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Predictors of Facebook Addiction Among Young People

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ABSTRACT

The aims of the research were: to examine the connection between Facebook addiction and the meaning of life among young people, demographic variables, the frequency of hanging out with family and friends, and Internet use. Also, the goal was to examine the predictors of Facebook addiction from the variables included in this research. The results showed that Facebook addicition is moderately positively related to the length of daily Internet use (P<0.001), moderately negatively related to the meaning of life (P<0.001), the frequency of spending time with family (P<0.001) and low positively related to the male gender of the respondent (P<0.001). The variables included in the regression analysis explain 42% of the variance of Facebook addiction (AR2=0.420) (P<0.001), and significant predictors in the first step are gender (P=0.001), frequency of socializing with family (P=0.001), while in the second step of the analysis the significant predictors were the meaning of life P<0.001), age of the respondent (P=0.003), living in the countryside (P=0.017), the frequency of spending time with family (P<0.001) and the length of daily Internet use (P=0.001).

Key words: *facebook addiction, meaning of life, onset predictors*

Introduction

Generation Z includes people born from born between 1997 and 2012[1]. The aforementioned generation is growing up in an era of great technological progress, and has certainly progressed faster than any generation before. This generation did not live in a period when there was no digital technology; during their growing up they were strongly exposed to social media and its content. Characteristic of this group is that everything is at their fingertips, they often do several things at once, they are used to multitasking, while their shortcomings are poor communication, a fast-paced and stressful life. Also, social media and the Internet in general, which is their natural environment, can lead to the alienation and faster independence from their families[2].

Meaning of life

There are different theories that describe the meaning of life (ML), and they describe it as an important part of human happiness and psychological well-being[3], as a sense of value[4] and as a motive that that gives us an incentive to continue[5]. According to Frankl, people have need to search for the ML, and that this urge to search for meaning is a fundamental aspect of human nature. He called it „will for meaning"[6,7]. Thus, Frankl believes that the ML and its functions are very important in life, and that the pursuit of meaning is the primary motivational driver of human behavior[8]. He also believes that for everyone, in every situation, there is an objective meaning which, however, does not depend on the individual, but exists outside of him. Through his life, the individual discovers an objective meaning that does not exist within him but outside him. Boredom, apathy and emptiness occur when there is

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a lack of ML, and it´s emphasized by the experience of an existential vacuum or a sense of meaninglessness that occurs when there is no personal fulfillment[9]. Such a condition can lead to negative outcomes, depression, and even suicide, and therefore, according to Frankl, a designed life is a prerequisite for an individual's mental and physical health[10]. In late adolescence, the ML plays an important role. During this period, young people face new situations and events, while they try to interpret and organize their experience by identifying significant aspects of their personal and social life, and discovering deeper meanings in their lives[11,12]. The search for ML can have a positive function as a cognitive scheme that allows late adolescents to identify and interpret informations relevant to meaning of life and to integrate their life experiences [13].

Facebook addiction

Social contacts with family members, friends or close people via Facebook is the most common reason for using it. But it is also used for fun and socializing. but the use of social networks for teenagers and young people is much more complicated. As adolescencent individuals try to gain a sense of individuality, identity and create strong bonds with those they find trustworthy and loyal, social media can help but also hinder teenagers from achieving these goals. The reasons are that they can find different forms of support on social media, but they can also encounter the negative sides of social networks that are associated with the risks of addiction, obesity, loss of social skills, being dumbed down due to too much information, hatred, cyberbullying, violation privacy and the risks of exposure to pornography and the dangers of pedophilia[14]. Facebook addiction (FA) is defined as "excessive involvement in Facebook activities and it is a frequent cause of problems in everyday social functioning"[15]. Research has shown that FA is positively linked to male gender, disrupted circadian rhythm, insomnia, depression and anxiety symptoms, but it is also negativly linked to openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness[16-20].

One of the most important signs of excessive use of Facebook is the lack of control, which is characteristic of other addictions. In this case, it is the lack of control over the time spent on Facebook. Precisely for this reason, it seems very important to find out what are the mechanisms that make people who start using Facebook in a positive social way to become addicted. That is why the main goal of our research was to find out what are the predictors of FA.

The influence of the meaning of life on Facebook addiction among young people

Although at first it seems that social media improves social relations and increases the number of social contacts, it turned out to be the exact opposite: people who are socially active "offline", i.e. show better life satisfaction and mental health than people who practice it "online"[21]. Last three years were also marked by the Covid 19 pandemic marked by social distancing and lockdown during which young people were forced to „be present" on social media and online classes, which did not contribute to the development of the previously mentioned „live" social activities. Also, the situation with Covid 19 could lead to increased dependence on social networks and feelings of loneliness.

So far, no research has been conducted on the topic of the influence of the ML on FA at all, not even among young people. Research on the impact of other addictions on the ML has shown that the development of various addictions is related to a lack of ML[22] and also to alcohol addiction[23], while the ML (defined as the pursuit of intrinsically valuable goals) is inversely related to harmful drinking[24]. According to Frankl, people without ML don´t have much to „fill their lives with other than regular, routine activities, which leads to feelings of emptiness and lack of stimulation. Such people feel that they are being forced into behavior that can easily reduce their boredom. Addictive behaviors meet this requirement because they are highly stimulating, becuse of their facilitating feelings of boredom[24].

Aim

1. To determine the connection between Facebook addiciton and the meaning of life among young people, demographic variables (age, gender, place of residence), frequency of hanging out with family and friends, and frequency of Internet use.

2. To determine the predictors of Facebook addiction from the previously mentioned variables included in the research.

Material and methods

Participants

The research was conducted in the period from March 2022 to January 2023 via the Google Forms platform. At the very beginning of the research, the respondents were informed about the principles according to which the research is conducted (voluntariness, anonymity) and they should gave their consent to this research. During the research, no personal data of the respondents, nor their e-mail addresses were collected, and in this way the anonymity of the participants is guaranteed. On average, it takes about 20 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. This research included 143 participants age 18 to 25 (M=21.05; SD=2.409) from the Republic of Croatia.

Methods

The questionnaire was created in such a way that it consisted of three parts. The first part of the questionnaire included six items related to the participants' sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, current

education, place of residence and how much time they spend per day on a computer/mobile phone/tablet). On the age-related question, it was necessary to enter the egzact age (in numbers), while on the other five items, participants answered by choosing one of the offered answers.

The second part of the questionnaire referred to the Bergen Facebook addiction scale. The scale consists of six items, and participants responded by choosing one of the offered answers on the principle of the Likert scale (from 1 – very rarely - to 5 – very often). The total result is the sum of all answers. The reliability expressed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.83 [25].

The third part of the questionnaire is related to the Meaning of Life Scale, which consists of twenty-three items that examine the emotional point of view of meaning and the cognitive aspect of the meaning of life. On a five-point Likert-type scale, the participants assess how much these statements apply to them. The total score is calculated as the sum of assessments on all statements. In doing so, ten statements are scored in reverse. A higher score indicates a greater meaning in the life of the respondent, and the scores range from 23 to 115. The reliability of the internal consistency type scale (Cronbach's alpha) is 0.892[26].

Statistical analysis

For describing the frequency distribution of the investigated variables descriptive statistical methods were used. The mean values were expressed by the Mean, minimum and maximum values, and standard deviation. Pearson correlations were used to determine the relationship between FA, the meaning of life and the age of the participants. Point Biserial correlations were used to determine the relationship between FA, gender and place of residence, while Spearman's correlations were used to determine the relationship between FA and time spent with family, friends and on the Internet. A hierarchical regression analysis was used to determine predictors of FA. The Kolmogorov Smirnov test was used to test the normality of the distribution. A value of $p<0.05$ was taken as the level of statistical significance. The statistical package IBM SPSS 25, manufactured in Chicago, USA, in 2017, was used for processing.

Results

The reaserch included 143 participants, of which 84 (58.7%) were female and 80 (55.9%) participants lived in the city. The arithmetic mean of the age of the participants is M=21.20 (SD=2.424) (Table 1).

It was shown that the Mean of FA in the examined sample was relatively low (M=11,979; SD=6,409) and did not deviate from the level of addiction in other studies[27]. The meaning of life in the examined sample was relatively high (M=85.851; SD=17.423) and dids not deviate from the normative sample[24] (Table 2).

TABLE 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TESTED SAMPLE

Variable		N (%)
Gender	Men	59 (41.3)
	Women	84 (58.7)
Place of residence	City	80 (55.9)
	Countryside	62 (43.4)
	Not answered	1 (0.7)
I spend time with my family	Very rarely	15 (10.5)
	Rarely	26 (18.2)
	Sometimes	39 (27.3)
	Often	28 (19.6)
	Very often	35 (24.5)
Hang out with friends	Very rarely	3 (2.1)
	Rarely	15 (10.5)
	Sometimes	32 (22.4)
	Often	56 (39.2)
	Very often	37 (25.9)
I spend every day on the internet on my computer/ smartphone	Less then 1 hour	9 (6.3)
	From 1 to 2 hours	29 (20.3)
	From 3 to 4 hours	41 (28.7)
	From 4 to 6 hours	35 (24.5)
	7 or more hours	28 (19.6)
	Not answered	1 (0.7)
	M (min – max)	SD
Age	21.20 (18 – 25)	2.424

TABLE 2

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF FACEBOOK ADDICTION AND MEANING IN LIFE

	M (min – max)	SD
Facebook addiction	11.979 (6 – 30)	6.409
Meaning of life	85.851 (38 – 115)	17.423

The results showed that FA is moderately positively correlated to the length of daily Internet use ($P<0.001$), moderately negatively correlated to the meaning of life ($P<0.001$), the frequency of hanging out with family ($P<0.001$) and low positively correlated to the gender of the participants (coded 1=male; 2=female) ($p<0.001$). Other correlations are visible in Table 3.

In order to determine the significant predictors of FA among young people, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed. In the first step, the variables gender, age, place of residence and time spent with family and friends were included. It showed that the variables included in the first step of the analysis explained 25% of the variance of FA (AR2=0.257) ($P<0.001$). Significant predictors were found to be: gender ($P=0.001$), frequency of socializing with family ($P=0.001$). The B coefficient indicates that

TABLE 3

CORRELATION OF FACEBOOK ADDICTION WITH MEANING IN LIFE, DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES, TIME SPENT ON THE INTERNET, AND TIME SPENT WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Facebook addiction	r	1							
	P	–							
	N	143							
2. Meaning of life	r	−0.494**	1						
	P	<0.001	–						
	N	141	141						
3. Age	r	0.005	0.246**	1					
	P	0.955	0.003	–					
	N	143	141	143					
4. Gender	r	-0.303**	0.323**	0.244**	1				
	P	<0.001	<0.001	0.003	–				
	N	143	141	143	143				
5. Place of residence	r	0.137	0.111	−0.022	−0.065	1			
	P	0.105	0.192	0.793	0.446	–			
	N	142	140	142	142	142			
6. I spend time with my family	rho	−0.364**	0.365**	0.104	0.128	0.014	1		
	P	<0.001	<0.001	0.218	0.128	0.873	–		
	N	143	141	143	143	142	143		
7. Hang out with friends (going out)	rho	−0.117	0.171*	−0.190*	0.085	0.058	−0.064	1	
	P	0.162	0.043	0.023	0.314	0.493	0.450	-	
	N	143	141	143	143	142	143	143	
8. I spend daily on a computer. tablet or smartphone on Internet	rho	0.382**	−0.375**	−0.276**	−0.321**	0.103	-0.168*	−0.053	1
	P	<0.001	<0.001	0.001	<0.001	0.222	0.046	0.529	–
	N	142	140	142	142	141	142	142	142

* P<0.05; **P<0.01

frequency of spending time with family negatively contributes to FA, male gender positively contributes to FA among young people (Table 4).

In the second step of the regression analysis, the variables of the meaning of life and time spent on the Internet were included. It showed that the variables included in the analysis explained 42% of the variance of FA (AR2=0.42) (P<0.001). Significant predictors were found to be: the meaning of life (P<0.001), age of the participant (P=0.003), frequency of socializing with family (P<0.001), place of residence (P=0.017) and length of daily Internet use (P<0.001). The ß coefficient indicates that the meaning of life and the frequency of spending time with family negatively contribute to FA, while the time spent on the Internet, age and rural residence of the participants positively contribute to FA among young people (Table 5) .

TABLE 4

RESULTS OF FIRST STEP OF HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS

	ß	T	P	AR^2
(Constant)		3.698	<0.001	0.257
Gender	−0.260	−3.396	0.001**	
Age	0.086	1.109	0.270	
Place of residence	0.144	1.951	0.053	
I spend time with my family	−0.412	−5.567	<0.001**	
Hang out with friends	−0.112	−1.478	0.142	

* P<0,05; **P<0,01

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine the existence of a connection between the severity of FA, the perception of the ML among young people and demographic variables, and to find out which examined variables are predictors of the FA among young people. It has been shown that FA is related to the ML, gender, time spent with family and time spent on the Internet. Our research showed that as

TABLE 5

RESULTS OF SECOND STEP OF HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS

	ß	T	P	AR^2
(Constant)		1.541	0.126	0.420
Gender	−0.118	−1.654	0.100	
Age	0.218	3.040	0.003**	
Place of residence	0.159	2.408	0.017*	
I spend time with my family	−0.267	−3.794	<0.001**	
Hang out with friends	−0.017	−0.239	0.812	
I spend daily on a computer. tablet or smartphone on Internet	0.272	3.666	<0.001**	
Meaning of life	−0.322	−3.999	<0.001**	

* P<0.05; **P<0.01

the meaning of life increases, addiction to Facebook decreases. Such results could point to the truthfulness of Frankl's theory, and indicate that the experience of the meaning of life could play an important role in the prevention of addictive behavior[24]. As stated earlier, today's young people lead a fast-paced and stressful life, while social networks and the Internet in general can lead to the alienation of young people. It is possible that in this way there is a feeling of meaninglessness, emptiness and apathy, which, according to Frankl, lead to addictive behavior[22] and seeking to satisfy one's social needs in the virtual world of Facebook.

FA is negatively related to time spent time with family. In such a way that the less time the young people spend with family, the dependence of Facebook get´s greater. These results are consistent with other conducted researches which showed that FA has an impact on children's relationship with their parents, i.e. the worse the relationship with parents, the greater is FA[28,29].

FA is also related to the male gender of the respondents. These results are not consistent with previous research, which showed that gender is not related to FA[30] or that women showed greater symptoms of FA than men[31,32]. These results of our research are surprising because it was thought that women are at a higher risk of excessive use of Facebook than men precisely because they use the Internet for social activities, while men use it more for other activities such as online gaming[33]. In any case, additional research is needed to determine the relationship between the mentioned construct and gender.

As expected, FA is related to the time spent on the Internet on a computer, mobile phone or tablet. In other words, the more time they spent on the devices on Internet, the FA can become greater. These results are consistent with the results of other research conducted on this topic[34-36]. Also, previous research indicates that Facebook users who have problems with excessive use have a tendency to spend significantly more time on the application than users who do not have problems with its use[37]. However, since Facebook is an online application on the Internet, Blachnio et al. believe that the concept of Facebook addicition overlaps with problematic Internet use[38].

As for the predictors of FA, it was shown that the meaning of life, age, time spent with family and time spent on the Internet are significant predictors of FA, while gender is a less strong but still significant predictor of FA. As mentioned earlier, male gender proved to be a significant predictor of FA. The results of only one study are partially consistent with these results[39], showing that men are 1.4 times more likely to be addicted to Facebook than women. In other studies, male gender did not prove to be a significant predictor of FA[19,40-42]. During the past period of the Covid 19 pandemic and the lockdown, there has been an increase in the use of social networks[43], switching to online classes both in schools and faculties, and social distancing. Live social contacts with close and distant family were limited, and it is possible that some of these contacts took place online through Facebook. which may have changed the habits of using social networks according to gender, and changed the center of gravity of the risk of addiction to this social network to men. Since the results have been inconsistent so far, that is, they have either suggested that female gender is a significant predictor or that gender has no role in the prediction of FA, more research is needed on this topic.

Age also proved to be a significant predictor of FA. Older age increases the likelihood of FA. The results of our research are not consistent with the results of other research, where it was shown that younger people have a problem with excessive use of the Internet and Facebook more often than adults[44,45]. The reasons for such results could be sought in the decrease in the use of Facebook by young people. Facebook is losing users in the younger demographic group, who leave it for other social networks, such as Snapchat, Instagram and Tik-Tok[46], while the older ones, according to our results, remain loyal to it and are therefore are at a greater risk of addiction. It is possible that the risk of Facebook adicition is lower in the younger population, but this does not mean that the risk of addiction to the Internet and addiction to other social networks decreases at a younger age. This relationship should certainly be explored in future research.

Time spent with family was found to be a negative predictor of FA. No studies on this topic were found. However, it is possible that individuals use Facebook as a compensation for the fact that they do not get the necessary support in real life and do not have good enough communication with their family to be satisfied and fulfilled, and therefore find solace in Facebook and thereby put themselves at risk of addiction[47].

Life in the countryside proved to be a significant predictor. Not many studies have been conducted on this topic, but one showed that the place of residence is not a significant predictor[48]. Social interactions are one of the main functions of social networks, including Facebook. There is a possibility that life in the countryside means a limited

number of social contacts, and young people in the countryside use Facebook to compensate for the lack of them.

As expected, it was shown that the length of Internet use positively contributes to FA. The results are consistent with the results of other studies[39,49]. Although the Internet is used for many activities, it seems that the amount of time spent on the Internet was also a risk factor for FA in our study, contributing to ongoing discussions about whether excessive use contributes to the development of behavioral addictions.

ML was also found to be a significant predictor of FA. No research has been conducted on this topic. Feelings of meaninglessness and hopelessness can lead to behaviors and habits that can easily reduce boredom, primarily these are different addictions and nowadays also addictions of the modern era. Most adolescents log on to social networks and the Internet to manage unpleasant emotions such as loneliness, stress, depression and anxiety[50]. It is possible that in this way they can probably temporarily get rid of unpleasant emotions in a virtual environment and experience fulfillment and meaningfulness that they do not have in real life. This is partly on the trail of Frankl's theory, which was mentioned earlier.

The results of this research can help in understanding the factors that can lead to the risk of FA, and can help in the prevention of addictive behavior. Certainly, this research opened up new questions that will need to be checked in future research.

Limitations of research

Part of the research is of a correlational nature, and opposite relationships between the constructs are also possible. Also, the research was conducted in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, it would be good to examine several countries and examine mutual relations. The research was conducted online, so it is not even possible to confirm with certainty in which region of the country the respondents filled out the questionnaire.

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PREDIKTORI OVISNOSTI O FACEBOOKU KOD MLADIH

S A Ž E T A K

Ciljevi ovoga istraživanja su bili: ispitati povezanost ovisnosti o Facebooku sa smislom života kod mladih, demografskim varijablama, učestalosti druženja sa obitelji i prijateljima, te učestalosti korištenja interneta. Također, cilj je bio ispitati koje uključene varijable su prediktori ovisnosti o Facebooku. Rezultati su pokazali kako je ovisnost o Facebooku umjereno pozitivno povezana sa dužinom dnevnog korištenja interneta (P<0,001), umjereno negativno povezana sa smislom života (P<0,001), učestalosti druženja sa obitelji (P<0,001) i nisko negativno povezana sa spolom ispitanika (p<0,001). Varijable uključene u analizu objašnjavaju 42% varijance ovisnosti o Facebooku (AR2=0,420) (P<0,001), te su u prvom koraku analize značajne varijable spola (P=0.001) i učestalosti druženja sa obitelji (P<0.001), u drugom koraku se pokazalo kako su značajne varijable smisao života P<0,001), dob ispitanika (P=0,003), stanovanje na selu (P=0,017), učestalost druženja sa obitelji (P<0,001) i dužina dnevnog korištenja interneta. (P<0,001).