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# GENDER ASPECTS OF INTERNET-ADDICTION AND SOCIAL NETWORKING MOTIVES IN RURAL HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## *Abstract*

The article presents the results of a pilot study into the gender aspects of the correlation between Internet-addiction in high-school students and their motives for using social networks. The study has been conducted among 100 students from the 10th and 11th grades at a rural school of Primorskiy region. The assessment of Internet-addiction was carried out with the use of K.S. Young's questionnaire "Internet-Addiction Test" adapted by V.A. Loskutova. An author questionnaire was used to assess how much each of the 8 following motives was manifested on a scale of 1 to 5: the motive of obtaining information, the motive of communication, the motive of belonging to a group, the motive of self-presentation, the motive of relaxation and entertainment, the motive of anonymity and freedom, material motives, and educational motives. As for the level of Internet-addiction among rural high-school students, no gender differences have been found here. However, gender differences have been revealed in the motives for social networking and in the correlation between these motives and the level of Internet-addiction. Rural male students used social networks, more intensively than females, for communication and maintaining their belonging to a group. Regardless of gender, Internet-addiction in rural high-school students proved to be positively related to the motive of relaxation and entertainment. The study demonstrates that social networks have become an important means of teenagers' socialization not only in urban conditions, but also in rural environment.

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## 1. Introduction

Modern teenagers develop along with the expanding information environment. This fact is one of the most essential features of their socialization today. We live in an information society where computers and Internet technologies have become a key instrument of and a cultural environment for human development and socialization. People's social world-views and self-images depend directly on information capabilities of various mass communication media, primarily Internet which has no match among other tools in terms of the scope of its colossal audience and its ability to overcome any barrier whether a governmental, a national, or a social one.

The development of computer technologies and the emergence of global Internet have influenced many spheres of human activity. Changes have occurred both in education (together with professional activity) and in the field of communication. A new form of it has come into being – virtual communication, which has a number of positive points as it allows a prompt transmission of information between interlocutors regardless of time and distance. The leading type of teenagers' activity consists in communicating and satisfying desires that result from it, such as the wish to extend their social circle, to search actively for a reference group, and to find various lines of building social identity. Given this, it is no wonder that communication in social networks has quickly become popular with youngsters of this age group. Hence, it is clear that nowadays mass media act as a specific agent in the process of children's and teenagers' socialization. Therefore, it appears to be logical that the term "information socialization" is spreading increasingly in the modern scientific discourse. Global Internet plays a special part in this particular type of teenagers' socialization.

While producing significant positive effects, the expanding information space and the increasing role of mass media and mass communications bear some risks, too. In this respect, for example, there is a stronger possibility for a teenager to choose a negative role model. However, another danger is more obvious: with the increasing number of Internet users, Internet-addiction has spread very quickly (Yang, 2015) affecting the younger generation in the first place. The disorderly use of Internet has resulted in the increasing risk of virtual life being separated from the reality, which, in its turn, may have harmful consequences for a person's physical and mental health.

Certainly, Internet-addiction is a socially dangerous phenomenon. It is a sort of disease (like any other addiction) that turns a human from a full-fledged personality into a living being with an obsessive need to connect to the net as soon as possible and stay there for as long as they can. Nevertheless, while being aware of the problem and thinking about the ways to solve it, researchers, psychologists, teachers, theorists, practitioners, and, finally, parents should take into account not only the negative aspects of teenagers' Internet use, but also the positive ones. The Internet has settled down so firmly in our life that further social development does not seem possible without it. This situation begs a question: how can we make the Internet a source of opportunities for a well-balanced development of a person – a teenage boy or a girl – so that our knowledge of it would not become a barrier to using it? There is no doubt that the choice of approaches and decisions on how to overcome (or better – to prevent) Internet-addiction should be science-based. The phenomenon we are interested in is a relatively new one in terms of social "age". Logically, there arise questions such as: how deeply has it been studied? What recent data have been

obtained in sociology, psychology, and pedagogy? And what knowledge (or facts) do we still need so that we could give adequate answers to the emerging challenges?

Studies conducted in Russia (Belinskaya, 2013) show that the country follows many world trends despite the fact that it joined the process of informatization later than Western societies. At that, the Russian social networks audience grows mainly due to the population of the country's provincial regions. The most distinct differences between Russian and foreign youngsters using social networks are only observed in the risks they are able to reflect on. In particular, risks such as having personal data violated, being unable to protect their accounts against spam, having a negative image of them built, and developing Internet-addiction, are the most frequent concerns reported by young people in the rest of the world (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), whereas teenagers in Russia fear of a different kind of risks: having real-life communication replaced by social networks, being unable to handle excessive amounts of information, and failing to cope with an unproductive waste of time (Belinskaya, 2013).

The psychological consequences of information socialization are heterogeneous and can be described in terms of deficiency and complementarity (Belinskaya, 2013). On the one hand, the technological capacities of virtual communication allow modern people to make up for specific "deficiencies" and satisfy a number of their frustrated needs. Most often, Internet users point out three needs they are most vulnerable to. These are the need for stimulation, the need for new experience, and the need for safety. At that, the way in which Internet communication satisfies these needs for them can be defined as a compensatory one.

On the other hand, virtual communication via the Internet can be complementary by giving people fundamentally new opportunities for developing themselves and enlarging their potential. In this context, Internet-addiction may act as a new motivation for cognitive activity, rather than a psychopathological phenomenon (Voyskunskiy, 2015).

## 2. Problem Statement

Studies into the psychological consequences of teenagers' communication in social networks have not proved the hypothesis (which was dominant 20 years ago) that Internet has a negative impact on teenagers' social development (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay & Scherlis, 1998; Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). At present, the most widespread hypotheses are those assuming that there are positive sides in the influence of online communication on teenagers' social development. Works of foreign authors distinguish three such hypotheses (after: Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). In view of this, there are some reasons to assume that social networks make it easier for teenagers to fulfill themselves and, therefore, lead to closer friendly relationships between them (the hypothesis of stimulation). On the other hand, the influence of social networks can have a stratified nature: it can be useful for some teenagers and harmful for others (the hypothesis of stratification) (Baek, Bae & Jang, 2013). For example, sociable teenagers are given additional opportunities to extend their circle through social networks, while teenagers with inefficient social skills may waste their time on inferior relationships online. Besides, the overuse of social networks can result in depressions and thus increase the risk of social isolation. The third hypothesis is the hypothesis of compensation assuming that online communication allows teenagers who have difficulties

interacting face-to-face with their peers to establish more satisfactory relationships (Blais, Craig, Pepler & Connolly, 2008).

The same tendency can be seen in Russian studies of today (Martsinkovskaya, 2012; Belinskaya, 2013; Kramarenko & Somov, 2013; Zaharova, 2014; Gurkina & Maltseva, 2015).

Nevertheless, the issue of teenage Internet-addiction continues to be on the agenda. (Young, 2004; Voyskunskiy, 2015; Malyigin, Merkureva, Iskandirova, Pahtusova & Prokofeva, 2015; Yang, 2015). In order to advance the elaboration of this problem, it is essential to investigate teenagers' motives in the field of Internet use. And since social networks are the leading object of their Internet interests (Gurkina, Maltseva, 2015; Kramarenko & Somov, 2013), it is understandable that studying their motivation for social networking appears to be the most important part of examining the phenomenon of Internet-addiction. In this respect, a special interest for analysis consists in the motivation of teenagers from remote provincial regions of Russia.

People's motivation for using the Internet has been studied rather well, with multiple classifications of motives being made up (Arestova, Babanin & Voyskunskiy, 2006; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Joinson, 2008 ; Tsitsika, Tzavela, Janikian, Olafsson, Iordache, Schoenmakers & Richardson, 2014). The correlation between teenagers' Internet-addiction and their motivation for social networking is still one of the least explored aspects.

## 3. Research Questions

The main research question is whether there is the difference between socialization by means of social networks of teenagers living in urban and rural conditions.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The study was a pilot one. The goal was to reveal the nature of how Internet-addiction is related to the motives which rural high-school students are governed by when using social networks.

## 5. Research Methods

Collecting the empirical data was carried out by using the following methods: the "Internet-addiction Test" by Kimberly S. Young (Young, 2004); the author questionnaire "The Motives for Online Communication" based on the results of a content analysis of survey data received from young people polled in Primorskiy region.

The Internet-addiction test consisted of 40 items. The respondents were to give an answer to each of them on Likert scale of 1 to 5. The interpretation of the test results included three categories of user attitude towards the Internet: an average online user (20-49 points); a user experiencing some problems because of the Internet (50-79 points); and an Internet-addicted user (80-100 points).

"The Motives for Online Communication" questionnaire consisted of 24 items. The respondents were to evaluate how attractive each of the 8 following motives was for them:

the motive of obtaining information,

the motive of communication,

the motive of belonging to a group,

the motive of self-presentation,

the motive of relaxation and entertainment,

the motive of anonymity and freedom,

material motives,

educational motives (related to gaining experience).

The questionnaire set three items for each motive to find out how much it was expressed. The respondents' answers to each item were assessed on a scale of +2 to –2 with a zero marker in the middle. The maximum score on each of the motives was +6, the minimum was –6.

To process the results of the empirical study, the Mann-Whitney U test and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (rs) were applied.

The empirical base of the study was formed by the students of the 10th and 11th grades (age 16-17) of the municipal general education institution "Pokrov secondary school of Oktyabrskiy city district" [Rus. "МОБУ "Покровская средняя общеобразовательная школа Октябрьского района"] (Vladivostok, Russia). The number of respondents was 100 people (50 boys and 50 girls)..

## 6. Findings

No significant differences have been found between rural male and female students as to the level of Internet-addiction. Yet, the average rate for male students was close to the critical value (M=82,4).

Rural boys were more than girls attracted by the motive of online communication (p =0,007) and the motive of belonging to a group (p= 0,04). This tendency may probably reflect a more active social position that rural boys hold compared to girls. In order to understand the geographical specifics of the mentioned gender differences, it is required to conduct more extensive studies including those among urban high-school students.

On top of the list, both boys and girls put the motive of obtaining information (M = 3,72 and M=4,32, respectively). The second place was given to the motive of relaxation and entertainment (M=3,28 for boys and M=3,98 for girls). On the third place was the motive of communication (M= 1,84 for boys and M= 0,6 for girls). It is interesting that educational motives received the lowest marks (M= - 0,12 for boys and M= - 0,74 for girls).

As seen from above, no gender specifics have been found in the hierarchy of social networking motives. At the same time, the comparison of this hierarchy of motives with the ones described in research literature allows talking about its regional specifics. For instance, in a recent study of teenager's motives for social networking in Russia (Gurkina & Maltseva, 2015), communication-related motives topped the list, while recreational ones (similar to the motive of relaxation and entertainment herein) were shared by about half the number of teenagers.

Internet-addiction among rural girls was positively related to such motives as the motive of communication (r=0,38, p = 0,01), the motive of belonging to a group (r=0,40, p = 0,00), and the motive of relaxation and entertainment (r=0,28, p = 0,04). In contrast, boys showed no correlation between Internet-addiction and the motives of communication and belonging to a group, but they demonstrated such correlation for the motive of obtaining information (r=0,28 p = 0,05) and the motive of relaxation and entertainment (r=0,44 p=0,00).

To sum up, only one motive has proved to be connected with Internet-addiction in rural high-school students regardless of gender, which is the motive of relaxation and entertainment. However, it is premature to say to what extent this connection can be explained by the specifics of rural life with its limited opportunities for entertainment in comparison to urban life. This correlation might reflect personal, rather than regional, specifics: some young people may be vulnerable to going too deep into the online reality because of their inaction and anxiety in real life.

Rural girls who turn to social networks by social motives have proved to be more prone to Internet-addiction. Apparently, here we deal with the principle of compensation: dissatisfied with their real communication with peers, girls find compensation in social networks and thus become addicted to them.

As for Internet-addicted boys, obtaining information was their specific motive for social networking. To find out how much this motive was expressed, the questionnaire set the three following items: "I can learn something new about my hobby, for example, find new recipes, learn some drawing techniques or acquire skills of playing a musical instrument, etc."; "It is very convenient to search for music and films in social networks"; "I can learn about various fashion trends in social networks". The influence of this motive on why rural boys develop Internet-addiction may be explained by the existing deficiencies in how they get information in real life. This is circumstantially proved by the fact that the motive of obtaining information took the first place both among boys and girls in our study

## 7. Conclusion

No significant differences have been found between rural male and female students as to the level of Internet-addiction.

Gender differences have been revealed in the motives for using social networks and in the correlation between these motives and the level of Internet-addiction.

Rural male students used social networks more intensively than females for communication and maintaining their belonging to a group.

Regardless of gender, Internet-addiction in rural high-school students was positively connected with the motive of relaxation and entertainment.

Internet-addicted boys more often turned to social networks by the motive of obtaining information.

Internet-addicted girls more often used social networks by the motives of communication and belonging to a group.

On the whole, we can conclude that social networks have become an important means of teenagers' socialization not only in urban conditions, but also in rural environment.

Since this study was a pilot one, its findings can also be of interest for organizing further research work and formulating hypotheses for future projects. The obtained results can serve as a starting point for new theoretical constructs in psychology and pedagogy thus making these fields more practice-oriented, authentic and reliable.

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