

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26661663>

Social Network and Addiction

Article in *Studies in health technology and informatics* · February 2009

DOI: 10.3389/conf.neuro.14.2009.06.054 · Source: PubMed

CITATIONS

23

READS

1,362

3 authors, including:



Daniele La Barbera

Università degli Studi di Palermo

76 PUBLICATIONS 397 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Filippo La Paglia

Università degli Studi di Palermo

32 PUBLICATIONS 159 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Educational Robotics [View project](#)



Chronic pain treatment [View project](#)

Annual Review of Cybertherapy and Telemedicine

Volume 7 Year 2009 ISSN: 1554-8716

Advanced Technologies in the Behavioral
Social and Neurosciences

Editors:

Brenda K. Wiederhold, PhD, MBA, BCIA

Giuseppe Riva, PhD, MS, MA



Interactive Media Institute

Social Network and Addiction

Daniele LA BARBERA^{a,1}, Filippo LA PAGLIA^a and Rosaria VALSAVOIA^a

^a*Section of Psychiatry, Dpt of Clinical Neuroscience, University of Palermo, Italy*

Abstract. In recent decades, the rapid development of innovative Internet-based communication technologies created a new field of academic study among scholars. Particularly, the attention of researchers is focusing on new ways to form relationship-thought social web. Social Network sites constitute a new form of web communities, where people meet and share interests and activities. Due to exponential growth of these sites, an increasing number of scholars are beginning to study the emergent phenomena in order to identify any psychopathological risk related to use of social web, such as addiction. This article examines the recent literature about this issue.

Keywords. Social Network, Addiction, Personality

Introduction

Social Network Sites (SNSs), such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr, are emergent social phenomena that are increasingly attracting the attention of academic research. SNSs are web-based services and are new way to communicate and share information. There are hundreds of SNSs that are regularly used by million of people around the world. A social network service is an online community where everyone can meet and interact with other people based on common interests, hobbies, job, political, religious, sexual views, and/or other activities [1].

SNSs allow individuals to construct a public profile, more or less visible according to default of site and user discretion, create a list of other users with who they interact and view list of contacts made by other users within the site [2].

On SNSs, each user can describe themselves, entering information about their background (e.g. high school), demographics (e.g. gender, age) and cultural tastes (e.g. favorite books, movies, television shows); users can choose photos and also write about themselves on their profiles, making self-promotion [3,4].

The increased use of SNSs has led scholars to study the psychological impact of social network services. Indeed, most users have integrated the use of social web into their daily practices, spending long time on Internet in order to create and/or maintain their social capital. Academic researches have begun to investigate the psychological and psychopathological aspects about use of SNSs, investigating their role in identity construction and expression, building and maintenance of social capital and concerns about privacy, focusing on the related risks.

¹ Corresponding Author: U.O. di Psichiatria, Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria Policlinico "P. Giaccone", via La Loggia, 1, 90129 Palermo, Italy; E-mail: labadan@unipa.it.

1. Method

In this review we evaluate the recent literature about the studies, exploring the impact of Social Network Sites on individuals and on their way to build social relationships. We begin to define the features of SNSs and to examine the link between use of these sites and traits of personality. Following this, we focus on psychological aspects relating to use of SNSs. In particular, we examine the recent articles that have investigated the risk of addictive behavior linked to use of SNSs.

We conducted a search on pubmed, psycinfo and google using the key words, such as Social Network, Addiction, Personality.

2. Results

Recently, Social Network Sites are proliferating and have attracted millions of users. The three most visited SNSs are Facebook, MySpace and Frindster. Until April 2007, the most popular SNSs was MySpace. At the moment, Facebook holds supremacy, but there are hundreds of social web daily visited by users [5].

The rise of SNSs could mean a shift in the organization and in the aim of online communities. Unlike web-communities, SNSs are organized around individual and are structured as personal network (ego-centric network). Each user is at the center of their community. Moreover, the main feature of SNSs is not to allow individuals to meet strangers, but to maintain pre-existing relationships, making visible the social network. On social web, meetings are often between users who share some offline, called “latent ties” [6].

These characteristics may be related to specific personality traits of the new generation. A recent research shows that students (Generation Y) are more narcissistic and self-absorbed than any previous generation. Technology allows the ability to express themselves quickly and easily and SNSs permit more self-promotion than traditional media [7].

More recent studies have investigated identity performance in less anonymous online settings, such as Facebook. The findings suggest that the Facebook selves appear to be highly socially desirable identities individuals aspire to have offline: Facebook users may exaggerate the part of their possible selves that are socially desirable but not emphasized in brief offline relationships, such as one’s character, intelligence, and other important inner qualities. Concurrently, they may seek to hide the part of themselves they regard as socially undesirable, such as shyness, overweight, or stuttering [8].

Another research on two competing hypotheses from the literature shows that users more extroverted and with higher self-esteem support the “Social Enhancement” hypothesis, being more popular both offline and on Facebook, while users less popular offline support the “Social Compensation” hypotheses, because they are more introverted, have lower self-esteem and strive more to look popular on Facebook [9].

Furthermore, interesting researches examine the romantic communication over SNSs, focusing on several psychological variables. A study on MySpace users found that low self-esteem encourages young adults to engage in romantic communication while higher emotional intelligence discourages such activity. The study also suggested that those who have higher self-image, such as thinking themselves attractive and happy with their appearance, tend to engage in romantic communication [10].

One study examined same psychosocial variables in New MySpace.com users. Findings show that intending bloggers scored higher on psychological distress, self-blame, and venting and scored lower on social integration and satisfaction with number of online and offline friends. Likely, intending bloggers may view this activity as a potential mechanism for coping with distress in situations in which they feel inadequately linked with social support [11].

Several studies inquired the modalities in which individuals create the profiles that reflect their identity. Researches reveal that females tend to turn to others for validation in contrast to males, who are more apt to maintain their individuality and whose relationships are more of an extension of their already-complete selves. In particular, Magnuson, in a recent study on MySpace profiles, found that the manifest identity formation consistent with traditional gender roles in which females are dependent on others for their sense of self [12-14].

Other research found further gender differences, examining the characteristics of users. On the one hand, women and men are equally likely to have accounts at a friend-networking site, on the other hand a sex difference occurs with the number of friends linked to the account, with men having significantly more friends linked to their accounts than women [15]. Moreover, men appear to have greater risk taking attitudes than women, e.g. men easily post information about themselves on the social network profiles, such as a phone number and instant messenger address. Instead, the women have greater privacy concerns and less identity information disclosure than men [16, 17].

Further, women are more likely to engage in online communication to maintain personal connections with family, friends and co-workers, while men use web sites for pursuing sexual interest and romance [18].

Another study shows that extraversion, one dimension of Big Five Personality Model, including energy, positive emotions, and the tendency to seek stimulation and the company of others, plays an important role in the formation of web-network ties [19].

Accordingly, the results of new research suggest that use of SNSs might provide greater benefits for users experiencing low self-esteem and low life satisfaction [20]. However, some scholars show concerns about potential abuse of social web: one speaks of “friendship addiction”, a new addictive process causing insecurity in users, particularly women [21].

Moreover, recent reports reveal that thirty per cent of teenagers spend long time on SNSs, neglecting school and family. It seems that young becoming addicted to social networking sites. Signs of possible social networking addiction included frequently visiting the site for long time, experiencing negative psychological or physical effects when the activity wasn't available, and scheduling other activities around online time. Studies show that typical addicts were more likely to be university students or people new to the workforce, people who had ready access to computers. According to scholars, addiction occurs when people go on web-site without a goal and it becomes part of their habit [22].

3. Conclusion

The exponential growth of Social Network Sites appears to respond to two opposing tendencies in modern society. On the one hand, social web meet the need of contact,

facilitating relationships and psychological wellbeing, on the other hand SNSs appear to accentuate individualism and self absorption, characteristics of modernity. Users self-centered, more vulnerable, particularly young people, could be absorbed by the web and develop addictive behaviors. To date, the question of potential risk related to use of social web remains largely underexploited. We believe that health care professionals, psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists and communication professionals should focus their future researches on this issue, in order to identify signs of possible psychopathological behaviors related of abuse of SNSs.

References

- [1] A. Acquisti, and R. Gross, Imagined communities: Awareness, information sharing, and privacy on the Facebook, Presentation at the 2006 privacy enhancing technologies (PET) workshop, Cambridge, England, 2006.
- [2] D.M. Boy, N.B. Ellison, Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* **13** (2007), 210-230.
- [3] H. Liu, Social network profiles as taste performance, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* **13** (2007), 252-275.
- [4] K. Lewis, J. Kufman, M. Gonsales, A. Wimmer, N. Christakis, Tastes, ties, and time: a social network dataset using Facebook.com, *Social Network* **30** (2008) 330-342.
- [5] Facebook, Statistic, Palo Alto, CA, <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>, 2009.
- [6] C. Haythornthwaite, Social networks and Internet connectivity effects, *Information, Communication, & Society* **8** (2005), 125-147.
- [7] L. Gordon, L. Sahagun, Gen Y's ego trip takes a bad turn, <http://www.articles.latimes.com>, 2007.
- [8] S. Zhao, S. Grasmuck, J. Martin, Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships, *Computers in Human Behavior* **24** (2008), 1816-1836.
- [9] J. Zywicki, J. Danowski, The Faces of Facebookers: Investigating Social Enhancement and Social Compensation Hypotheses; Predicting Facebook™ and Offline Popularity from Sociability and Self-Esteem, and Mapping the Meanings of Popularity with Semantic Networks, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* **14** (2008), 1-34.
- [10] Q. Dong, M.A. Urista, D. Gundrum, The impact of emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and self-image on romantic communication over MySpace, *CyberPsychology & Behavior* **11** (2008), 577- 578.
- [11] J.R., Baker, S.M. Moore, Distress, coping, and blogging: Comparing new Myspace users by their intention to blog, *CyberPsychology & Behavior* **11**(2008), 81-85.
- [12] M.J. Magnuson, L. Dundes, Gender differences in "social Portraits" Reflected in MySpace Profiles, *CyberPsychology & Behavior* **2** (2008), 239- 241.
- [13] C. Etaugh, J. Bridges, The Psychology of women: a lifespan perspective, Boston, Allyn e Bacon, 2003.
- [14] A.M. Manago, M.B. Graham, P.M. Greenfield, G. Salimkhan, Self-presentation and gender on MySpace, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* **29** (2008), 446-458.
- [15] J. Raacke, J. Bonds-Raacke, MySpace and Facebook: Applying the Uses and Gratifications Theory to Exploring Friend-Networking Sites, *CyberPsychology & Behavior* **11** (2008), 169-174.
- [16] J. Fogel, E. Nehmad, Internet social network communities: risk taking, trust, and privacy concerns, *Computers in Human Behavior* **25** (2009), 153-160.
- [17] H. Jellicic, D.L. Bobek, E. Phelps, R.M. Lerner, J.V. Lerner, Using positive youth development to predict contribution and risk behaviors in early adolescence: Findings from the first two waves of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. *International Journal of Behavioral Development* **31** (2007), 263–273.
- [18] S. Wehrli, Personality on Social Network Sites: An Application of the Five Factor Model, ETH Zurich Sociology Working Papers 7, ETH Zurich, 2008.
- [19] E. Weiser, Gender differences in Internet use patterns and Internet application preference: a two-sample comparison, *CyberPsychology & Behavior* **4** (2000), 167-178.
- [20] N.B. Ellison, C. Steinfield, C. Lampe, The benefits of Facebook "friends": Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* **12** (2007), 1143-1168.
- [21] D. Smallwood, Facebook to blame for "friendship addiction" among women, *MailOnLine* (2008).
- [22] J. Cole, More young Australians addicted to online networking, <http://www.news.com.au>, 2009.