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YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A FACTOR AFFECTING ESL ACQUISITION

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Abstract. This thesis analyses the level of youth use of social networks, their dependence on these networks, and the socio-psychological consequences of this process. The work highlights the role of social networks in the lives of young people, their impact on their personal development, educational activities, and the process of social adaptation. According to the results of the study, it was found that excessive dependence on social networks can negatively affect young people's communication in real life, their academic activities, and psychological balance. At the same time, it is also emphasized that the correct and purposeful use of social networks serves to broaden their worldview, improve their knowledge and skills. The thesis provides recommendations for the formation of young people's digital culture and the effective use of networks.

Keywords: *Youth, social networks, addiction, Internet, adaptation, digital culture, psychological impact.*

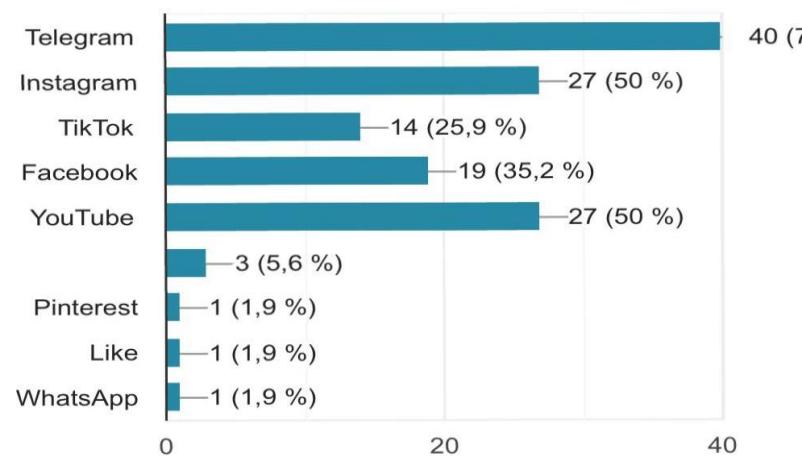
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Introduction

In the modern era, information technologies and the Internet have become an integral part of our lives. In particular, social networks — platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, X (Twitter), YouTube — have become the most widely used means of communication among young people. Through them, young people keep up with the news, express their opinions, learn, communicate and have fun.

However, along with this process, the problem of addiction to social networks is also growing. The excessive time spent by young people on the Internet and networks negatively affects their mental state, academic performance, social activity and relationships in real life.

The purpose of this research is to study the causes of youth addiction to social networks, its negative consequences, and suggestions and recommendations for reducing this problem.



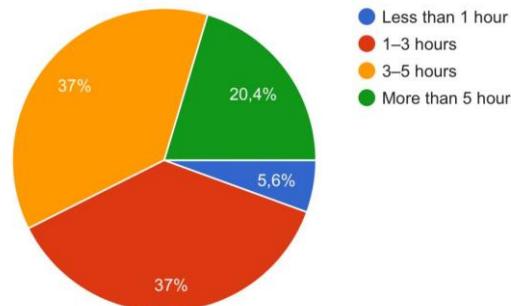
The concept of addiction to social networks:

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Addiction to social networks is a state in which a person loses control over his activities on the Internet, that is, he cannot manage the time spent on the network. In this case, a person prefers virtual communication to real life.

Psychologists say that this type of addiction is formed as a result of a violation of psychological, emotional and social balance. The main signs of addiction include:

- Spending more than 4-6 hours a day on social networks;
- Sleep disturbance and decreased attention;
- Decreased interest in real communication;
- Anxiety, irritability when unable to access the Internet;
- Prioritizing virtual life over real life.



Causes of addiction among young people:

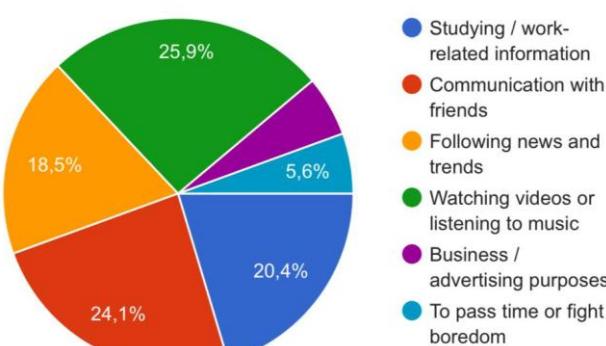
There are several factors in the formation of addiction to social networks:

- The desire to fill free time. Many young people use networks as a means of overcoming boredom.
- The need for social recognition. A person feels “important” through the number of likes, comments, and followers.

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- The desire for self-expression. Young people turn to social networks to freely express their thoughts and feelings.
- Psychological escape mechanism. Some young people become addicted to networks to escape problems, stress, and difficulties in life.

Also, weak parental control and insufficient knowledge of information culture in educational institutions enhance this process.



Positive and negative aspects of social networks:

Social networks are not a bad phenomenon in themselves. They also have positive sides:

- Information exchange and instant communication.
- Easy access to educational and scientific resources.
- The ability to stay in touch with friends and relatives.
- Development of digital skills.

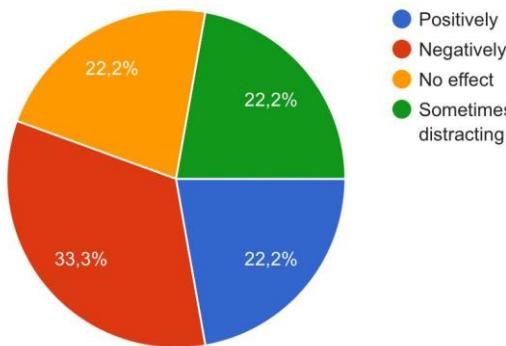
But the negative aspects are just as serious:

- Disconnection from real social life.
- Mental depression and depression.
- Ineffective time spending.

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- Indifference to studies and work.

Cybersecurity problems and the impact of misinformation.



The role of social networks in the process of youth adaptation:

“Adaptation” is the process of a person’s adaptation to new conditions.

Social networks play a dual role in the social adaptation of young people:

- Positively: young people receive new information, quickly adapt to the modern world, and their circle of communication expands.
- Negatively: they begin to lose their real-life communication skills, and their sense of social responsibility weakens.

So, social networks, while being a means of adaptation, can also be a destructive factor. Therefore, young people need to learn to use networks purposefully and moderately.

Ways to solve the problem:

The following measures can be taken to prevent addiction to social networks:

- Forming a culture of digital hygiene: young people should learn to plan their time and use networks for beneficial purposes;
- Introducing digital education courses into the educational process;
- Strengthening parental control, but based on trust;

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- Encouraging real activity instead of virtual life by involving them in sports, creativity, and social projects;
- Creating conditions for young people to spend their free time meaningfully by state and public organizations.

Youth addiction to social networks is one of the serious psychological and social problems in modern society. It is important not to deny this process, but to properly manage and control it.

By properly directing the networks, young people can become self-developing, creative and socially active people. However, their uncontrolled use leads to consequences such as wasting time, social isolation and mental imbalance. Therefore, educational institutions, parents and representatives of society need to work together to develop the digital culture of young people, to educate them on the basis of real, not virtual, values.

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