SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN THE CONTEXT OF PARENTAL ACCEPTANCE AMONG SLOVAK ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Backround and aims: It is a major challenge for contemporary parents to deal with the omnipresence of social media in their adolescent children's lives. This study focuses on the deeper psychological contexts of problematic social media use, drawing mainly on the empirical evidence on the relationship between parental responsiveness and problematic Internet use. The aim of the study is to verify the correlations between adolescents' propensity to overuse social media and the perceived parental warmth, indifference, hostility, and rejection. Methods: The research file consisted of 1,005 Slovak adolescents (73% women, AM_{age}= 16.99, SD_{Age}= 1.24). The research instruments included PARQ/Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Rohner, 2005) and BSMAS/Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (Andreassen et al., 2016). Results: The results indicated a weak negative correlation between the perceived parental warmth in mothers and fathers and their child's propensity to overuse social media. Conversely, parental hostility, indifference, and rejection showed a positive correlation with excessive social media use. The results are discussed from the viewpoint of gender differences as well. Conclusions: The presented findings corroborate the theories of compensatory Internet use (Kardefelt-Winther D., 2014) and basic psychological need compensation research (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Liu et al., 2016; Lukavská et al., 2020). Our findings show the need for interventions to prevent problematic social media use by helping parents to apply optimal parenting styles.
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Keywords: Social media use, perceived parental responsiveness, adolescence.

1. Introduction

From the viewpoint of substance and behavioural addiction emergence, adolescence is a sensitive period (Balogh et al., 2013). The prevalence of problematic Internet use (PIU) is higher in adolescents in comparison to the general population (Kuss et al., 2014). The PIU aetiology is complex because it includes personality as well as environmental factors. The number of studies investigating family factors in adolescent PIU is on the rise. The Internet has become an integral part of adolescents' everyday lives. However, due to the combination of their natural innocence and the desire for sensation, adolescents are vulnerable in the interactive, immersive virtual world created by social networks. Adolescence is a transitional period during which children are gradually gathering courage to leave the safety of their home and explore new possibilities. During this period, parents play the key role in encouraging or hampering potentially dangerous activities. According to Soh et al. (2018), peer attachment competes with parent attachment when it comes to risk online activities and potential Internet addiction in adolescents. However, they also noted that parents may have a greater overall influence on adolescents than their peers.

Parenting style is defined as the way parents express their attitudes and expectations with the aim to influence their children's behaviour (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). This theory deals with the affective and behavioural aspects of parenting. Numerous studies have proved the influence of different parenting styles on child development. Applying a typological approach to parenting style, researchers have found that the authoritative parenting style is related to positive psychosocial consequence, while the neglecting and authoritarian parenting styles are related to negative consequences (Garcia & Gracia, 2009). Calafat et al. (2014) used a two-dimensional concept of parental behaviour consisting of emotional responsiveness (warmth, acceptance, engagement) and strictness (control, requirements, demands, harshness), and their research showed that highly responsive (indulgent and authoritative) parenting styles

were more protective of adolescents' substance abuse than the less responsive (authoritarian and neglecting) styles. This approach focuses on the dimensions of parental warmth and control. Lee and Chae (2007) found that parental warmth encouraged adolescents to use the Internet for educational purposes more frequently and made their online behaviour more positive. It appears that a good parent-child relationship relates to a lower PIU risk. Casalo and Escario (2019) found a negative correlation between perceived parental care and Internet overuse in Spanish adolescents aged 14 to 18 years. In US adolescents aged 12 to 17, a negative correlation between PIU and good parent-child relationship was also found (Bleakley et al., 2016). Chinese high school students who reported good relationship with their fathers showed a lower PIU tendency as well (Dong et al., 2019). Chinese adolescents aged 11 to 18 with the PIU tendency reported a lower family environment quality than those who did not have PIU (Shi et al., 2017). Shanghai adolescents aged 11 to 20 reporting worse relationships with their mothers or fathers showed higher PIU scores (Xu et al., 2014). A weak negative correlation between parent-child relationship and PIU was found in 13 years old (Shek et al., 2018) and 16 years old (Shek et al., 2019) Hong Kong adolescents as well. The only study focused on collecting data from the parents instead of their children uncovered a moderately negative correlation between PIU and parental care, but also moderately positive correlation between PIU and excessive parental care (Siomos et al., 2012). Chinese adolescents with clinically diagnosed PIU reported lower paternal and maternal emotional warmth and higher rate of rejection in comparison to the control group (Xiuqin et al., 2010).

Geurts et al. (2022) suggested that what parents do (media-specific parenting) is less important than how they do it (general parenting). Specialised literature (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Steinberg et al., 1992) specifies three basic dimensions of general parenting: responsiveness (parental warmth, acceptance, and support), demandingness (parental supervision, rules, structure, discipline), and allowing autonomy (encouraging children to develop independence in terms of thinking, interests, and ideas). Parenting characterised by high scores in these three dimensions is considered positive since it creates optimal emotional climate for children's healthy development (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Positive parenting promotes the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs for optimal development and well-being in adolescents: competence, autonomy, and cohesion (self-determination theory). If these needs are not met at adolescents' homes, adolescents will seek to have their needs met in other social contexts (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The theory of compensatory satisfaction (Liu et al., 2016) and the model of compensatory Internet use (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014) both suggest that adolescents can develop an Internet addiction if they use this medium as the compensatory social environment. Consistent with this reasoning, multiple studies have showed that PIU negatively correlates with positive parenting aspects such as emotional warmth, empathy, and support (Li et al., 2018), while it correlates positively with parental overprotectiveness, rejection, and strict punishments (Li et al., 2020). Further studies have indicated that highly responsive parenting combined with demandingness serves as a protective factor (Dogan et al., 2015; Lukavská et al., 2020; Moazedian et al., 2014). On the other hand, parenting styles neglecting the three basic dimensions represent a PIU risk factor (Dogan et al., 2015; Lukavská et al., 2020; Siomos et al., 2012; Tao et al., 2007). If problematic social media use (PSMU) is understood as integral part of PIU, these findings may indicate that general parenting is associated with PSMU as well.

Many experts draw on the Internet addiction theory (Andreassen et al., 2016; Kuss & Griffiths, 2011; Montag et al., 2014; Müller et al., 2016; van Rooij et al., 2017; Young, 2009) and consider social networking sites (SNS) addiction a form of behavioural addiction: "being overly concerned about SNSs, to be driven by a strong motivation to log on to or use SNSs, and to devote so much time and effort to SNSs that it impairs other social activities, studies/job, interpersonal relationships, and/or psychological health and well-being" (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014, p. 4054). As the debate about the existence/ non-existence of SNS addiction or its distinctive concepts is not currently closed, and due to our goals and research design, this paper will operate the term "social media overuse" instead of addiction.

Based on the available theory and the existing research findings, we expect the tendency to social media overuse to show a negative correlation with parental acceptance and warmth, and a positive correlation with parental indifference, hostility, and rejection.

2. Methods

The research file consisted of 1,005 Slovak adolescents aged 15 to 20 years, 73% of whom are females. It was a combination of cluster sampling (because of multiple random collection sites) with voluntary sampling (because people in these sites responded to an online survey). The online questionnaire link was distributed via official representatives to secondary schools across Slovakia. The online form included:

The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) derived from the original Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS). The word "Facebook" has been replaced by more general "social media" to

assess the addiction in general (Andreassen et al., 2016). The scale measures six factors: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse. Each of them is captured by a single item on a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = very rarely; 5 = very often). The points are added up, and the total score ranging from 6 to 30 points is interpreted as follows: the higher the score, the riskier social network use. According to the authors of the Slovak version of this instrument (Izrael et al., 2019), its internal consistency is $\alpha = .94$. In the presented sample, the instrument showed satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = .78$).

 Parental Acceptance – Rejection Questionnaire Short Version (PARQ/S). This is a shortened version of the original 60-item PARQ. It is a self-reporting questionnaire designed for children and adolescents focused on their current perception of parental acceptance/rejection (Rohner, 2005). Each parent is scored separately. This instrument consists of 24 items and 4 subscales: warmth (8 items), hostility (6 items), indifference (6 items), and undifferentiated rejection (4 items). For each item, the respondent comments on a 4-point scale (1 = almost never; 4 = almost always). The subscale items are added up to calculate the rough score. The internal reliability in all scales was satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha = .79 to .94).

3. Results

Table 1. Relationship (Spearman correlation) between the SNS overuse tendency and parental acceptance/rejection factors (N=1,005).

	PQM_W	PQM_H	PQM_I	PQM_R	PQF_W	PQF_H	PQF_I	PQF_R
BSMAS	-.17***	.27***	.22***	.24***	-.16***	.24***	.22***	.22***

Note: BSMAS = Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, PQM_W = PARQ_mother_warmth, PQM_H = mother_hostility, PQM_I = mother_indifference, PQM_R = mother_rejection, PQF_W = PARQ_father_warmth, PQF_H = father_hostility, PQF_I = father_indifference, PQF_R = father_ rejection, *** p < .001

4. Discussion and conclusion

 According to Lukavská et al. (2020), parental responsiveness (warmth) appears to be a more consistent predictor of PIU than strictness (control). Therefore, we reached for Rohner's concept of parental acceptance/rejection. Right the initial bivariate analysis identified weak, but systematic (because statistically significant) relationships between the main variables of both scales. First, there are negative associations between the tendency to excessive use of networks and the perceived parental warmth of the mother and father. Contrariwise, with a growing score in perceived parental hostility, indifference and rejection, the adolescent's Bergen scale score also grows, i.e. his tendency to overuse social networks increases.

 These results are consistent with research findings of the negative association between PIU and aspects of positive parenting, including parental emotional warmth, empathy, and support (Li et al., 2018) and a positive association with parental rejection and harsh punishment (Li et al., 2020). Many other studies have reached similar findings (Casalo & Escario, 2019; Bleakley et al., 2016; Dogan et al., 2015; Dong et al., 2019; Lukavská et al., 2020; Moazedian et al., 2014; Xiuqin et al., 2010). Overall, they thus support the compensatory gratification theory (Liu et al., 2016) and the compensatory model of Internet use (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014) regardless of cultural context. The gender comparison showed that adolescent girls are more susceptible to the influence of social networks ($d_{COH} = .36$), to whom even more attention needs to be paid in this sense. The result corresponds with other authors (Andreassen et al., 2016; Stănculescu, 2022). As the results of the initial correlation analysis showed, it will make sense to identify other variables that affect the detected systematic associations through subsequent multivariate analyzes (regression, mediation, etc.).

 We recognise the use of self-assessment scales and some necessary compromises in the method of data collection to be the limits of our study, somewhat reducing its generalizability to the Slovak adolescent population. However, these findings expand the spectrum of empirical knowledge of mutual relations between aspects of parental approach and the use of information technologies in adolescence and sharpens the focus from the more general topic of problematic Internet use to the more specific use of virtual social networks. We can also advise the results when creating programs to support parenting skills development.

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