

# Prevalence of Social Networks Addiction among Ethiopian Youths

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**Abstract:** *A curiosity and mystique around teens and youths behavior has long been a cultural obsession. The world of social networks has captured the youths' attention because of their ability to embrace new things quickly as they are digital natives, super communicators and multi-task performers. This study explores how far the Ethiopian youths are addicted to social networks. The objective of this research is to analyze the age and gender dynamics of youths regarding social networks addiction. There are three target population of this study: teen cyber café visitors, cell-phone using older youths and laptop using professional youths. For the first target population, systematic random sampling is used whereas for the second and third snowball sampling is applied. The sample size (n=264) comprises of questionnaire (n=252) supplemented by interview from key respondents (n=12). The data is collected and analyzed keeping in view the age and gender dynamics and the result is presented.*

**Keywords:** addiction, social networks, social networks addiction, youths' online communication.

## 1. Introduction

Addiction can be explained by oddly high dependence on a particular thing (Park, 2005; Salehan & Nigeban, 2013). It is characterized by repetitive acts with a total negative sum of consequences (Waal & Mørland, 1999; Salehan & Negeban, 2013). Addiction results from the relationship between a person and the object of his addiction. It is a quantitative change in behavior patterns: things that once had priority become less important, and less frequent behaviors become dominant. Addiction represents an intemperate relationship with an activity that has adverse biological, social, or psychological consequences for the person engaging in these behaviors (Zinberg, 1984; Shaffer, 1987). There are two genres of addiction: substance addiction and process addiction (Milkman & Sunderwirth, 1987; Hyman & Nestler, 1993; Hyman, 1994). Social networks addiction falls in the second genre as it has been widely identified as an abnormal condition that arises out of social networks use.

## 2. Literature Survey

Young (1996) theoretical definition sees social networks addiction as excessive time spent on many activities to the extent of incurring adverse effects on user's physical and psychological health, expressed in his or her academic, professional, social and marital relationships, and other facets of life (Azim, Zam & Rahman, 2009; Adiele & Olatokun, 2014). Excessive and compulsive social networks use, also seen as a form of technological addiction (Widyanto & Griffiths, 2006; Adiele & Olatokun, 2014). Addiction to social networks is a recent and fast growing clinical phenomenon (Young, 2004; Saville et al., 2010; Adiele & Olatokun, 2014), and one of such problems emerging from its excessive use ( Shapira et al., 2003; Murali & George, 2007; Wan & Chiou, 2007; Bertagna, 2009; Christakis & Moreno, 2009; Akin & Iskender, 2011; Adiele & Olatokun, 2014). Many countries have come to see these addictions as a potential threat to public health, with a country like China

reporting that about 10 million of its young people test positive to online addiction (Block, 2008; Adiele & Olatokun, 2014). Evidence on ground calls for concern, because online addiction to some games, cybersex and viewing of pornography can give rise to harmful behaviours and sexual tendencies (Longe et al., 2007; Adiele & Olatokun, 2014), for the fact that such adult websites and applications present themes of behavioural violence (Flood, 2009; Adiele & Olatokun, 2014). Addiction may also have a link to user's psychiatric history, which entails attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, impulse control disorders (ICDs), substance overuse, social loneliness and anxiety (Yen et al., 2008; Recupero, 2010; Adiele & Olatokun, 2014). This study therefore aims to investigate if there is prevalence of social networks addiction among Ethiopian youths and how this is related to frequency and time-span. Hardly did any study investigate the issue that provides a substantial evidence of prevalence of social networks addiction in Ethiopian context. The objective of this paper is to assess and compare the age and gender dynamics of youths' social networks addiction. The scope of this research is to understand gender (male and female) and age (younger and older) dynamics of youths' social networks addiction.

## 3. Materials and Methods

This research has been accomplished through mixed design wherein both quantitative and qualitative tools have been employed. The subjects of this research study are social networks users falling under teen and youth category. An individual who had used social networks through Internet at least once in the last 1 month is the participant of the research. The participants are the desktop user teens from five cyber cafes, cell phone user youths from five universities and laptop user professional youths of different organizations of the Nekemte town situated in Oromia region of Ethiopia. This study has employed mixed method (questionnaire and interview). The tool used for quantitative data is self

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administered questionnaire. The questions are of both open and close ended types. In order to get better response, both single and multiple choice questions are included in the questionnaire. A pilot study coupled with a preliminary study of 5 cases has been done to add value in the questionnaire. 12 qualitative interviews have also been carried out from key informants for complementing the quantitative data. In order to determine the level of addiction to social networks, the researcher has adopted the measurement proposed by Beth Morrissey (2012). According to him, 12 statements of behavioral use are put together in one question and the respondent was supposed to answer in 'yes' or 'no' to each statement. Then the answers are clubbed to ascertain three categories of addiction. If the total number of 'Yes' ranges from 1-4, then the respondents may be categorized as "most likely not to be addicted". If the total number of 'yes' ranges from 5-8, the respondent is categorized as "may be addicted". If the number of 'yes' ranges from 9-12, then the respondents are supposed to be categorized as "likely to be addicted" to social networks.

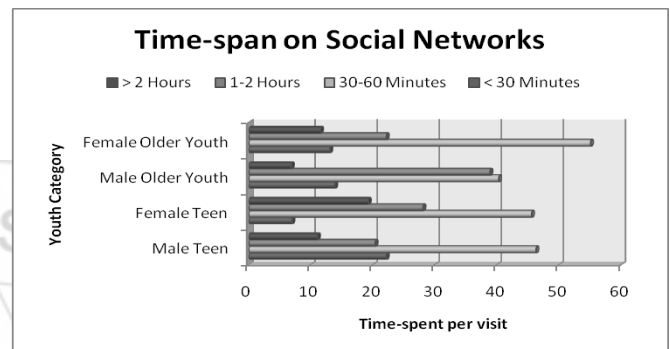
The study is conducted in Nekemte town of Oromia region in Ethiopia situated at the elevation of 2088 m, and the location of this city is 9 degree 50 north latitudes and 36 degree and 330 east longitudes. It is at the center of the road network for south western Ethiopia. The town is fairly developed having about 15 cyber cafes, 300 EVDO connections and 700 CDMA users through which social networks is used on the internet (Ethiopian Telecommunication, 2012). The sample size of this study is 264. A total sample size of 252 is determined for quantitative survey using the assumptions of desired precision 5percent and confidence level 95 percent. The sample includes both male (n=126) and female (n=126) youths and early (n=111) and matured (n=141) youths. The size of the sample is statistically derived. 12 In-depth interviews have been conducted from key informants. There are three target population of this study from where sample is drawn. They are teen cyber café visitors, cell phone using older youths and laptop using professional youths. For the first target population i.e., teen cyber café visitors, systematic random sampling is applied. For the second (cell phone using older youths) and third (laptop using professional youths) target group snowball sampling is applied. The questionnaire is piloted and translated. The survey sample includes teen desktop users in 5 different cyber cafes of town; cell phone using older youths in 5 different universities of the town, and laptop (EVDO/CDMA) using professional youths of the town. For collecting qualitative data as complementary, 12 key informants were selected. They were: cyber café owner, university instructor, government official, doctor, health professional, engineer, foreigner/expatriate, church administrator, merchant, NGO officer, addicted teen, and addicted older youth. After the data is gathered through questionnaire, it is sorted, edited, tabulated and frequency is drawn out. Afterwards, it is analyzed in terms of proportion and percentage.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

The data of time-spent per visit, visiting frequency and likelihood of addiction is discussed and interpreted below in terms of gender and age:

#### 4.1 Time-Span per Visit

Time-span refers to a measurable period in which a social network user consumes a particular length of time in one sitting. As the time span increases, the diversity of uses also increases. There are two reasons why time spent is important to study: first, social networks keeps on changing in terms of features and functions and the second, it is addictive in nature. Youths who have lion share of using social networks often fall prey and use it irrespective of time constraints. Interpersonal utility motive, escape motive, and Internet experience explain the time spent on social networking sites (Cha, 2010).



**Figure 1:** Time spent on social networks by age and gender

The statistics reflect that females and teens show the same behavior of time spent on social networks whereas males and older youths create another category of similar behavior of time spent. However, in all categories 30-60 minutes/per session is the represented by maximum youths followed by 1-2 hours. More than two hours is the least time-span per visit which indicates that youths are not much addicted to social networks otherwise this category would have been the highest frequency.

#### 4.2 Visiting Frequency

Frequency refers to how often people use social networking sites. In other words, how many hours people spend on social networking sites per week. Obviously, the factors like interpersonal utility, perceived ease of use, privacy concerns, and age predict the frequency of social networking site use (Cha, 2010).

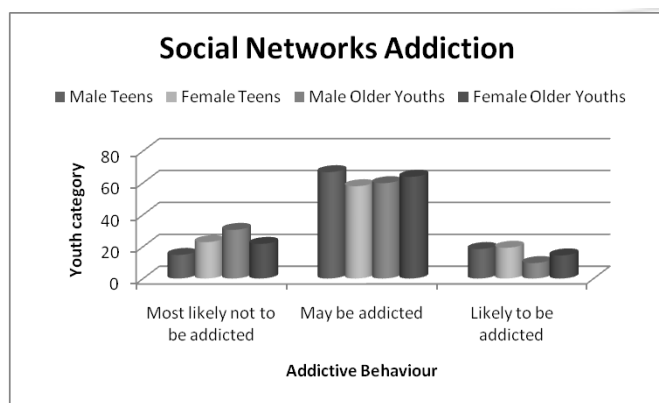
**Table 1:** Frequency of social networks use

Visiting Frequency	Age and Gender			
	Male Teens	Female Teens	Male Older Youths	Female Older Youths
	%age	%age	%age	%age
I'm constantly logged on	24.1	17.6	19.4	16.0
Several times a day	16.7	15.8	30.6	24.6
Once in a few days	42.6	38.6	36.1	47.9
Once a week	5.5	19.3	2.8	7.2
Occasionally(< Once a week)	11.1	8.7	11.1	4.3

The figure reflects that most of the respondents use social networks 'once in a few days' and very little proportion of respondents use social networks 'once a week'. Therefore, 'several times a day' is the second and 'logged on constantly' is the third characteristics of social networks users. Besides, males (21 per cent) are constantly logged on more than females (17 per cent). Teens (21 per cent) are constantly logged on more than elder youths.

### 4.3 Addictive Behavior

Addiction and social networks are young sciences and the strength and consistency of these activities to shift subjective states vary across individuals, it is very difficult to determine addiction prevalence rates with precision; however, repetitive and excessive patterns of emotionally stirring experiences are more important in determining the pattern (Wray & Dickerson, 1981; Shaffer, Hall, Walsh, & Bilt, 1995).



**Figure 2:** Social networks addiction by age and gender

The figure of addictive behavior to social networks among youths reflect that most of the respondents are under 'may be addicted' category followed by 'most likely not to be addicted' and finally 'likely to be addicted'.

### 5. Conclusion

There is no strong evidence base for establishing online addiction that how far internet use significantly displaces other social interaction and activity. Byron (2008) suggests that young people's increased internet use may result from the often enforced reduction of their time spend in public space and going out to socialize due to parental concerns about risk in public space. The findings of this survey pertaining to the social networks addiction reveal that most of the Ethiopian youths consume 30-60 minutes per session; visit their social networks once in a few days; and they fall under "may be addicted" category.

### 6. Recommendation

Far too little is known about youth engagement online. Researchers need to develop a model of addiction that can better explain the complexities of youths with social networks. There is no single "silver-bullet" solution or technological "quick-fix" to youth addiction concerns in light of the rapid pace of change in the digital world. At teen stage, parental involvement and approaches is important to better

guide and mentor them to make wise choices of engagement. We must engage our youths in constant dialogue and always be willing to talk to them about difficult issues, challenges, or contents they face online. There is a need for training, support and capacity building for teens and youths which should aim how to use social networks and become more positively engaged. There is a greater possibility that some innocent youths may engage in the unlawful communications unintentionally which may put them into troubles. There is a need for further research directed at understanding young people's use of social networks as it is an unexplored area.

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