

## Social networks and value system of students

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Technologies in general and media in particular influence their audience through their form and content. There are many studies about the role and effect of classic media on values change; however, few studies have explored new emergent media such as social networks. The aim of this descriptive-survey research is to investigate how time spent on social network and social network addiction is related to value system of students. **Methodology:** Statistical population consisted of all students studying at higher education institutes in Bojnord during 2015-16 academic years. A sample of 229 students was selected using cluster-random sampling. Data was analyzed using SPSS 19 software. **Findings:** Findings revealed a negative significant relationship between the use of social network and social network addiction on the one hand, and the value system of students on the other hand. This finding held true for religious, cultural, political and social components of the value system, except for economic component. **Discussion:** According to these findings, higher education should pay greater attention to promoting media literacy of students

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## 1. Introduction

The recent centuries in general and the recent decades in particular have witnessed radical change in values of human societies. Depending on the intellectual and cultural context, these changes can be evaluated either desirably or undesirable. The monitoring, analysis and observation of the change process in the value of a society is a prerequisite for identifying and resolving various issues in religious, educational, social, cultural and media areas.

## 2. Literature Review

There have been several studies on value changes in the Iranian society, especially young people, which generally reflect a change of values in the society. Some of these studies include Godarzi (2010), Monadi (2007), Sharifi (2006), Nosrati and Zolfaghari (2012) on change of youth values and its related factors, Rafiepour (1996) regarding the change of youth values, Massoudifar (1993) about the beliefs system of adolescents and their parents, and the tendency of adolescents to foreign culture, Mardanpour (2002), Vosoghy and Akbari (2010) and Eskandari and Kazemi (2014) on human and non-human factors affecting the change of values.

“What factors have triggered these changes?” It is a simple question but difficult of answer. A series of related, complex, and intricate factors affect the value system of societies. In this regard, technologies in general and the media, as one of its manifestations, are among the most influential variables. By proposing the concept of "silent revolution", Englehart and Wells (translated by Ahmadi, 2010), argued that the rapid incorporation of new values and ideas through new information and communication technologies could seriously undermine the foundations of identity in a society. As noted by Castells, satellite and Internet play a decisive role in transforming and shaping cultures and national identity of citizens by radically changing the structure and nature of communication (Adlipour, Ghasemi, Mir Mohammad Tbar, 2014, p.24).

Following media such as radio, television, and satellite, cyberspace in general, and social networks (and, in a more recent term, social media) in particular, have been the subject of growing educational, sociological, and cultural research. Social networks came into play when no one imagined that one day the social aspect of the Internet would have a dominant function. This has been so well-received by Internet users that one can safely maintain that social networks represent one of the most influential services provided on the Internet, which has caused tremendous development in the social systems of various countries in recent years (Rasoli, Bandegi-Monfared, 2014).

Social networks (such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Telegram, etc.) provide platforms where people gain the opportunity to introduce themselves and demonstrate their personality traits in an attempt to communicate with others. These sites are potentially capable of triggering fundamental changes in social context of individuals, both at the level of interpersonal and social relationships (Javadinya et al., 2013, p.40).

Social networks or media – like any other technology - generally affect their audience through form and content. Recent studies suggest that younger generation is more vulnerable to these contents (Mearmar, Adlipor, Khaksari, 2012, p. 169, Hajyani, Mohammadzade, 2014, Eskandari, Kazemi, 2014). As we will discuss later, the main assumption of this paper is that irrespective of the content exchanged in social networks or media, the use of this technology in the long run can influence the value system of the audience.

In fact, this research seeks to investigate the relationship between the use of social networks and the value system of students.

One of the major topics related to the technology is whether technology is partial or impartial in terms of value. It is because in our standpoint on technology, neutrality is often implicitly taken for granted. The technology neutrality debate boils down to the discussion of the fact whether the impartiality of partiality of technology is a function of the way it is used by people or the nature of technology per se. That is, is it the people that direct and guide the technology or the technology can be directional on its own? Researchers and theorists have proposed two conflicting perspectives on this issue: First, technology is neutral by nature and is used as a tool [by humans]; second, technology is not neutral and it is laden with hidden philosophies and ideologies (Siemens, Tittenberger, 2009).

In the first view, which is underscored by modernism, technology is seen as neutral and devoid of any value and culture and we, as the users, determine the impact of technology and its pertinent values. The merits and demerits of the technology are a function of its applications by users rather than the nature of technology. For example, one cannot evaluate the good and bad qualities, or values and anti-values of a tool like a knife. A knife, inasmuch as treated as a tool, is not laden with any positive or negative values. The goodness or badness of this tool depends on its user and the purpose for which it is utilized. A number of studies by Fisks (1987), Harrison and Stephen (1999), Katz and Rice (2002), Sudweeks, McLaughlin and Rafaeli (1998), Garramone, Harris and Anderson (1986), Ebersole (2000) and Welchman (1997) as cited in Kanuka, 2008, p.96), as well as Jonassen et al. (1998) and Clark (1994) have address this delicate issue.

On the contrary, theorists such as McLuhan (1967) in the field of media and communications, and Siemens (2006) and Bagheri (2002) in the realm of education contend that the technology is not neutral and it is initially loaded with covert values before any application. For example, McLuhan, argues that the media as a technology can deeply transform society and human psyche. In this context, McLohan uses a few specific terms such as "each medium has a message," as a way of rejecting the assumption regarding the neutral and partial nature of the technology. According to him, the most important significant effects of the media, which shape our habits of perception and thinking, and hence the crucial effects of the media, are originated in the form, rather than the content of media (Severin, Tankard, translated by Dehghan, 2009).

According to the assumption about the partiality of the technology, Chandler (1996) argues that technology is shaping our experiences on the account of their selectivity. In other words, Chandler posits that in our interaction with the media, there is a mutual process of action and reaction at work (Kanuka, 2008). From this perspective, "Every instrument has a covert ideological orientation; a predictive tendency to construct the world in a way that prefer one conceptualization over the other and a set of values over another, plainly fostering one perception, skill, or tendency over other forms "(Postman, 1993, p. 13).

In this regard, as pointed out by Woolgar (1996), technologies are seen as cultural artifacts. For instance, Internet technology as a man-made construct is laden with a special cultural and value load so that, in the words of Masoumi (2010, p. 34), some political gatekeepers, inasmuch as they perceive technology as more of a threat rather than opportunity, seek to impede or prohibit its application.

A more obvious and accurate instance is Twitter, Facebook or Telegram. These technologies have an inherently social structure before serving as a vehicle for the exchange of content (as they are social and network-based so that their individual application would be meaningless) and are loaded with a certain

cultural and value concept. Depending on these values, they may be promoted or hindered (filtered) by some communities (Eskandari, Kazemi, 2014).

These impacts are sometimes referred to as "context effects". One of the context effects of Internet and social networking is the spread of the generalism versus particularism. That is, social networks have provided an opportunity so that everyone can comment on almost anything, and all ideas should be respected. In this context, there are no sacred and superior values, and if they exist, they will be discussed in parallel with other views. The horizontalization of values is comparable to the leveling of values. This means that due to the fact that the truth is not absolute, all values, concepts and approaches are treated equally without any perceived superiority (Habibi Fahim, 2014).

From this viewpoint, Internet, and consequently social networks, could be treated as the promoter of the postmodern ideologies in the world, so that they can, consciously or subconsciously, steer their users towards the postmodern mentality and intellectual practices. Characteristics such as decentralization, horizontality of values, lack of origin and conclusion of truth, and an interpretive view of the world and its phenomena, among other things, are the cornerstones of the epistemology of postmodernism (Deleuze, Guattari, Massumi, 1987), which are especially manifested on social networks.

Based on this, some research findings suggest that social media are rapidly affecting the lifestyle of societies such as the United States so that even people's beliefs regarding the values of democratic life have undergone changes (Swigger, 2013). The present study seeks to investigate the relationship between the value system of students and the time spent on social networks. The structure of this research, despite its simple design, can make a significant contribution by providing substantial findings and implications.

### 3. Methodology

In this study, two questionnaires were used: Youth Value Orientation Questionnaire and the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, which are described in details below.

The first questionnaire, which was designed with the assistance of several faculty members of University of Bojnord and Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman, was previously used in a provincial research projects (Eskandari, 2013, Eskandari, Kazemi, 2014). The questionnaire is a modified version of Godarzi's questionnaire (2010). Based on a review of literature, five categories of "religious, cultural, social, political, and economic" values were selected to draw up the questionnaire. Each category consisted of 3 statements, which constituted a total of 15 statements. Each statement comprised of four items that were scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with a score of 4 indicated an acceptance of ideal values at its highest level (desirability of values in the five categories are evaluated in terms of the extent of adaptability with religious teachings). The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated by the Cronbach's alpha (0.79) and Spearman Brown's two-half-coefficient (0.80).

The second scale, which was designed by Sicily Anderson at the University of Bergen, Norway, is known as BFAS (Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale). This scale, with a calculated reliability of 0.82, was modified into the Social Network Addiction Questionnaire (not just Facebook). Along with this questionnaire, which measured the extent of dependence on social networks, the hours spent on social networks scale was also evaluated on a Likert-scale.

The statistical population of the study consisted of all students of universities and higher education institutes of Bojnord in 2015-16 academic year. The author's effort to obtain accurate and reliable statistics was futile. However, the population covered about 15,000 students and the participants were selected using cluster random sampling. For this purpose, among academic centers including two state universities, six Applied Science and Technology centers, one Islamic Azad University branch, one Payam Noor university and two Higher Education Institutes, 10 centers were selected and 40 questionnaires were assigned to each center. The questionnaires were submitted to one of the faculty members of the said centers to be distribute among male and female students under proper condition. As a result, 400 questionnaires were collected, of which only 229 subjects were self-acknowledged users of social networks and hence had not filled in the scale of social network addiction. As such, only data derived from 229 questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 19 software.

#### 4. Findings

The descriptive findings of this study, including gender, academic status and majors are shown in Tables 1.

**Table 1.** Frequency distribution of gender, marital status and the majors of participants

	Single	
	Frequency	Percentage
Female-Single	85	46.2%
Female-Married	15	33.3%
Male- Single	99	53.8%
Male- Married	30	66.7%
Total	184	100%
Major- Human science	80	34.9%
Major -Technical	116	50.7%
Major -Fundamental science	7	3.1%
Major-Art	22	9.6%
Total	229	100%

In addition to the above, descriptive findings suggest that only 10% of the participants used local social networks, such as Ham-Mihan and Facenama, and 87% preferred to use international social networks such as Facebook, Telegram, to name a few.

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviations for each value category

Variable	Mean	SD*	Z.ks**	Probability value
Religious values	8.84	2.13	1.97	0.001
Cultural values	8.38	1.53	1.91	0.001
Economic values	7.56	2.34	1.58	0.01
Social values	9.74	1.92	2.23	0.0001
Political values	6.93	2.64	1.53	0.018
Value system	41.30	6.60	1.31	0.62
Addiction	14.85	5.11	1.19	0.11

\* Standard deviation \*\*

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviations for the variable of values (for each category and in general) as well as social media addiction. As the probability value of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test reveals, the distribution of the variable of religious values was abnormal ( $p = 0.001$  and  $Z = 1.97$ ), cultural values was abnormal ( $P = 0.001$  and  $Z = 1.91$ ), economic values was abnormal ( $P < 0.01$  and  $Z = 0.88$ ), social values was abnormal ( $P = 0.0001$  and  $Z = 2.13$ ) political values was abnormal ( $P = 0.018$  and  $1.53/1 = Z$ ), and values in general was normal ( $P < 0.06$  and  $Z = 31/1$ ), while social network addiction was normal ( $P < 0/11$  and  $Z = 1.19$ ).

To answer the question, "Is there a significant relationship between the value system of a person and the time spent on social networks?" the normal and abnormal distribution of variables was taken into account. Since the distribution of the components of value system - religious, political, cultural, social and economic - was abnormal and the distribution of the value system was normal, the Kruskal-Wallis and one-way ANOVA tests were used to compare the components of the value system and the value system respectively. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Results of Kruskal Wallis test and One-Way Analysis of Variance.

Variable	Time spent (hrs)	Mean	SD	F	Significance level	Kruskal Wallis Test	Significance level
Political Valued	0.5	7/91	2/75			11.31	0.04
	1	6/88	2/77				
	1-2	6/08	2/77				
	2-3	6/62	2/32				
	More than 3	6/63	2/14				
	NA	2/42	2/53				
Religious values	0.5	9/86	1/97			0.01	13.53
	1	8/82	1/98				
	1-2	8/23	2/36				
	2-3	8/60	2/17				
	More than 3	8/36	2/26				
	NA	1/71	8/97				
Economic values	0.5	8/30	1/86				
	1	7/86	2/14				
	1-2	7/61	2/93				
	2-3	7/08	2/22				
	More than 3	6/83	2/45				
	NA	7/35	1/91				
Social values	0.5	10/46	1/48			0.04	11.61
	1	10/02	1/65				
	1-2	9/56	2/20				
	2-3	9/68	2/07				
	More than 3	9/82	1/70				
	NA	9/09	2/01				
Cultural values	0.5	9/05	1/55	-	-	13.02	0.02
	1	8/57	1/26				
	1-2	8/10	1/40				
	2-3	8/40	1/77				

Value system	More than 3	8/20	1/58	3.90	0.002	-	-
	NA	7/97	1/51				
	0.5	45/48	5/53				
	1	41/90	6/44				
	1-2	39/30	8/07				
	2-3	40/78	6/48				
	More than 3	39/71	5/24				
	NA	40/78	5/32				

As the results of Table 3 show, according to the probability value of Kruskal Wallis test, there is a significant difference between the score of political values and the time spent on social networks ( $p = 0.043$ ,  $p = 11.31$ ). Since non-parametric tests were used in this study, a post hoc test could not be administered, but the analysis of the mean ratings indicated that those who spent less time on social networks retained more desirable political values.

According to the results of Table 3, the argument discussed above holds true for religious, social and cultural values; that is, those who spent less time on social networks have significantly more desirable religious, social and cultural values. In the case of economic values, however, the results of Kruskal-Wallis test revealed did not reveal any significant difference in the desirability of economic values and hours spent on using social networks ( $z = 9.48$  and  $p < 0.09$ ).

Regarding the score of value system and the hours spent on social networks, the results of one-way ANOVA indicated a significant statistical difference between these two scores ( $F = 3.90$  and  $p 0.002$ ). Also, the results of Schaffer's post hoc test showed that the value system score of students who spent less than half an hour on social networks was significantly higher than others. On the other hand, the value system score of students who used social media more than an hour a day was significantly lower.

To answer the question "Is there a significant relationship between the value system, its components and the social network addiction?", given the abnormal distribution of the components of the value system - religious, political, cultural, social, and economic component – and the normal distribution of the value system and addiction to social networks, the Spearman correlation test was used to assess the relationship between components and addiction to social networks, and the Pearson correlation test was employed to evaluate the relationship between the value system and social network addiction. The results are displayed in Table. 5.

**Table 4:** Results of Spearman and Pearson Correlation tests

Variable	Addiction to social networks	
	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Religious values	-0.12	0.5
Social values	-0.18	0.008
Economic values	-0.13	0.05
Cultural values	-0.06	0.35
Political values	-0.04	0.51
Value system	-0.22	0.002

According to Table 4, there was a significant negative relationship between social network addiction and value system scores ( $r = 0.22$  and  $p = 0.002$ ). Moreover, there was a significant negative relationship between addiction to social networks and social value scores ( $r = -0.88$  and  $p < 0.008$ ). Nevertheless, a negative but non-significant relationship was observed between social network addiction and the scores of religious values ( $r = 0.12$  and  $0.05 < p$ ), economic values ( $r = 0.13$  and  $0.05 < p$ ), cultural values ( $r = 0.06$  and  $p < 0.35$ ), and political values ( $r = 0.04$  and  $p < 0.051$ ).

## 5. Discussion

The results of the study suggested a significant negative relationship between students' score of value system and the time spent on social networks as well as addiction to social networks. According to theorists such as McLuhan (1967), Postman (1993), Deleuze (1987), Chandler (1996), Woolgar (1996) and Shaygan (translated by Valyani, 2009), technologies and media, irrespective of the desirability of their contents, can exert a huge effect on their audience. The results of the research are in agreement with this basic assumption.

Obviously, this is not to underestimate the influence of the media content, especially social networks. Rather, it can be argued that if the form and shape of technologies and the media convey desirable messages and values to the audience, the content can exert a greater and deeper effect. This may explain the reason that among the components of the value system, only economic values did not have a negative significant relationship with the time spent on social networks, since the contents of social networks are primarily concerned with religious, cultural, political, and social issues, rather than economic considerations.

The results of this research are consistent with the findings reported by Tyler (2012, p. 5). He argued that virtual social networks, coupled with the influence of Western powers, had launched a homogenization movement in the world, which has aroused controversy and conflicts in the world, accelerating the tendency of some nations to undermine their national identity and traditions.

Overall, the results are consistent with the findings of Javadinia et al. (2013), Golmohammadi (2007), Najati Hosseini (2012), Ameli and Haji Jafari (2012), Adlpor, Ghasemi, Mir Mohammad Tabar (2014) and Shafie (2015). More specifically, Eskandari and Kazemi (2014) demonstrated that the value orientation of young people living in rural areas, with limited access to satellite and Internet, was significantly higher than their counterparts in urban areas. They also suggested that the use of satellite and Internet was strongly linked to the adoption of negative values by the younger generation.

Along with this, there are research that has acknowledged the undesirable impact of the Internet, cyberspace and social networks on the identity of young people. For example, Memar, Adlipour and Khaksar (2012) in a research on virtual social networks and identity crisis contended that individuals are overwhelmed with confusion and uncertainty in building identity when dealing with this new space and the plurality of resources. Adlipour, Qasemi and Kianpour (2013) in another study on Facebook and the national identity of youths revealed that in analyzing the role of virtual social networks such as Facebook in undermining national identity of users, the huge effect of these media on attitudes and behaviors of citizens and diminishing empathy, national belonging, and social cohesion should not be overlooked. Along the same line of research, Adilipour, Qasemi and Mir Mohammad Tabar (2014) in a study on the impact of Facebook on the cultural identity of the young people of Isfahan reported similar results.

Based on the findings of the present study and the literature review, one cannot pass judgment on prohibiting the use of technologies and modern media. Making such a decision is neither possible nor desirable given the spirits and requirements of time. The adverse experience of prohibiting technology such as video tapes and satellite over the past decades has led practitioners to focus more on promoting media literacy. The goal of media literacy is to raise awareness, give authority, and liberate the audience. One of the implications of analysis and proper understanding of media messages is enhanced awareness that can foster healthier social communication with the media (Salehamiry, 2008, p.9).

The findings of the present study reveal that even university students are not sufficiently familiar with the proper utilization of social networks. Promoting media literacy and raising awareness about the direct and indirect context effects of the social networks could serve as a strategy to alleviate the adverse effects of the new media.

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