Friendship Discrepancy and Time Spent on the Internet

Hsieh-Hua Yang
Department of Health Care Administration
Chang Jung Christian University
396 Chang Jung Rd., Sec. 1, Kway Jen, Tainan, Taiwan
Republic of China

Hung-Jen Yang
Department of Industrial Technology Education
National Kaohsiung Normal University
No. 62, Shenjhong Rd., Yanchao Township, Kaohsiung County 824, Taiwan
Republic of China

Abstract: A questionnaire was designed to measure the university students’ friendship network and the time of Internet use. Name generation was used to identify the friendship network. The result showed that the higher the discrepancy between nomination and reciprocal dyads, the longer the time spent using the Internet.

Key words: Friendship discrepancy, Friendship network, Internet use, University students

1 Introduction

The Internet has become an essential part of daily life for university students. They use it for searching information, discussing with other users, and in many other ways. It seems that the Internet is infiltrating into every aspect of life, especially social relations. Internet users make new relations on the Internet and ignore face-to-face contact. The longer usage of the Internet was associated with a decline in social involvement. Anderson (1998) found the average time of Internet user to be 100 min per day, with dependents averaging 229 min compared to non-dependents, who averaged 73 min. Chen et al. (2003) developed a Chinese Internet Addiction Scale and found the average time of high risk students was 18.46 hours per week, in contrast to 7.88 hours of normal students. Obviously, the more time a person spends on the Internet, the more likely he will be a problematic Internet user.

Recently, many studies found the relationship between loneliness and a high use of Internet (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003; Caplan, 2002; Kraut, et al., 1998; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2000). Nurmi and Salmela-Aro (1997) indicated that characteristics of the social environment are related to feelings of loneliness. The characteristics of social environment included social integration, social activities, and the number of close friends. They also indicated that failure to establish meaningful social relationships and fit in with a group of peers would lead to a pervasive feeling of loneliness. Peplau and Perlman (1979) defined loneliness as a psychological condition that develops from the perceived discrepancy between the relationships one desires to have in number and quality and those one actually has.

Most of the related studies assessed loneliness by the UCLA Loneliness Scale rather than observing the social environment. However, Gross (2004) measured the friendship by the number of close friends at school and the number of times seeing friends outside school, and failed to detect a reliable
association between usage and loneliness. Wang’s study (2001) measured the satisfaction of the subjects’ social interactions with their friends and families, and the results showed that IAD (Internet Addiction Disorder) and social interaction had no direct link. Prezza, Pacilli, and Dinelli (2004) tested the predictive variables of loneliness including less frequency of group encounters. They measured the actual friendship or interaction, but not the relationships one desired.

We argue that loneliness should be measured as the discrepancy between the friendship one desires and those one actually has. And the following research questions were developed: Is there any correlation between friendship discrepancy and time spent on Internet?

It was anticipated that the results of this study would extend the understanding of friendship network and Internet use.

2 Method

The subjects were 17 male and 41 female university students. They were freshmen. About one month after they entered school, the questionnaire was administered in class. During this month, welcome party and camping were the activities for them to become familiar with their classmates and seniors in the same department. Friendship formation needs opportunity to meet face-to-face. Participation in these activities would increase that.

A questionnaire was designed to measure the friendship network and time spent on the Internet. Friendship network was measured within a defined boundary and the method of free recall was used to collect friendship network data (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Respondents were asked to generate a list of their best friends, but not more than 10. The number of best friends was defined as the friendship one desired. If a pair of two students nominated each other, we defined it as a reciprocal dyad. The number of reciprocal dyads was defined as the number of actual friendships. The difference between the desired and the actual friendship was defined as friendship discrepancy.

The time spent on Internet was measured as the frequency of spending 3 hours on Internet continuously in one day per week. There are five items including never, 1-2 times per week, 3-4 times per week, 5-6 times per week, and every day.

3 Results

The friendship discrepancy and time spent on Internet were compared between male and female students. The results showed that there was no difference between males and females in both friendship discrepancy and time spent, as shown in Table 1. Nearly half of the male students spent not less than 3 hours on Internet every day. About 30% of female students spent the same time on Internet.

Table 1 Description of subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 times/wk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 times/wk</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 times/wk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>(29.3)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>(70.7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship discrepancy</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The range of friendship discrepancy was from 0 to 10. The means of friendship discrepancy were 3.47 and 3.36 for male and female students respectively. It meant that there was a gap between the desired friendship and the actual friendship.

The analysis indicated that there was correlation between friendship discrepancy and time spent on Internet (Table 2).

Table 2 Means of friendship discrepancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2times/wk</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4times/wk</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6times/wk</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Obviously, there exists a dose effect. The friendship discrepancy was increased by the time spent.

4 Conclusions

A friendship relation is established after acceptance of a friendship request. A friendship can be canceled by any of the friends. The friendship network is thus bi-directional. In this study, the actual friendship was the number of dyads. A dyad is a pair of reciprocal nominations. It is a practical measurement to verify the real social world.

Compared with Chen’s study, the students who spent 3 hours 1-2 days per week were normal, and those who spent 3 hours on Internet every day were the high risk. Between these two groups were the students who were at the critical condition. Furthermore, Anderson found the average time of Internet dependents was 229 min. In this study, the highest choice of time was 3 hours per day. It was not certain if there were students who spent as much time as Anderson’s finding.

Davis (2001) hypothesizes that, rather than Internet use causing depression, existing psychosocial problems predispose individuals to develop maladaptive cognitions associated with their Internet use. The results showed the friendship discrepancy increased by time spent. We should explain it more carefully.

Kandell (1998) reports there are a number of reasons why college students are particularly vulnerable to becoming addicted to the Internet. Beginning student life is challenging, as it involves developing one’s sense of identity, such as gaining independence, deciding on a career path, fitting in with peers. These factors can cause psychological symptoms if the student is finding it difficult to adapt. Through peer relationship, adolescents begin to learn techniques for assessing the organization of social groups and their own positions within them. They develop aspirations for advancing their own social standing. In addition, they gain some insight into the rewards and costs of extensive group identification. On an individual level, adolescents who are able to participate in positive peer friendships are embedded in an intellectually and socially stimulating environment.

The friendship discrepancy of freshmen may be an indicator of adaptation in the beginning year of university. If they could not gain friendship equally as they desired, their feeling would be unbalance. For balance this feeling, they might turn to Internet for another way to establish social relation. We concluded that friendship discrepancy might increase the time spent on the Internet.

Reference


