THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE FAMILY COMUNICATION OF YOUTH IN KOSOVO

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Abstract

Undoubtedly, the influence of social networks in our time is unquestionable, and particularly the impact on the daily life of its users is of huge significance. Teens and young adults in general are those who carry the implications caused using social networks. This paper is a research on the effects of new media and their rapid spread in Kosovo, as well as its role in the communication within family. It is an index, analytical, and elaborative paper that aims to bring the consequences of the use of social networks by teens and young adultsinto the readers' view. This paper aims to answer the research question whether the use of social media by youth affects relationships and communication within family in Kosovo from the adolescent's perspective. In order to shed some light on this issue, a combination of theoretical explanation and methodological research was quite necessary. Based on the survey method, a questionnaire was prepared with a combination of questions with various alternatives. We shared the questionnaire with the respondentsface-to-face. This study was conducted with a group of students from three high schools in three cities (in Pristina, in Ferizaj and in Lipjan). The results show that time spent in social media by most of the youngsters is high, and a bigger percentage claimed that they do not spend enough time with their families. The qualitative data in this study shows that social media is negatively impacting the social interaction between individuals within the family.

Keywords: Internet, social networks, teens, family communication

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Introduction

The prominence of social life in human nature and interactions is great and no one can shadow it. Thus, wepresume everyone should understand and be convinced that the first institution and the essential cell of social life is the family. In this context, the first stage of communication development of an individual begins within the family, and it is formed in contact with other family members. Undoubtedly, we are living in an era where the speed, spread and impact of new technological tools and online information on the Internet is inevitable. We can easily assume that we have become "dependent customers" of the tools and applications that keep us connected to the opportunities they offer, either to communicate or to be informed.

The change that digitalization brings, is that it forms everything within its boundaries, transforming every change into a unity. Thus, as Negroponte (1995) assumes such a relationship between humanity and digital innovation makes the world itself not a place of people, but a world of "digital beings".

Furthermore, Van Dijk (2006) claims, "the use of electronic devices and the Internet is gradually becoming embedded in our daily lives" (p. 60). While Turkle (2011), expressed concerns if we perpetually connected to the Internet, we risk of losing the ability to think critically. She noted that "Technology is the architect of our intimacies, but this means that as

we text, twit, e-mail, and spend time on Facebook, technology is not just doing things for us, but to us, changing the way we view ourselves and our relationships"(p.28).This study tries to find out if there is any connection between family relationships and the use of social media among young social media users in Kosovo. Social media is used by the youth of our country most regularlyto connect with friends and create communities. However, more research should be conducted on this matter, in order to come with the most genuine results. Little or no research has been done in this topic in our geographical area. Most of the researchers have focused on descriptive or quantitative research of fashions of use of Internet, on the time spent using electronic devices and the Internet itself. Few researchers have addressed the ways in which the Internet has changed the functionality of the family, more precisely the communication within the family. Social media has become part of daily life of Kosovo citizens, and the impulse in using those is increasing day by day. According to Fazliu (2017), the main social networks that are currently in popular use among youngsters in Kosovo areFacebook, Instagram and Snapchat. Hence, throughout this paper, we will try to enlighten this issue and to see the effects of social media on the family communication and relationship. In order to give a comprehensible picture on the issue, the paper is divided into some subparts. First of all, it gives a theoretical explanation of the issue under discussion; secondly, it describes the methodological process used for this research; thirdly, it analyses the data and results collected from the methods used.

In this study, the following research questions are aimed to answer:

- What is the relationship between family communication and the use of social media among young social media users in Kosovo?
- From the perspective of young Kosovars, does the constant use of the social media and Internet, have a negative or positive impact on communication within the family?

Definition of social networks (media)

There are many definitions about social media, but according to Trottier and Fuchs (2015), social media could reasonably consider any of the three forms of socialization as a central point: a) cognition, b) communication, and c) cooperation. Social media manifests the emergence of new technologies and specific applications calledWeb 2.0, which refer to the presence of a class of Internet-based applications that offer all users the opportunity to write and contribute by posting various content, through multiple multimedia devices (Beer & Burrows, 2007).Social media is the term often used to refer to new forms of media that involve"interactive participation, social media are never completely passive"(Manning, 2014, p.1158).It can also be defined as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Social networks and changes in the daily life of young people

The family, which for centuries and millennia is considered the basic institution or the main pillar of any society, is being transformed day by day. The impact the family had on society is changing along with the changes in family members. Family communication as an important element of understanding is witnessing the blows of strong social media wind. Family communication refers to "the way in which verbal and non-verbal information is exchanged between family members" (Epstein, Bishop, Ryan, Miller & Keitner,1993)**.**

Therefore, the relationship between the role of social media and society, in particular family, needs to be analyzed.

In our society there are almost no studies that scrutinize the role of technology and the Internet in family life. Blossom (2009) quoted that social media is actually the beginning of a new way of life for people who regularly use its skills. With this rapid technological development, it is clear that the family of the past is no longer present among us. The family transformation has undergone through many processes in the new era of digitalization and media. The domino effect of this transformation initially started with a change in the lifestyle of children and adults in the age of Internet. Then, the changes fast captured every aspect of family, such as: the concept of freedom between the two generations took new dimension; the old hierarchy within the family faded away; maintaining and cultivating family ties became computer-generated; the parental control took a new shift and the emergence of reformed models of negative issues such as bullying, pornography, sexual harassment and violence came into being.

Online communication and digital generation

This young generation, which Blossom (2009) calls "the Net Generation", has radically changed the way of interpersonal communication. They prefer the idea of sharing information with others through electronic devices. They want to be connected with their friends and family all the time, but they use technology, from mobile phones to social networks. This generation has adapted in a special way the technological innovations by converging in their way of life, which distinguishes them from the lifestyle of their parents. When the TV is on, they don't sit and watch, as their parents did. TV is background for them, to which they listen while they check out information or talk to friends online or via text message (Tapscott, 2009).

The lifestyle of the children of both generations has changed. While the previous generation, which Blossom (2009) called the "generation of digital migrants", was entertained outside before the introduction of the Internet, the Net generation finds their entertainment in front of a screen. While for them, the world was outside the walls of the house, for the generation of the Internet, the world exists inside the walls. As Tapscott (2009) assumes that "the youth of the previous generation found freedom outside, the generation of the Internet find freedom within" (p.220). As we can see the concept and idea of freedom, entertainment and personal development has changed over time.

The transformation of the physical appearance of the house and its electronic devices inside has formed a more attractive perception of the house. The previous generation wanted to leave home to see the world, while the generation of the Internet and social media finds the world inside the walls of the house. Blossom (2009) emphasizes it saying that "for the earlier generation (before the internet), staying inside meant that you were controlled; while outside you were free, while the internet generation, found and saw their freedom - online" (pp.221-223).

The internet generation finds all their basic needs and requirements within the home, sitting in front of their digital device, browsing new information and options that applications offer, playing various games, and being informed and entertained in many other ways.

Another important dimension that the Internet and social media are changing in the family is fragmentation. As, *Kra*ut, Brynin, & Keisler*, (2006**) noted, that it was variously suggested that the Internet was leading to a new level of "fragmentation". Of course, this change is not happening because of our desires and preferences, but as a result of the era in which

technological developments are felt all over the world. Social media has a role to play in this transformation. "First, is of physical fragmentation, with an image of people in their own rooms and only the most cursory of interaction between them. The second is that even when individuals are physically in the same place, their attention is split between the current situation and accessing the Internet" (Hughes & Hans, 2004).

This new generation, that knows everything about the Internet and digitalization, has also shaken the old-fashioned hierarchy of the family. "The old family setup - with the father as CEO and the mother as chief operating officer - was challenged on many fronts." (Tapscott, 2009, p. 224) Now, the Net generation plays an important and dynamic role in the wellbeing of the family, and their voice is so necessary to be heard as the voice of the executive director of the family (father). Tapscott (2009), also noted that the old hierarchy has given way to a new kind of family democracy, in which Net Generation has a voice in family affairs.

In some studies, the net generation is considered to be the reason for the breakdown of family ties and happiness. However, this perception is not all as believed. Actually, the Net generation appreciates family values and maintaining family ties. They value their parents and the wellbeing of the family. The change in parenting style, with more space and freedom of expression, has enabled the new outlook of the family to be seen differently. Boyd (2014) notes that "the generation of the Internet sees their parents as a vital source of happiness and security" (p. 226). It is not only the Internet and digital devices that attract net generation individuals to go to their homes, but also the warmth and freedom that such generation find there. Furthermore, the parents of the new generation are changing the care and approach toward their children. The advent of the so-called "Helicopter Parent," as Ginott's (1962) calls it, is the new way parents try to recognize, control, and intervene in everything about their children's life.

Digital media but also developments in technology are challenging privacy as an integral part of us." A serious loss of privacy has been considered the most negative effect of social media". (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 96). All social media have become a storehouse of our private information and we are paying no attention to the issue. Our privacy is not ours anymore, and can be grabbed from this storehouse, similar to the food, which is picked from there when is needed. It can be used for various purposes and misused in the levels we do not even imagine.

As we can see, the social media has its positive and negative effects on our daily life. Although the benefits are great, we should not underestimate the consequences that the use of social media can have on our life.

Methodology

To answer the research questions, we adopted the descriptive study model, while a survey was considered the most appropriate method to picture and emphasize the essence of this issue. At the same time, it provides a summary model of the answers that can be turned into authentic data and measurements, to accept or reject the research question with its results.

A sample was withdrawn from teenagers of three high schools in three different cities, one inPristina, one in Ferizaj and one in Lipjan, based on random sampling technique. In order to make the study more consistent, it was conducted with students of a public school, a private school and a semi-public school. With a total of 200 respondents, of tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades, a questionnaire was used to get participants'opinions on the impact of social media as a means of communication within the family. The questionnaires completed by participants who are not social media users were excluded. We guaranteed the anonymity of

the respondents by not collecting their email addresses. We have shared the questionnaire, by face-to-face method with the respondents. Their participation by group was as follows:

- 15 years old - 26 participants or 13.2%

- 16 years old - 56 participants or 28.4%

- 17 years old - 59 participants or 29.9%

- 18 years old - 44 participants or 22.3%

- Over 18 years old - 12 participants or 6.2%

While according to gender, the participation was 47.2% male and 52.8% female.

Research results

The purpose of this research was to understand how much thetime spent on social networks affects relationships within the family and in particular physical communication between family members. To achieve these results, a questionnaire was drafted, based on two models, which haveconcluded in previous researches (Gjylbegaj&Abdi, 2019; Salgur, 2016).

-I- In the first addressed question, the respondents were asked how much time did they spend browsing social media within a day, where some optional time intervals were given, starting from 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, 5-6 hours and over six hours. This choice of these intervals was made based on the age of the respondents and their daily activity. Most of them or 38.6% spend 3-4 hours a day browsing social media, while 29.4% spend 1-2 hours, 18.3% spend 5-6 hours a day and 13.7% spend over 6 hours a day browsing social media. These findings show that the use of social media is increasingly becoming more popular in Kosovo. As Howard (1997, as cited in Di Maggio, Hargittai, Neuma, and Robinson, 2001) suggests that "the Internet strengthens and expands social connections by putting users in more frequent contact with their families and friends" (p. 316).

-II-The following question asked which form of communication makes them establish more connections with other family members, through social media or face-to-face communication. The reason why we asked this question was to find out which forms of communication young people prefer most, either when they address their parents, or in communication within the family. Respondents showed an almost equal rating for both forms of communication, where 44.4% answered face-to-face communication, and 37.4% answered communication through social media. While 18.2% have a neutral position on this issue. Apparently, although the form of communication viaInternet (or social media) is mostly considered more passive and as more difficult to address family issues, young people increasingly prefer online communication with other family members. Nevertheless, some studies such as that ofÜnal (2017), concluded that "the healthiest way of communication is accepted to be face-to-face communication" (560).

Even though, this generation still prefers face-to-face communication, we can assume that the communication within family in Kosovo is changing with a faster pace, and very soon the percentages will rise.

- III –In the third question addressed to them, we wanted to know whether they spend enough time communicating with other family members. Their responses were as follows: 57.2% think they do not spend enough time communicating with family members, 29.1% think they spend enough time, and 13.7% have a neutral attitude on the issue. Due to the increasingly dynamic life of the time we live in, the lack of time spent with family is seen as a serious

problem and challenge in family communication. These results are in accordance to a previous study conducted by Salgur (2017).

-IV- Do you think that social media negatively affects physical communication with the rest of the family? Regarding this question, the answers of the respondents were as follows: 51% think that social media has negative effect on physical communication with the rest of the family; while 35.2% think that social media does not negatively affect the communication within the family; and only 13.8% have a neutral attitude. It is now a reality that social networks have become the most popular Internet destinations in recent years. According to (Giddens, 2006), one of the main concerns about using social media is the fact that more and more people spend time communicating online. They address their daily needs and desires through cyberspace, which can make them spend less time interacting with each other in the physical world.

-V-Being another important aspect within the broad framework of family relations, opinions and views on family ties were taken, too. Special attention was paid to the impact of social media on communication within the family. To the question, whether they think that social media had a negative effect on relationships with their family members, the answers of the respondents were as follows: 44.9% think that social media does not have a negative effect on family relations; while 38.9% think that it has a negative effect; and only 16.2% have a neutral attitude. These findings are consistent with the previous studies, as Ünal (2017) found that communication in a family is hindered by the use of social networks outside their goals.

-VI- Excessive spending of time on social media during the time we stay together with our families has become worrying. To the question, are you worried when you are together with your family and some members use social media? To this question, the answers of the respondents were as follows: 55.1% think that they do not worry when other members of family use social media; while 30.3% say they are worried; and 14.6% of them have a neutral attitude. Even Tapscott (2009) sees no problem in this matter. In accordance with findings of this research, he comes to a conclusion and suggests to not be worried so much when we see our children who stay in an environment and do not communicate verbally. They prefer to communicate through social networks, through photos, online conversations or even video.

-VII-In order to explore whether the use of social media reduces the time spent with the family, we addressed the question to the respondents that in case there were no social media, would they spend more time for physical (face-to-face) communication with other family members. It is a well-known fact that those who spend more time browsing social media, or even on the Internet in general, spend less time with their parents. Such a statement was confirmed by the results of this research, where 77.3% of respondents think that if social media did "not exist", they would spend more time in physical communication with family members.
While only 10.1% think the opposite, that even if social media did not exist, they would not spend more time in physical (face to face) family communication.
Thus, these findings are in accordance with the study of Di Maggio et al. (2001), which found that higher levels of use of digital technologies "are associated with decreased communication with family members" (p. 316).

Conclusion

Social media hasassumedcentral role of the social life of young people. This research made an attempt to find out the relationship between social media and family communication, andhow young people interact via social media. According tothe findings, the increaseduse of

social media, decreases the level of family communication. Overall, the results showed that almost all young peoplepossess an account on social media, andInternet access for youth has significantly increased in recent years. Based on their answers, the social media providesthe easy connection to youth with other members of their families.This opportunity has been facilitated by the possession of mobile phones and other electronic devices. Moreover, face-to-face communication still remains the main standard of preferred communication with each other. To sum it up, based on results, it is obviousthat social media is interfering in their daily lifeto a great extent, especially in their communicationwith their family.

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