

Internet and facebook use and abuse



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1. Statement of the Problem

Technology has advanced greatly in the last 20 years. The greatest advancement was the way we communicate. The Internet and Cell-phones have changed the way information is shared, the way we communicate and the way many of us spend our days. I find this all very interesting. I am now 23 and I have witnessed the world change from, house phones and letters, to the Internet and cell-phones. I remember when my family got caller ID for our home phone and I remember when the Internet was slow and nothing but simple text filled websites. I was always good with computer and electronics, even as a kid, my parents could never understand them and I had no problem. As I got into high school, I started using the Internet more, especially for communication, and was introduced to social networks such as Facebook.

Now fast-forward to today and the Internet and my smartphone are the only ways I communicate. Facebook has become a huge company with over 800 million users (Facebook 2011). and I have a smartphone that enables me to look up information instantly almost anywhere. I realize now that I cannot go without these technologies and I know that it is the same for many, if not most people. I also realize that services such as Facebook are changing the way we interact and I don't know if this is a good or bad thing. All of my experiences and observations have led me to wonder a few questions. My first question is whether the Internet is helping us or hurting us? My second question is whether the use of the Internet and cell-phones is making us more connected or less?

2. Review of Literature

I found multiple studies on the use and abuse of the Internet and the included services it provides. Some of these studies were outdated, not because they were over 10 years old but because the Internet and its associated culture changes at an alarming rate. The most recent professional journal article was written in 2011 on the use of Facebook and how Facebook affects people psychologically and sociologically. There has been research into Internet Abuse but the Internet only became available to households in the last 15 years. Computer or video game addiction, which is excessive or compulsive use of computer and video games with resulting adverse consequences, is not clinically defined as a part of behavioral addictions in DSM-IV. There is no official diagnosis or definition of the disorder in any official diagnostic system (Weinstein 273). Internet Usage

One study titled, Problematic Internet and cell-phone use: Psychological, behavioral, and health correlates, investigates Internet usage and cell-phone usage, in 2006. The study showed the reliance the participants have on the Internet and their cellphones, with 177 out of 337 students using the Internet 7 plus hours per week. Out of the 177, 15 indicated that they use the Internet over 40 hours per week. 40 hours a week translates to almost 6 hours a day.

The participants were asked what activities were they used on the Internet, and over 97% of the 337 participants indicated that they used the Internet to search information for academic purposes, and 63% of the participants, used the internet to searched for personal purposes. 56% of the participants used

the Internet for online homework. Over 93% indicated that they used the Internet to communicate with friends (C. Jenaro et al. 312). Another activity that is widely used on the Internet is watching videos.

Youtube is the largest video streaming website in the world. Youtube had 100.9 million users in 2009 (Chau 66). 17 percent of Youtube's users are teenagers. "Over half of this population reported that they registered to become a member to post comments." (Chau 66) Youtube also allows registered users to create a personal profile page similar to Facebook, called Youtube Channel, that allows for you to display your own videos as well as bios of yourself. 17 percent of teenagers with a registered account, had a personal Youtube Channel. (Chau 66)

3. Cell-Phone Usage

Problematic Internet and cell-phone use: Psychological, behavioral, and health correlates, also survey cell-phone use. Only 5 out of 337 participants had a cell-phone, and surprisingly 45 participants had more than one cell-phone (C. Jenaro et al. 312). When asked how much time participants spent per week on their cell-phone, 75% said less than 1 hour per week, and 15 participants used their cell-phone more than 4 hours a week (C. Jenaro et al. 312). This study is from 2006, which is a time when Smartphones were in their infancy, and this is apparent by the study which did not even ask if people surfed the internet on their cell-phones. Only 2 participants (.59%) said that they used instant messaging (Internet based messaging) on their cell-phone (C. Jenaro et al. 312). Facebook Usage

A study on Facebook titled A Two-Process View of Facebook Use and Relatedness Need-Satisfaction: Disconnection Drives Use, and Connection Rewards It, showed some very alarming results. According to the study, “Facebooking has become near-epidemic in college populations (Sheldon, Abad and Hinsch 766). The first part of the study, surveyed 1002 participants from University of Missouri.

The participants consisted of 436 males and 563 females. The results showed that 960 out of 1002 participants have a Facebook page, which is more than 95% of the participants. Also out of the 1002 participants, 78% access the site at least twice per day. These results could indicate “an obsession that disrupts or consumes peoples’ lives” (Sheldon, Abad and Hinsch 766). A Two-Process View of Facebook Use and Relatedness Need-Satisfaction: Disconnection Drives Use, and Connection Rewards It, performed a multiple part study on the effects that Facebook has on individuals. The studies focused on use, connection and disconnection, and reactions to deprivation. The first study examined how Facebook affects connection and disconnection.

The first study “established a somewhat counterintuitive pattern of relationships, in which greater Facebook use was associated with both disconnection and connection” (Sheldon, Abad and Hinsch 768). The study showed that people use Facebook and as they use it more, they feel like they have more connections to people because you have instant access to information about people. People can read other’s thoughts in real time and can acquire a sense of knowing what is currently going on in other people’s lives.

The structure and labeling of Facebook creates an atmosphere where people are “ friends” with people even though many of these people are only acquaintances. This gives the user a sense of having many friends but as a result of this same structure and labeling, they do not get the level of social interaction and connection that is normally associated with in-person social interaction and normal relationships. This leads to the increase of disconnection (Sheldon, Abad and Hinsch 768).

The researchers then reexamined how connection, disconnection, and Facebook usage affected the individuals. Study 2 replicated the results of study 1, which was the data that inspired the full research that was conducted. Study 2 took the replicated data and then examined the effects of connection and disconnection more in depth. The effects of connection and Facebook use were further explained: Specifically, the association between disconnection and Facebook use was largely explained by a measure of “ using Facebook to cope with disconnection,” and the association between Facebook use and connection was largely explained by measures of participant’s positive experiences within the context of Facebook use.

In line with our original theorizing, disconnection may drive Facebook use (as a coping strategy), and connection may result from Facebook use (as a reward). (Sheldon, Abad and Hinsch 770). These results reveal that both connection and disconnection go up as Facebook usage goes up. There is then a cycling effect where individuals use Facebook and disconnection goes up, resulting in a coping behavior that increases use.

The increased use of Facebook to cope will then create more disconnection then leads to more coping (Facebook usage). The level of connection one feels is related to their experience on Facebook. If one had dissatisfaction associated with usage, connection will not increase as much, this effects the overall dissatisfaction a person can experience; yet the coping mechanism will still increase usage. (Sheldon, Abad and Hinsch 769).

3. Research Methods

I wanted to know how people were using the Internet and cell-phones, so I decided to create a survey that included questions about usage, activities and habits that I realized that I had because of the Internet and my cell-phone. I wasn't concerned as much about gender, what I wanted to know is how other people that are close to my age use the internet and whether they realize that they have become so reliant on it that it can almost resemble an addiction. I handed out 20 surveys to the Introduction to Sociology class. I did not interview anybody, but I did include a short paragraph question about Facebook.

The short paragraph question asked how they use Facebook, why they use it and any habits that they have realized have formed from the use of Facebook. The short paragraph question was intended to be more open ended, with the hopes of finding out habits that I didn't have and realized existed. I did not observe the participants writing this short paragraph, they only identifying information I have about each person that answered it, is their gender. For the other parts of the survey, I included multiple-choice answers, true or false (yes or no), and check all applicable statements. I had

a total of five true or false questions; five multiple-choice questions and seven check all applicable statements.

4. Analysis

My survey showed some very interesting results. I handed out more than 20 copies of my survey but I only got back 20. I feel as though 20 is enough, because every participant fit my target participants group because they were all in college and familiar with technology. My survey was a little lengthy and not every question was answered by some of the participants. Out of the 20 participants, 12 were male and 8 were female. Every single participant owned a computer and a cell-phone. Half of the participants indicated that they own a Smartphone, which is a cell-phone with extra capabilities that include Internet capabilities. My Research: Computer Usage and Distractions

I asked a few questions relating to time spent using the computer, and the results were 8 out of 20 participants used a computer 10 plus hours per week, 9 participants used a computer 5 to 9 hours per week and 3 used a computer 1-4 hours per week. I also asked how much computer use, is for academic work. 3 participants indicated they used a computer for academics 10 plus hours per week, 7 participants used computer 5-9 hours per week and 10 people used a computer 1-4 hours per week.

These two questions alone signal a strong trend; that not only do many college students use the computer excessively but that college students spend a lot of time on computers for non-academic use. 8 participants used a computer 10 plus hours but only 3 participants used a computer 10 plus

hours for academic use. This is not the only indicator of excessive non-academic computer use. I also asked if participants used the computer for non-academic purposes at the same time that they used the computer for academic work. 17 out of 20 indicated that they did. These 17 participants were then asked to check all applicable activities. All 17 participants stated that they used a social network such as Facebook. 13 people watched videos, 4 used instant messaging to communicate with friends and family, 3 video chat and 5 read news, blogs and other articles.

These are all activities that are performed during academics, which could lead to a drop in efficiency because of these distractions. The most important question I feel as though was on the survey was how distracting are these activities during academics, and all 17 participants indicated some level of interference with their academic work, with 4 participants indicating that the internet activities were so distracting that they had to remind themselves to focus on academic work. This is a strong indicator that the Internet with all its potential distractions can cause low work efficiency. Social Networks have become the most used service available on the Internet. Currently Facebook is the most popular social network in the world with over 800 million users (Facebook 2011). And as you can see through my research, all participants used a social network during academic work, which could be an indicator of the distractions social networks place on students. My Research: Facebook Usage

The next section of the survey had five questions and one short paragraph relating to Facebook. This section showed some interesting results. 5 of the 17 participants used Facebook more than 8 hours per week, and this was

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very interesting considering only 8 participants of the original 20 answered that they use their computer 10 plus hours per week. This correlates to some people using a majority of their time on computer for Facebook.

For the 2 true or false questions, one question asked if the participants found themselves browsing Facebook because it was something to do and if they answered yes, do the participants feel as though it has become something that is pointless but they still feel drawn to it? 8 out of 17 participants answered yes to using because it is something to do and 5 out of 17 participants answered yes that they feel drawn to using Facebook even though it is pointless. This is very interesting and is definitely cause for concern especially when you consider the fact that all the participants used Facebook and found social networks and the other mentioned internet activities distracting, with the extreme being that 4 people had to remind themselves to get back to work. My Research: Facebook Usage Interviews

One of the female participants stated that: “ Use it[Facebook] to see what is going on. It is just part of my everyday life” (Female #1). Obviously to her, the Internet and in particular, Facebook has become a daily routine. She was one of the participants that used a computer 10 plus hours a week, used Facebook 8-10 hours per week, felt drawn to Facebook, and she was one of the participants that had to remind themselves to focus on work because the Internet was such a distraction. A male that had the same answers as the female, stated that Facebook is a “ very useful procrastination tool”(Male #1).

Both of these individuals are fully aware of their excessive use and have to actively remind themselves to get back to schoolwork. Another female who used Facebook 4-7 hours per week stated that: I think we use Facebook to communicate with people we'd otherwise lose contact with. It can become very addicting. We may also use it to keep track of things people we aren't fond of are doing. For me, I have a friend that was a foreign exchange student that lives in Venezuela, & Facebook makes it much easier to keep in contact. She is one of my best friends so it's very important for me to talk to her often (Female #2). Clearly Facebook is a useful tool to her but she indicates how addictive it can be. She gives a great example of how useful Facebook can be when using it to keep in touch with distant friends and family. Facebook has enabled her to actively maintain her relationship with her best friend from Venezuela.

As Female #2 stated, Facebook can be very addicting, this is backed up by the 13 participants that stated that they either use Facebook because it is something to do or they are drawn to it even though it is pointless. Another male strengthens these results by stating that: It's kinda dumb, I never write anything on it, I just look at other people's stuff when I'm bored at school.

During weekends when I'm home I never look at it. It's when I have nothing better to do, or when I am on a computer trying to do school work, I look at my computer and just know that Facebook is just a few clicks away, just waiting for it to be looked at (Male #2). Male #2 indicates how tempting Facebook is, especially when you are already on the computer and it is "just a few clicks away". This clearly sounds like an addiction, even though he doesn't use it at home, it's when he is around it, like a smoker trying to quit

and every time the smoker is around it, he starts to get those temptations to smoke again.

Facebook can be a great tool when used right. This is further explained in a statement made by a male who took the survey: Facebook is good for keeping in touch with people if you don't talk with them regularly. However, people are addicted to it, posting status updates every hour and new(pointless) photos every day. I use Facebook to talk with friends and share interesting videos. I like it, even though it can be addicting. It's all about moderation, and that applies to everything (Male #3).

Male #3 obviously finds Facebook as a useful tool, but he also notices how people use it to announce to the world their life, which could be an indicator that these people are using Facebook as a way to make their life feel important by announcing it to the world. Male #3 also states the level of addiction and abuse associated with Facebook and how “ it's all about moderation” but like Male #3 states, this applies to many things. Almost anything can become a problem if it is used too much. 5. Conclusion

When you think about the past before computers were widely used, when people studied, they pulled out a notebook, some pencils and a textbook or two. The only distraction was the environment around them. People could control this distraction by going to the library or a quiet place, but now we use computers so much, and they have become such a requirement to perform academics, that the Internet and the distractions it contains are inescapable. Isolating yourself to efficiently perform academic work is nearly impossible. Even if someone wanted to avoid using his computer, he can do

certain tasks without requiring it, I personally do not know one teacher or professor who accepts handwritten essays and as the Internet becomes more and more advanced, it will only increase the level of distractions, and the need for it.

Computers are not the only device to worry about, because the Internet and our current technology have advanced to a point where the Internet is constantly sitting in your pocket, and for many people that admitted to in my survey, they feel lost without it. Cell-phones have changed a lot since the sociology journal article in 2006, but even then there was a clear trend of cell-phone dependence and use. Now in 2011, Smartphones are widely available, and consumers want these advanced phones. In fact in July of this year, 2011, Google's CEO announced that 550, 00 new Google powered phones are activated each day (Cheredar 2011).

These Google powered phones which are called Android, account for less than half of the Smartphone market share. This means that over 1 million new smartphones are being activated each day across all mobile platforms. The Mobile Internet is shifting from something a few have, to something that only a few don't. The adoption of Smartphones has become so rapid; there is little research on the usage and abuse of these devices. As my research indicated, people are not just using them for searching websites, they also rely on them as navigation devices, organizers, calendars, alarm clocks and much more. This dependence should be carefully considered, and evaluated.

Facebook has become something that needs to be studied much more.

Judging by my small research study alone, there is clear data that represents

the huge potential for addiction and as a distraction. Other research only furthers what I have found to the point where its clear that the sociological and psychological effects of Facebook, can easily lead to a cycle of usage that becomes over usage, that can become an addiction. 17 out of 20 participants used Facebook or another social network during academic work, and in the journal article, over 78% of their participants used Facebook at least twice a day.

These two pieces of data represent an alarming trend for college students and if action isn't taken to understand the effects of the Internet and Facebook, serious consequences could occur. Facebook is a business like any other, they are here to make money, and to make money, they need people to use their website as much as possible. Many big businesses conduct their own psychological and sociological research to find ways to increase revenue, and Facebook is no different.

The internet and many of it's services can be great tools, they can increase the sharing of knowledge, increase communication and they can help citizens show the world, what their repressive nation is doing to their people. These are just three examples of the great uses of the Internet. Like all technologies, people find positive and negative ways of using any technology, The Internet is an amazing invention but we as humans do not understand the full sociological and psychological effects of the Internet. More research needs to be done, we do not have time to waste and any research that correlates the Internet and addiction, need not be ignored. 6.

Strengths and Weaknesses

I felt as though my research accurately showed that the Internet and smartphones are used to a point that borderlines addiction, especially considering the level of distraction that the participants indicated. There were only 20 participants, which for the goal of my research, was not a big deal. If I were to expand this research to include gender difference in regards to computer use, I would need a large group of participants and I would also need to make sure that the participants were half male and half female. My participants were 75% male and 25% female.

After handing out the surveys, I came across great research on Internet usage from 2006. I had some questions that were identical, some similar and others that were not comparable. If I were to change my research I would base my survey more off of the social data I found.

There was good information on internet use and abuse in socindex but much of it was outdated and because the advancement of technology is moving so rapidly currently in our culture an around the world, my research could have been a great indicator of this rapid change by comparing both the socindex 2006 article and my 2011 data, if my survey was more identical to the survey from the socindex article. I also think that questions regarding locations would be important. The people I surveyed were attending University of Pittsburgh in Bradford Pa, which is not a fun town. It is isolated especially in the winter months and there is nothing to do besides go bowling, to the bars, to the small movie theater or out of town.

There is some great nature to be enjoyed but only during the beginning of the fall semester or summer, other times it is too cold. So this type of

environment could greatly influence the result. Just the isolating factor in the winter could lead to more Facebook and Internet use because they don't see people as much, because everybody is indoors. Personally for Facebook and me going here, I notice that there are few things to do and one of those things I did a lot was go on Facebook especially when it was cold and I was stuck inside. I would like to see a comparison from a different region, maybe a college in Florida.

Its hard to say though, one possibility is that people there use it just as much but its because they are more social and are posting about everything they are doing. I went to high school with someone who went to college in Florida and I don't talk to him at all but I was his friend on Facebook and I noticed a lot of his statuses where about everywhere he was. So a national online survey would definitely help with this theory, it would be an interesting research project.