75
		3-4 hours – 2.27
		5-6 hours – 2.68
How long do you surf in SN at nights?	.000	1-2 hours – 2.50
		3-4 hours – 1.67
		5-6 hours – 2.64

In addition, time on SN also has an impact on how long respondents stay online at night. Statistically significant difference was showed by respondents who spend 3-4 hours per day at social networking sites, they tend to not stay long online at night, with $\mu = 1.67$. Respondents who spend less than 3 hours and more than 4 hours per day surfing in social networking services stay online longer, $\mu = 2.50$ and $\mu = 2.64$, respectively (Table 9).

4.5. Money Spend on Social Networks by Students

Next, the amount of money, paid by users for Internet, was analyzed. According to results, presented in the Table 10, a bit less than half of respondents (42.3%) pay 1001-1200 soms per month for Internet connection. 26.8% pay 500-1000 soms, 14.1% - 200-500 soms. About 17% of respondents said that they connect to Internet only via free wi-fi.

Table 10. The amount of money paid for SN

	Frequency	Percent
Wi-fi only	12	16.9
200 - 500	10	14.1
501 - 1000	19	26.8
1001 - 1200	30	42.3

Further analysis revealed that gender, educational level, time spent on SN are non-significant at 95% confidence level.

4.6. Social Networks in Education

The aim of this analysis was to determine if respondents consider time, spent on SNS, as useful. Also, since Internet is used by respondents during their work and study, the second question was on whether social networks disturb their attention from work. Independent variables of the analysis are the gender, education level of the respondents and time, spent on SN. The difference in responses between female and male respondent was statistically significant in one of two research questions. That is, female respondents said that time spent on SN was useful, with $\mu = 3.21$, while male respondents average score was $\mu = 2.65$ (Table 11).

Table 11. ANOVA on dependence of education process on gender

Questions	Sig.	Mean
Time, spent on SN was useful	0.029	Female – 3.21
		Male – 2.65
SN disturbs my attention during work or lessons	0.514	Female – 2.97
		Male – 2.78

The difference of attitude toward SN as an educational tool among respondents with different educational level, on the other hand, was statistically significant. The significance was $\rho = 0.001$ for the question whether time, spent on SN was useful. For the question whether SN disturbs attention during work or lessons the significance was $\rho = 0.029$. In both questions, respondents with higher education level were totally agree ($\mu = 5.00$), while respondents with incomplete higher and vocational education were uncertain (Table 12).

Table 12. ANOVA on dependence of education process on educational level

Questions	Sig.	Mean
Time, spent on SN was useful	.001	Vocational – 2.50
		Incomplete higher – 2.81
		Higher – 5.00
SN disturbs my attention during work or lessons	.029	Vocational – 3.00
		Incomplete higher – 2.95
		Higher – 5.00

Time, spent surfing on social networks was also statistically significant, with $\rho = 0.043$ for both questions (Table 13).

Table 13. ANOVA on dependence of education process on time spent on SN

Questions	Sig.	Mean
Time, spent on SN was useful	.043	1-2 hours - 2.00
		3-4 hours - 3.13
		5-6 hours - 2.64
SN disturbs my attention during work or lessons	.043	1-2 hours - 4.00
		3-4 hours – 2.96
		5-6 hours - 2.50

Respondents, who spent on social networking sites about 3-4 hours, considered this time as more productive ($\mu = 3.13$) than those who spent on SN less than 3 hours or more than 4 hours ($\mu = 2.00$ and $\mu = 2.64$, respectively). On the other hand, the responses about whether social networking sites disturb attention during study or work, showed more consistency. That is, the more time respondents spent on social networking sites, the less these services disturb respondents' attention from work or study, means were 4.00, 2.96 and 2.50 among those who

spend 1-2 hours per day in social networks, 3-4 hours per day in social networks and 5-6 hours per day in social networks, respectively.

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to determine factors that attract young people to social networking services, as well as potential to use these services as an educational tool in the Kyrgyz republic. Thus, the research questions were formulated to investigate whether use of social networks influence consciousness characteristics of respondents, such as thinking abilities, attention to real world and anxiety level when not using SN. In addition, the research covered an issue of trust to information on social networking sites and addiction level of respondents to these services. At this point, the money, users spend on Internet, was also investigated. Finally, intention of the study was on determining whether SNS can be used as an educational tool, if SNS are considered as helpful in education. In the paper, the dependence of research question on the respondents' gender, their educational level and time they spend on social networking sites were analyzed. To collect data, online survey forms were utilized. The total sample size included into analysis comprised 71 users.

In the survey there were 52.1% of male respondents and 47.9% of female respondents. Results showed that gender of respondents had an impact on habits of using SN. Firstly, females were more addicted to SNS than males. However, they succeed to pay more attention to people around while surfing in SN and surf less at nights than male respondents. At the same time, female respondents trust to information published in SN less than males and think that time spent on SN was useful. These results go in line with the previous study by [16].

Also, investigation of impact of education level of respondents on the research questions showed, that the higher the level of education, the less people feel discomfort when not in SNS for a long time. That is, more educated people can avoid surfing in SN. However, education level has no effect on thinking abilities of respondents. The difference of attitude toward SN as an educational tool among respondents with different educational level was also significant. Although questions were opposite in meaning, in both questions, respondents with higher education level were totally agree with statements, while respondents with incomplete higher and vocational education were uncertain. This may be due to fact that people with higher education have better time management and use SN in more productive way.

The last criterion was the amount of time that respondents spend in social networking sites. Impact of this criterion on the cognitive skills and trust level was not significant. The difference was significant in the ability to pay attention to people around during SNS usage. That is, the more people use SNS, the less they pay attention to real environment. The surprising results was that respondents feel that the more time they spent in social media, the less it disturbs their attention during work or lessons. That is, people who spend more time in SN can concentrate more on their work.

Overall, it can be concluded that SN has a potential to be used in higher educational context, since respondents with higher level of education have more control over using SN, they do not feel uncomfortable when they are offline. In addition, there is no effect of SN on respondents' cognitive abilities. However, gender of users should be considered when using Facebook for education, because there are gender differences in habits of using SN. The previous research

by authors [17] showed that despite low rates of internet penetration, the vast majority of youth are members of some social media; and the most popular social media were Facebook.

Social networks are playing indispensable role in life of youth. Almost every student have a smartphone with access to internet for different purposes starting from connecting to classmates, being up to date with last news, keeping in touch with family and friends etc. However, they might be not aware on how those media might effect their lives, and how to use if more effectively to be useful during education. The results of this study might shed light on potential of Facebook to be used in educational context in Kyrgyzstan considering their surfing habits, addiction levels, and level of trust to information received through SN.

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