Social media addiction among Moroccan university students: a cross sectional survey

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Abstract

Introduction: social media (SM) has become an increasingly popular leisure activity over the last decade with excessively use. Social media addiction is often associated with negative effects. University students are a particularly vulnerable group to SM addiction. The objective of the study was to assess SM addiction among Moroccan university students and its negative effects on their lives. **Methods:** a cross-sectional survey was conducted among university students in Faculty of letters and Human sciences of Ibn TOFAIL University of KENITRA. A total of 104 students were included. The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) was used to assess the level of SM addiction. **Results:** the median age was 22 years. The most social networking sites used among the study population were Facebook and WhatsApp. Seventy three point five percent (73.5%) of the students daily used the internet for social networking the last seven days with an average of more than four hours per day in 68.8%. Fifty seven percent (57%) of the students had a BSMAS score ≥ 18 showing that they may have or be developing an actual addiction to using SM. More than half of the participants has experienced a negative impact of the SM use on their job, relationship or studies, health and well-being. **Conclusion:** there is a need to focus on SM addiction as worldwide problematic issue and behavioral disorder increasingly reported by younger internet users especially university students to undertake the appropriate preventive measures to reduce the burden of SM addiction and its negative effects on people lives.

Introduction

The Internet is a knowledge technology that has entered into every aspect of life as a means of information, trade and communication. It has become an indispensable tool for our daily lives. Although the purpose of its emergence was to reach secure, fast, inexpensive information and to facilitate communication, today it has become a means of causing significant changes in individuals and society. The fact that internet usage takes place independently of time and space over a virtual environment leads to changing forms of communication and social media, which is an extension of internet technology, changes communication channels among people [1]. The use of social media in Morocco and around the world is increasing, especially young people and students show intense interest in it. Indeed, according to information provided by Internet World Stats (2017) based on data provided by leading organizations in Internet researches (Nielsen/NR, eTForcasts, CIAlmanac, ITU, IWS, CIA), as of March 2017 the number of Internet users worldwide has increased by approximately 3 billion 732 million people (49.6%). The number of internet users has been increasing year by year. For instance, in Japan, the number has reached over 100 million by the end 2016 [1,2]. Because of widespread internet use, internet addiction has been a common and serious problem all over the world. Problematic internet use could cause various problems such as mental health issues, dietary problems, sleep deprivation and academic failure [2]. In fact, young people are living increasingly mediated lives. Nowadays, social networking does not necessarily refer to what we do, but who we are. Social networking can arguably be considered a way of being. Children born since the late 1990s have grown up in a world that has been reliant on technology as integral part of their lives, making it impossible to imagine life without being connected. This has been referred to as an "always on"

lifestyle and being "on" has become the status quo [3]. In the context of behavioral addiction, Internet addiction, Social network addiction, social media disorder and social media addiction have been investigated and are gaining importance along with developing technology [1]. Social networking sites (SNSs) are becoming increasingly influential. Statistics show that more than 350 million people around the world are believed to meet the clinical definition of an addiction because of their Facebook habits [4].

In 2012, Turne & Serenko have described three notionally different perspectives and explanations behind social networking addiction: cognitive-behavioral model(this model emphasizes that "abnormal" social networking arises from maladaptive cognitions); Social skill model(this model emphasizes that "abnormal" social networking arises because people lack self-presentational skills and prefer virtual communication to face-to-face interactions) and Socio-cognitive model(this model emphasizes that "abnormal" social networking arises due to the expectation of positive outcomes, combined with internet self-efficacy and deficient internet self-regulation [5]. The transition from normal to problematic social media use is seen as an important mechanism to alleviate stress, loneliness or depression for the individual, so they become more active with more social media. This ultimately leads to many problems and exacerbates the unwanted mental states of the individual. Brown & Bobkowski stated that social media use can lead to harmful behaviors such as aggression, personality disorder, unhealthy diet, early sexuality, tobacco and alcohol use in young people [6]. The researchers conducted in different countries revealed that internet usage addiction is not limited to university students, but also includes secondary school and high school students. It can be said that the determination of this situation is important when considering the problems caused by social media addiction [7]. In the same context and since this issue is a

global phenomenon that stands out worldwide, we carried out this cross sectional study in Morocco among Ibn Tofail university students aiming to describe the current state of use of social media (SM) among this study population and to show statistically the negative impact of social media addiction on the way of Moroccan university students lives.

Methods

Study design and sampling method: a cross-sectional survey was conducted between March 2019 and May 2019 in Faculty of Letters and Human sciences of Ibn TOFAIL University of KENITRA-Morocco. We used stratified random sampling method from the three academic years of English studies and from each year, the participants were randomly recruited in total, a representative sample of 104 Moroccan students accepted to participate in the study.

Method of data collection: data were collected using an electronic questionnaire that was self administrated using social networking sites (Facebook and WhatsApp groups) of students of each level of English studies. The tool was prepared and written in English.

Questionnaire: the questionnaire was divided into three sections, and each section included several questions to assess the following items: the sociodemographic profile of the respondents (age, sex, marital status, and educational level); evaluation and description of the use level of social networking: can we talk about the SM addiction among Moroccan population? using The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) which is an adaptation of the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS), and contains six items reflecting core addiction elements. Each item is answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from never (1) to

always (5); thus, yielding a composite score from 6 to 30, concerning experiences during the past year; evaluation of negative effects of SM overuse on other aspects of life of Moroccan students. The questionnaires were filled out anonymously.

Statistical analysis: the data were collected and transposed on an Excel table and analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). The quantitative variables in symmetric distributions were expressed as mean with standard deviation (SD). The quantitative variables in asymmetric distributions were expressed as median (interquartile range (IQR). Categorical variables were summarized as numbers (percentages). The descriptive and analytical results obtained were presented in the form of tables and figures and compared with the results of other similar surveys carried out in other countries.

Results

The sociodemographic profile of the respondents (age, sex, marital status, and educational level): the survey included 104 Ibn TOFAIL University students randomly recruited from the Moroccan university students. The sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents showed that 68.3% were men. The median age was 22 years, with IQR of 19-26. The marital status showed that 75% of participants were single. The two thirds (61.5%) of the participants lived in other residence different from the parental and university residences. The educational level varied with equitable distribution of the study population over the three academic years (Table 1).

Evaluation and description of the use level of social media: can we talk about the SM addiction among Moroccan

population? (BSMAS): the most social networking sites are used among the study population were Facebook and WhatsApp in 50% and 31.3% respectively (Figure 1). Seventy three point five percent (73.5) of the participants daily used the internet for social networking the last 7 days with an average of more than four hours per day in 68.8% (Figure 2). The half of the participants sometimes to always spent a lot of time, when they are not online, thinking about social media or planning to use social media. Forty six point seven percent (46.7 %) of the participants sometimes to always felt urges to use social media more and more over time. More than half of the participants (57%) used social media to forget about personal problems. Six percent (6%) of the participants never tried to reduce of the social media use without success and always became restless or troubled if they are unable to use social media. Concerning the BSMAS scoring, 57% of the participants have scored "sometimes" or "very often" on at least 4 of the 6 items corresponding to a score ≥18 and showing that those students may have or be developing an actual addiction to using social media.

Evaluation of negative effects of SM addiction on aspects of life of Moroccan students: sixty eight point three (68.3) of the participants had a negative impact of the social media use on their job, relationship or studies. Forty four point two percent (44.2%) of the study population had the troubles of sleeping because of using social media. Thirty one point seven percent (31.7%) of the participants were victim of cyberbullying (intimidating or threatening conversation) on social media. The social media use has a focus distraction in 50% of the study population. Forty four point two percent (44.2%) of the participants experienced the drop in productivity and demotivation because of social media use. Almost two thirds of the study population (62.5%) felt tired and stressed because of social media use. The peer pressure and the desire to compare were found in 50% of the participants. The fear of missing out (FOMO) while being off line on Social networking Sites was found in 25% and the other related health issues were found in 56.3% (Table 2).

Discussion

Social media addiction: addiction refers to "repeated failures to refrain from drug use despite prior resolutions to do so". Recently, addiction to social media attracts scholars´ attention. Social media addiction was defined as being overly concerned about Social Networking Sites (SNSs) or driven by a strong motivation to log onto SNSs, so that it impairs normal social activities and/or psychological health and well-being. Behavioral patterns of obsessively checking SNSs have been studied in relation to usage patterns, motivations, and negative consequences [8-11]. The studies maintain that not only the overuse of SNSs may lead to SNS addiction, but also young generation´s addiction to social media may be suffering from intrapsychic conflict [11]. It is difficult to estimate the prevalence of problematic social media use due to the use of various assessment tools and the lack of a consensual definition of problematic social media use. The instrument used in our study to assess the state of social media use among Moroccan university students was The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) which is an adaptation of the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS), and contains six items reflecting core addiction elements. Each item is answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from never (1) to always (5); thus, yielding a composite score from 6 to 30, concerning experiences during the past year [8,10,12]. The BSMAS has revealed, in our study, the scoring ≥ 18 in 57% of the participants showing that those students may have or be developing an actual social media addiction. Internet addiction is regarded as a growing health concern in many parts of the world, with some estimating rates of addiction between 1.5% and 8.2% in the United

States and Europe, and as much as 7% in some Asian countries [13,14]. Social media is a particular type of Internet usage that continues to grow in popularity and contribute to rising rates of internet addiction. Social media ("SM") is defined as a technological platform facilitating "social interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks" [15].

Because SM use is so interactive, it tends to be very reinforcing; people use it to stimulate online conversations and get feedback about their activities, interests, and opinions. For this reason, it can lead to habitual, or addictive, posting and monitoring behaviors .Therefore, we define social media addiction as "the excessive use and habitual monitoring of social media, manifested in compulsive usage that comes at the expense of other activities" [16]. One study has examined SNS addiction among adolescents using a nationally representative sample and reported that 4.5% of 5,961 Hungarian adolescents (mean age 16 years old) were categorized as "at-risk" of social networking addiction [3]. In 2018 in Japan; another study was conducted among 573 respondents who completed the questionnaire (mean 19.3±1.3 years). LINE was the most popular social media platform (52.0%) followed by Twitter (36.3%). The Internet Addiction Test (IAT) score showed addiction in 66.3%, with 4.5% classified as having severe addiction (IAT ≥70) [2]. In the same context a large national survey was conducted in 2015 in Norway including 23,532 Norwegians (Mage = 35.8) using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The results of this Norwegian survey demonstrated that lower age, being a woman, not being in a relationship, being a student, lower education, lower income, lower self-esteem, and narcissism were associated with higher scores on the BSMAS, explaining a total of 17.5% of the variance [17]. To our knowledge; our study is the first

report describing the current state of use of social media (SM) and his negative impact among Moroccan university students.

Negative effects of social media addiction: there is a growing scientific evidence base to suggest social media addiction may lead to symptoms traditionally associated with substance-related addictions. As it has outlined, for a small minority of individuals, their use of social networking sites may become the single most important activity that they engage in, leading to a preoccupation with SM use (salience). The activities on these sites are then being used in order to induce mood alterations, pleasurable feelings or a numbing effect (mood modification). Increased amounts of time and energy are required to be put into engaging with SM activities in order to achieve the same feelings and state of mind that occurred in the initial phases of usage (tolerance). When SM use is discontinued, addicted individuals will experience negative psychological and sometimes physiological symptoms (withdrawal), often leading to a reinstatement of their SM use (relapse). Problems arise as a consequence of the engagement in the problematic SM use, leading to intrapsychic conflicts and interpersonal conflicts [3,18-20]. In this sense, at addicted state to Social Media, the person may experience and suffer from the negative side effects of Social Media such as cyberbullying, distraction, drop in productivity and academic performance, fear of missing out (FOMO), anxiety, depression, less self-control, lower self-esteem and peer pressure, poor sleep and other related health issues.

Cyberbullying: people can say anything they want and still get away on the internet. This has led to cyberbullying, where people use the electronic communication to send messages in an intimidating or threatening nature. Cyberbullying can be a serious issue where the victim can experience a huge amount of stress that leads to a decline in

mental health. There are also cases where cyberbullying have led to suicide cases and caused death [19,20].

Distraction, drop in productivity and academic performance: many studies have found that the more people engage with social media, the less the person able to focus on his work. It leads to decrease productivity and increase in procrastination. Therefore, to spend much time using the social media can lower the academic performance and decrease the creativity of university students. In this context, we cite the cross-cultural research including 10,930 adolescents from six European countries (Greece, Spain, Poland, the Netherlands, Romania, and Iceland) that showed that using Social Media for two or more hours a day was related to internalizing problems and decreased academic performance and activity [21]. Another cross sectional survey of 10076 students has examined the associations between social media use (SMU) and school connectedness and academic performance among middle and high school indicated that heavy SMU is negatively associated with students. The findings school connectedness and academic performance among middle and high school students and these results suggest that adolescents should limit their SMU to no more than 2 h per day [17].

Peer pressure and desire to compare: another common way how social media can affect the people life is through peer pressure. People are afraid to miss out and they love to compare themselves with other people. The person wants to become part of the community and part of the group, this is why he is using the social network in the first place. As human nature, the person will want to compare himself with other and this will cause peer pressure. The person wants and looks for being like everyone else. Over compare will create anxiety and give rise to the negative feelings such as jealousy in social culture. Moreover, this can evolve into a more serious issue and cause mental health disorder [4].

Fear of missing out (FOMO) and nomophobia: recent research has suggested that high engagement in social networking is partially due to what has been named the "fear of missing out" (FOMO). FOMO is "a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent". Higher levels of FOMO have been associated with greater engagement with Facebook, lower general mood, lower wellbeing, and lower life satisfaction. In addition to this, research suggests that FOMO predicts problematic SM use and is associated with social media addiction [22-24]. In one study, it was found that FOMO predicts negative consequences of maladaptive Social Media use. Other research using found that FOMO mediates the relationship between high Social Media use and decreased self-esteem. Taken together, these findings suggest the Fear of Missing Out may be a significant predictor or possible component of potential Social Media addiction [3,22,25]. Related to both Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) and mobile phone addiction is the construct of nomophobia. Nomophobia is shorthand for "no mobile phone phobia", i.e. the fear of being without one´s mobile phone. The criteria for nomophobia include: regular and time-consuming use of mobile phones, feelings of anxiety when the phone is not available, "ringxiety" (i.e. repeatedly checking one´s phone for messages, sometimes leading to phantom ring tones), constant availability, preference for mobile communication over face-to-face communication, and financial problems as a consequence of use. Nomophobia is inherently related to a fear of not being able to engage in social connections, and a preference for online social interaction (which is the key usage motivation for SNS use), and has been linked to problematic Internet use and negative consequence of technology use, further pointing to a strong association between nomophobia and SNS addiction symptoms [3,20,26,27].

Fatigue and stress: feeling tired and stressed occurs whenever the person stares at the computer screen for a long period using and checking Social Networking Sites. Therefore, as result of constant checking updates on social media and switching from one task to another, the information overload will wear out the brain power and make the person feel fatigue [1,3,4].

Other related health issues: other related health issues have been reported as the consequence of social media overuse such as blurry vision, headaches, back and neck pain, carpal tunnel syndrome while using the phone or facing the computer over a long period. Moreover, this routine of SM overuse disturb the sleep quality and cause the person to suffer side-effects from sleep deprivation [1-4].

Conclusion

The use of Social Media and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram has become the cornerstone of modern communication and connection as it allows users to create a sense of belonging and redefine their way of being. Despite the many positive benefits and impacts of these sites, the recent research, as we reviewed in this work, has been concerned with the negative impact of excessive use of social media on the health and wellbeing of users, especially that of young people, who are enthusiastic users of this technology. Then our study, consistently with the other findings, demonstrate that Social Media addiction would negatively affect millions of people, especially adolescents and university students as technology continues to grow. Consequently, we recommend that public health professionals and also mental health professionals should be aware of the spectrum of social media addiction and their focus towards implementation of preventive, diagnostic and treatment strategies should be accelerated. Finally, further large cross sectional studies are required in our Moroccan context to illustrate this worldwide phenomenon « Social Media addiction » by national data statistically significant and adjusted to our Moroccan population to plan public health policies and set up preventive measures to reduce this behavior disorder.

What is known about this topic

- Use of social media around the world is increasing, especially young people and students show intense interest in it;
- Because of widespread internet use, internet addiction has been a common and serious problem all over the world. And this problematic internet use could cause various problems such as mental health issues, dietary problems, sleep deprivation and academic failure.

What this study adds

- To our knowledge, our study is the first survey conducted in Morocco to assess the level of social media use and the negative effects among university students using the BSMAS scale;
- Further large studies are required in our Moroccan context to illustrate this worldwide phenomenon « Social Media addiction » by national data statistically significant and adjusted to our Moroccan population to plan public health policies and set up preventive measures to reduce this behavior disorder.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Authors' contributions

All the authors have read and agreed to the final manuscript.

Tables and figures

Table 1: socio-demographic characteristics of the study population

Table 2: the effects of social media use among the study population

Figure 1: the social networking sites used by the study population

Figure 2: the hours of social networking on average day in the study population

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Table 1: socio-demographic characteristics of the study population	
Variable	**Number (%)**
Age(years)*	22 [19;26]
Gender:	
Male	71(68.3)
Female	33(31.7)
Marital status:	
Single	78(75)
Married	26(25)
Divorced/widowed	0(0)
Residence:	
Parental	20(19.2)
University residence	20 (19.2)
Other	64 (61.5)
*: expressed as mean [IQR]	

Table 2: the effects of social media use among the study population.

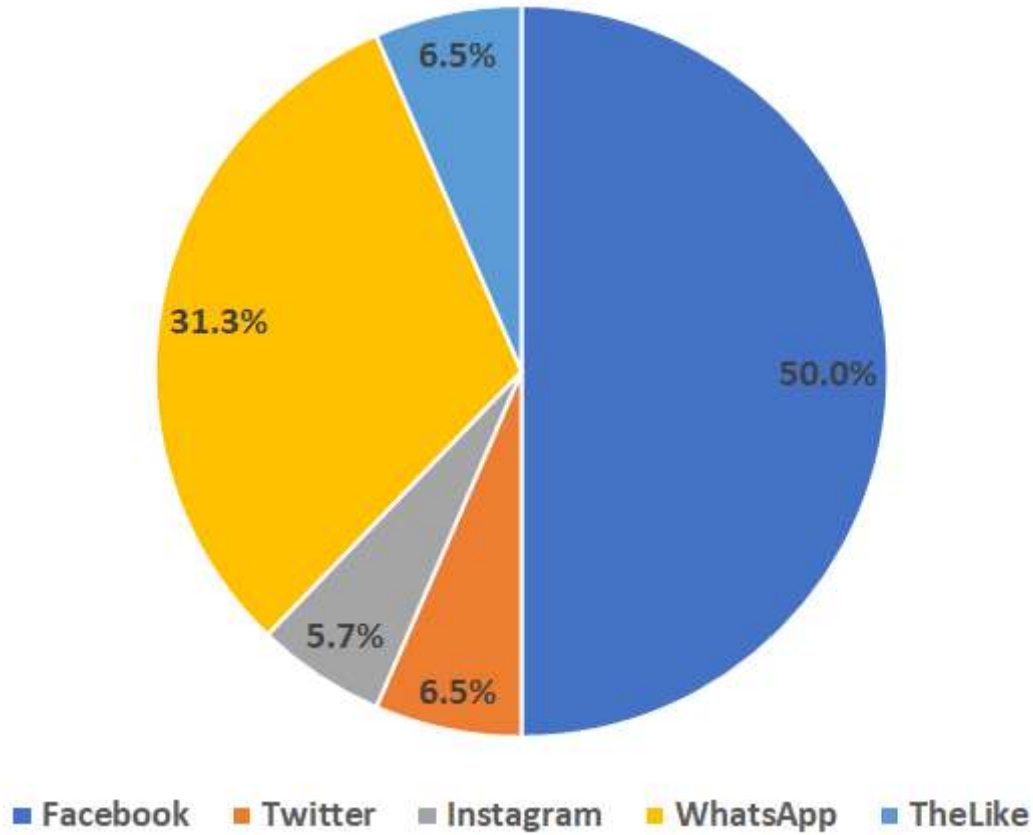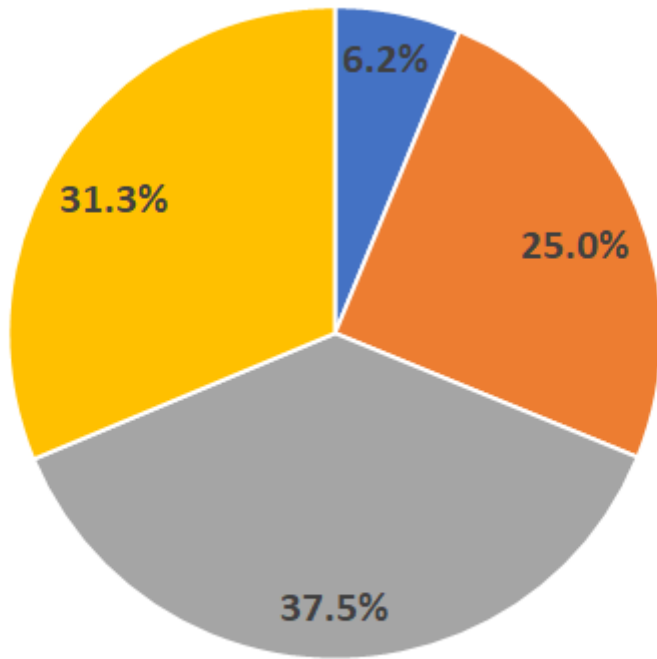| Effect of social media use	Number (%)
Negative impact on job, relationship or studies:	
Never	33(31.7)
Rarely	33 (31.7)
Sometimes	26(25)
Very often	6 (5.8)
Always	6 (5.8)
Troubles of sleeping:	46(44.2)
Cyber bulling on social media:	33(31.7)
Focus distraction effect:	52(50)
Drop in productivity and demotivation:	46(44.2)
Fatigue and stress:	65(62.5)
Peer pressure and the desire to compare	52(50)
The fear of missing out (FOMO):	26(25)
Other related health issues:	58(56.3)

Figure 1: the social networking sites used by the study population

Figure 2: the hours of social networking on average day in the study population