



Psychopathological profiles of adolescent and young adult problematic Facebook users



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Keywords:

Problematic Facebook use
Borderline traits
Psychopathological symptoms
Attachment
Adolescents and young adults

ABSTRACT

Background: The dramatic increase in the use of the Facebook in recent years has led to problematic use. **Objective:** The aim of the study was to explore the psychopathological profiles of Facebook users.

Participants and method: The sample consisted of 456 adolescents and young adults aged from 12 to 25 with a Facebook account. They answered to an online self-questionnaire assessing Facebook use, motives for Facebook use, depressive symptoms, social anxiety, sensation seeking, borderline personality traits, parental bonding and attachment, and peer attachment.

Results: A three-cluster solution was identified among Facebook users. The first cluster, called "borderline" was well above the mean on borderline traits, depressive symptoms, social anxiety and sensation seeking. Another cluster, labeled "sensation seeking" was distinguished by high levels of sensation seeking and low levels of other psychopathological variables. The third cluster, called "low traits" was well below the mean on all psychopathological symptoms.

Discussion: To our knowledge, this is the first study that examined associations between problematic Facebook use, motives, attachment and psychopathological symptoms among a sample of adolescents and young adults, using a person-centered approach. This social network could become an indicator of psychopathological features among adolescents and young adults.

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1. Introduction

Today, social networks use appears as a global phenomenon. Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites. To date, the number of active users on Facebook is estimated to one billion, with nearly 26 million in France (Internet World Stat, 2014). Mainly invested by young users, Facebook allows different way of communicating through many applications: email, instant messenger, wall, pictures or comments sharing. Thus, this social network can, for adolescents and young adults take the form of a place for social experiments (Moreau, Roustit, Chauchard, & Chabrol, 2012), but can also be over-invested and lead to a problematic use. Facebook addiction or problematic Facebook use is defined as an inappropriate use of Facebook, including symptoms similar to those of impulse control disorders and behavioral addictions (Yu, 2011). Despite the lack of consensus regarding definition, assessment or terminology of Facebook addiction, and of Internet addiction (Laconi, Rodgers, & Chabrol, in press), these new disorders

are more and more recognized. Given the close relationship between Internet and Facebook use (Kittinger, Correia, & Irons, 2012), "problematic use" will be used rather than "addiction" in this paper.

Even if "there is little research related to the positive and negative consequences of Facebook use" (Kittinger et al., 2012), similar risk factors could enhance the development of problematic Internet and Facebook uses. Several factors which are predictive of adolescent and young adult problematic Internet use, including motivations, social anxiety, depressive symptomatology, sensation seeking, personality traits, psychosocial maladjustment, parenting and familial factors (Kormas, Critselis, Janikian, Kafetzis, & Tsitsika, 2011; Kuss, van Rooij, Shorter, Griffiths, & van de Mheen, 2013), have been linked to problematic Facebook use among college students. Depressive symptoms are more prevalent among Internet addicts (Akin & Iskender, 2011; Ko, Yen, Yen, Chen, & Chen, 2012; Ko et al., 2008) and among excessive Facebook users (Hong, Huang, Lin, & Chiu, 2014; Koc & Gulyagci, 2013; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Besides, social anxiety appears more frequently among problematic Internet and Facebook users than non-problematic users (Bernardi & Pallanti, 2009; Kittinger et al., 2012; Ko et al., 2012; Orr et al., 2009; Sheldon, 2008; Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2010). Whang, Lee, and Chang (2003) noted

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dysfunctional social behaviors among problematic Internet users, and highlighted that socially anxious people are more likely to create online relationships. Weidman et al. (2012) suggested that it could be explained by the avoidance of social situations where the subject is in the presence of unknown persons, by using the Internet. Social anxiety could precede frequent Internet use among 11–20 years (Kochman, 2008). Thus, online interactions appear as an alternative to face to face communication, which can be confirmed by the most frequent motives of Facebook use (i.e., relationship maintenance, and passing time) retrieved among students (Sheldon, 2008) and adolescents (Moreau et al., 2012). Motives play an important role and could explain 60% of Facebook use variance among students (Sheldon, 2008).

Among personality characteristics, most studies have focused on the five-factor model of personality (Andreassen, Torsheim, Brunborg, & Pallesen, 2012). Sensation seeking is associated with problematic Internet (Lin & Tsai, 2002; Lu, 2008) and Facebook use (Sheldon, 2008). Borderline personality traits which are frequent in youth and linked to addictions (Chabrol, Ducongé, Casas, Roura, & Carey, 2005) have been little explored in problematic Internet and not yet in Facebook use. However, emotional instability which is a core feature of borderline personality traits is a risk factor of Internet addiction among adolescents (Kuss et al., 2013). The social network analysis as a method of investigation of borderline patients has already been employed (Clifton, Pilkonis, & McCarty, 2007). The analysis of Facebook profiles and interactions with others revealed that patients with borderline personality disorders reported lower levels of positive relationships (e.g., trust, social support) and a greater number of relationships that had been terminated.

Parental and peers attachment plays a major role in adolescent social development (Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 2000; Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 1998) by influencing cognitive, social and emotional functioning (Moretti & Peled, 2004). For example, among adolescents, insecure parental attachment is related to more conflict with family and peers (Moretti & Peled, 2004). Besides, lower interpersonal relationships quality has been found among adolescent problematic Internet users (Liu & Kuo, 2007; Milani, Osualdella, & Di Blasio, 2009). Among young adults, parental bonding has an impact on problematic Internet use (Kalaitzaki & Birtchnell, 2014; Huang et al., 2010). Therefore, parental and peers attachment would also have an impact on problematic Facebook use. Two recent studies have focused on attachment impacts on Facebook use among adults. Individuals with insecure attachment felt less comfortable and capable in interpersonal relationships and online social behaviors (Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Johnson, 2013), and those with a high attachment anxiety spent more time on Facebook (Oldmeadow, Quinn, & Kowert, 2013).

In contrast to the many variable-centered studies, there are few person-centered studies of adolescent and young adults with a problematic Internet use and no study of youth problematic Facebook use. We find few studies classifying mobile Internet users on the basis of demographic or characteristics use (Brandtzaeg, Heim, & Karahasanović, 2011; Eynon & Malmberg, 2011; Okazaki, 2006). We only found two studies proposing affective state-based typologies of internet users (Christodoulides, Michaelidou, & Siamagka, 2013; Mauri, Cipresso, Balgera, Villamira, & Riva, 2011). Cluster analyses are useful to determine if there are subgroups of adolescents with specific psychopathological profiles. Also, these analyses are helpful in assessing whether these subgroups of adolescents are varying in the levels of motives and problematic uses. At the level of clinical implications, a better knowledge of psychopathological profiles might contribute to the understanding of problematic Facebook use and to the identification of specific needs concerning prevention or treatment for psychopathologically distinct groups of adolescents and young adults.

In this study, cluster analysis was used to identify homogenous groupings of participants based on the main psychopathological variables involved in Internet use. Among Facebook users, we assume the existence of different profiles which would differ in terms of Facebook use, depressive symptoms, social anxiety, sensation seeking and borderline personality traits. We hypothesize that participants with borderline traits, high level of depression, social anxiety, sensation seeking and borderline traits would have higher scores of problematic Facebook use and more dysfunctional relationships (i.e., poor attachment to parents and peers, and non-optimal parental style), and would present significant differences in terms of motives of using Facebook.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and procedure

The study included 490 adolescents and young adults, aged between 12 and 25 years old. Thirty-four participants were excluded because of biases questionnaires. Total sample of our study was composed of 456 participants with mean age (SD) = 20.5 (2.5). Among them, 76% ($n = 348$) were women and 24% were men ($n = 108$). The participants consisted of 328 university students (72%), 52 employees (11%), 32 inactive (7%), 28 high school students (6%), 11 college students (2%), and 5 participants with another situation (1%).

Participants were recruited online between November 2012 and February 2013, through Facebook, email and forums (e.g., Dpstream, tv, ado.fr, jeuxvidéo.com). All participants were informed of the confidentiality and the anonymity of their responses, and agreed to give their free and informed consent. Only participants with a Facebook account were included in this study.

2.2. Measures

First, participants completed a set of demographic questions (age, gender and professional status) and then, the following questionnaires.

Problematic Facebook use was assessed with an adapted version of the Internet Addiction Test (Khazaal et al., 2008; Young, 1998; IAT). The IAT includes 20 items rated on a scale of 0–5 ranging from “rarely” to “always”. The term Facebook was used instead of “online” or “Internet” (e.g., “How often do you try to cut down the amount of time you spend on Facebook and fail?”). The total score varies from 20 to 100 and distinguishes several types of Internet (i.e., normal use (0–49), moderate problematic use (50–79) and severe problematic use (80–100)). Participants scoring higher than or equal to 50 were considered problematic Facebook users. The IAT is one of the most used and validated tool to assess problematic Internet use (Laconi et al., in press), and thus its items have been frequently used and modified to screen Facebook addiction (Alabi, 2013; Hong et al., 2014; Meena, Mittal, & Solanki, 2012; Modi & Gandhi, 2014). It shows good psychometric properties with a Cronbach's alpha located between $\alpha = .63$ and $\alpha = .93$ (Laconi et al., in press). In our study, we obtained a coefficient of $\alpha = .86$.

The Questionnaire of Facebook use motives (Sheldon, 2008) is composed of 26 items rated on a 5-points scale. Items are ranged from 1 “not at all” to 5 “exactly”. Six factors can be identified (i.e., relationship maintenance, passing time, virtual community, entertainment, coolness, companionship). More the score is high on each factor, more the associated motive is important. Internal consistency was satisfactory with a Cronbach' alpha of $\alpha = .88$.

Interpersonal relationships were measured with a short form of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Raja, McGee, & Stanton, 1992; IPPA-24) which

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