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# **The Opportunities and Damages of Virtual Social Networks from Students' Perspectives; the Experience of Iranian Users**

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Today, virtual social networks affect different dimensions of individual and social life of individuals and in the future they will play a much greater and more important role in life. The present study aims to study the positive and negative effects of virtual social networks from students' point of view medical and non-medical sciences universities of Gonabad city. This is a descriptive-survey study. The research population of the study population was Gonabad, a university student in the academic year of 2016-2017. To determine the sample size, 350 samples were selected using Cochran formula and selected by stratified random sampling from the research community. The data gathering tool in this study was a demographic questionnaire and a researcher-made questionnaire that was a measure of the effects of virtual social networks. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 20 software. networks social telegram with 96% and Instagram 60.9% were the most popular. communication with friends and acquaintances with an average of 16 and education with an average of 11, the most significant positive effects and anti-religious propaganda with an average of 17, and rapid formation and promotion The rumors with the average of 13 are the most negative effects of using these networks. There was also no significant difference between the viewpoints of students of medical and non-medical sciences universities in Gonabad. Facilitating virtual communication and education from the viewpoint of students is the most important opportunity to use virtual social networks. Also, anti-religious propaganda and the instigation of doubts, the formation and promotion of rumors are also a threat to such networks.

**Keywords:** Social Networks, Opportunities, Damages, Internet, Iran, Gonabad.

## **Introduction:**

Today, with the expansion of the use of information and communication technology in everyday life, we are witnessing the emergence of a new generation of Internet tools that provide countless possibilities for interconnections, negotiation, dialogue and, in general,

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two-way communication. Since the creation of the first virtual social network, thousands of types of these websites have been created globally (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) and are now one of the most important communication tools in the community and the world (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009) For many, the use of these networks is one of the daily tasks. Virtual social networks are places where individuals have the opportunity to introduce themselves, display their personality traits, and communicate with others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These websites potentially have the potential to make fundamental changes in the social life of each person potentially both interpersonal and social relationships (Ellison, Lampe & Steinfield, 2009) and have influenced their lifestyle (Bashir, & Afrasiabi, 2012). In most cases, the most important impact of these websites is to preserve and enhance past relationships, (Hampton & Wellman, 2003) to form new interpersonal relationships (Walther & Parks, 2002) and facilitate communication (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). Research has also shown that they can be used optimally for educational purposes by using them in the educational or therapeutic process (Farahani, Kazemi, Aghamohamadi, , Bakhtiarvand & Ansari, 2011; Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011; Yedidia & et al., 2003; Rajabiyan Dehzireh, Aliabadi, Esmaeili Gujar& Khedri Lilus, 2018). Studies have also shown that the use of these networks causes harm to the family, educational, adaptive, religious and psychological beliefs of students (Zandvanian, Heidari, Bagheri, Atarzadeh, 2013), and also undermines national and Islamic identity, values and ethics, and the institution of the family (Ghasemi, Adlipour, Kianpour, 2013; Kazemi, 2014). Javid et al. 2017 showed that the emergence of insecurity and consumer culture, inappropriate and non-educational use of programs, students' attitudes toward non-traditional social values and beliefs, and the formation of different subcultures and the dissemination of non-valid or incorrect educational materials, the most important damage is the use of social networks (Javid, Sadri, Salarzahi & Noruzi, 2017). Mozafari 2017 showed that virtual addiction, physical and psychological harm, moral deviations, academic failure, positive attitude towards virtual networks and false identity have the most impact on the use of virtual networks by students (Mozafari, 2017). Salavatian and Dolatkah 2017 also showed that the use of mobile social networks influences various aspects of cultural identity including language, religion, coverage, social behavior and user ethics (Salavatian, Dolatkah, 2017). Kian and Ya'ghoubi Malal 2015, in the role analysis and application of virtual social networks for students, showed that students considered better communication with friends and participation in social, cultural, sports activities as the most important positive factors of virtual social networks, and the most negative effects of Virtual social networks spend a lot of

time on these networks (Kian, Ya'ghoubi Malal, 2015). Sumitha 2011 stated that most students use these networks for friendly communication, and they consider the most important concern of these networks to be privacy violations (Sumitha, 2011). Zaidieh 2012, research showed that there are some benefits and barriers to using social networks as educational tools. Privacy, real friendship, taking time and misunderstanding are the most important challenges in educating through social networks. On the other hand, flexibility, repeatability and convenience and accessibility have a positive impact on the use of social networks in education (Zaidieh, 2012). Considering that today social networks are an integral part of the life of many students that affect all aspects of life, it can be said that positive and negative potentials affecting various aspects of human life as well as the level Membership in social networks has grown significantly in recent years, and the membership of young people's community, especially students in these networks, cannot be overlooked, the aim of this study is to identify the advantages and disadvantages of social networks from the viewpoint of students.

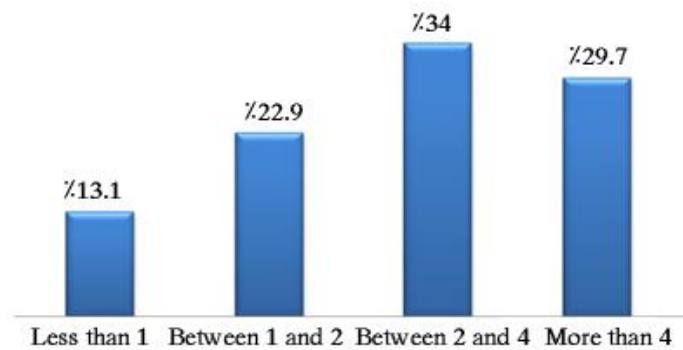
### **Methods:**

The present study is descriptive - survey and in terms of purpose, has been practical. The study population consisted of all students working at universities in Gonabad city (medical and non-medical sciences universities) in the academic year of 2016-2017 that has a history of using virtual space and social networks. To determine the sample size, 350 samples were selected using Cochran formula and selected by stratified random sampling from the research community. The data gathering tool in this study was a demographic questionnaire and a researcher-made questionnaire for assessing the effects of virtual social networks, including 23 questions packed with Likert 5 options in two dimensions. Positive effects with 11 questions including continuous virtual communication with friends and acquaintances, participatory development Socially targeting, online targeted advertising, education and negative effects have 12 questions including the formation and promulgation of rumors and false news, anti-religious propaganda and instilling doubts, violations of individual privacy, and negative effects of behavior. The formal validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by a number of experts in communications sciences and cultural activists and its reliability was obtained using the statistical test for each dimension (positive effects with Cronbach's alpha coefficient 0.755, negative effects with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 906 / 0 and total questionnaire with Cronbach's alpha coefficient 0.831). The sampling method of this research was carried out in a multistage way. First, by providing the statistics of all students working

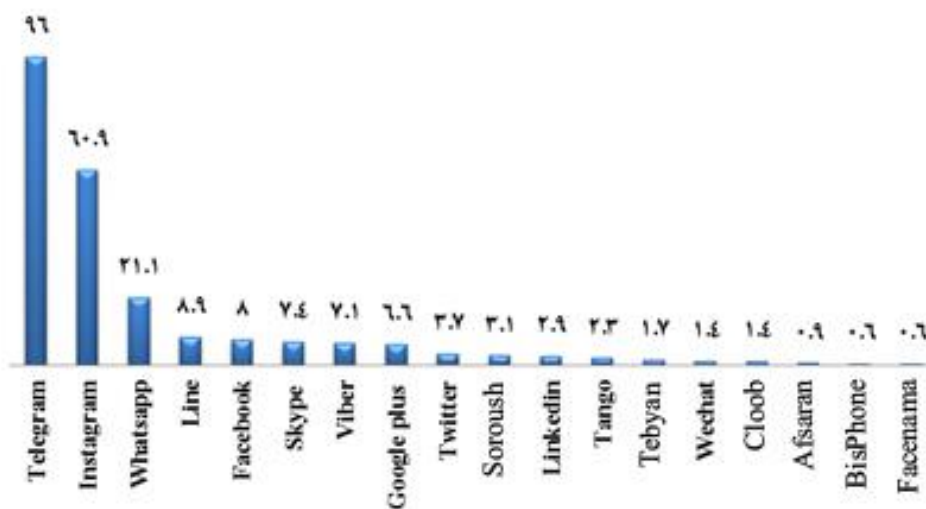
in each of the medical and non-medical sciences universities in terms of quotas for each of the above groups, Sampling has been done. In order to collect the samples, the questioner in the classrooms of the students randomly presented and explained the research objectives, and then the questionnaire was distributed among the students and completed in the presence of the questioner. After completing the questionnaires, data analysis was performed using SPSS software version 20 and descriptive statistics and t-test.

**Findings:**

The sample included 271 women and 79 men, also 298 Bachelor’s degree students, 42 Doctorate students, 6 Associate’s degree students and 2 Master’s Degree students. Chart1 1 shows the extent of using social networks and Chart 2 of the social networks used.



**Chart 1:** The amount of people participating in research from social networks



**Chart 2:** Social networks used by people participating in the research

**Table 1:** Average positive and negative consequences of using virtual social networks

<b>effects</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>Positive Effects</b>	Continuous online communication with friends and acquaintances	16.1286
	Education	11.9029
	Targeted online advertising	7.2436
	Social Partnership Development	7.0914
<b>Negative effects</b>	Anti-religious propaganda and induction of doubt	17.0286
	Formation and promotion of gossip and false news	13.6057
	Violation of privacy of individuals	11.9029
	Negative Behavioral Impact	7.8971

**Table 2:** The result of the independent t-test in the difference between students ' perspectives on students of the medical and non-medical sciences universities.

<b>group</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>P Value</b>
<b>Students at the government University</b>	90.5230	11.89973	-3.196	346	0.002
<b>Students of the University of Medical Sciences</b>	95.0345	14.31960			

Results of Table 2 show that the significance level of P value is more than 0.05. This means that there is not a significant direct relationship between the views (opportunities and threats) in students of medical and non-medical sciences universities of Gonabad. It can be said that there is no difference between the views (opportunities and threats) in the students of medical and non-medical sciences universities of Gonabad.

### **Discussion and Conclusion:**

The Internet and services provided in it, while being a useful tool for obtaining and exchanging information, can also be destructive; in other words, the Internet is a powerful tool that can cause corruption as well as education and training tools Scientific, cultural and social facilities for teens and youth. Social networks are a new generation of databases that

have become the focus of Internet users' attention today. Such databases operate on an online basis, each of which brings together a handful of Internet users with specific features. Social networking is a form of social media that provides access to a new form of communication and content sharing on the Internet. The results of this study showed that most people use social networking between 2-4 hours nightly day (34%) and more than 4 hours nightly day (29.7%), in the among networks social, telegram (96%) and Instagram (60.9%) are most used among students. The results of Javid et al. 2017 also showed that the social network of telegrams has the highest popularity among students. This confirms the findings of this study (Javid, Sadri, Salarzahi, Noruzi, 2017).

Concerning the positive effects and effects of using virtual social networks, the results of this study showed that continuous virtual communication with friends and acquaintances was a positive consequence of the use of these networks, followed by training, developing social partnerships, targeted internet advertising, Other positive outcomes are the use of these networks. Kian and Ya'ghoubi Malal 2015, in his research showed that students considered better communication with friends and participation in social, cultural, sports activities as one of the most important positive factors for virtual social networks. The least effect is related to participation in educational activities (Kian, Ya'ghoubi Malal, 2015). An important feature of social networks is that they have become a place to share knowledge. The diversity of users and knowledge shared on social networks is enormous. Hence, the importance and necessity of these networks can be considered as a tool for improving education and learning.

Also, regarding the negative effects and effects of the use of virtual social networks, the results of this study showed that anti-religious propaganda and induction of doubt are the most important negative consequences of the use of virtual social networks, and then the formation and promulgation of false rumors and news, Personal privacy violations, negative-behavioral effects of other negative consequences of using these networks. Kian and Ya'ghoubi Malal 2015, have also considered the long time spent on these networks to be the worst offensive, and then the loss of privacy has been considered as a negative effect (Kian, Ya'ghoubi Malal, 2015). Javid et al. 2017 also showed that the dimensions of the emergence of insecurity and consumer culture, the inappropriate and non-educational use of programs, the data of student attitudes towards non-traditional social values and beliefs of identity, and the formation of subcultures different and disseminating non-valid or inaccurate materials have equal value and are of the highest importance to students (Javid, Sadri, Salarzahi, Noruzi, 2017). Jafari 2016 the most important cybercrime damage is long-term use,

dependency and false addiction, reduced emotions and family feelings (Jafari, 2016). Salavatian and Dolatkahh 2017, on the damages of virtual social networks have shown that the use of this network undermines the cultural identity of students including language, religion, coverage, and behavior, which seeks out the effects of social, economic and cultural failures in society. And diminishes ethical and fundamental values (Salavatian, Dolatkahh, 2017). Ghasemi et al. 2012 in their research showed that the longer the membership and the rate of use of the Facebook social network increase; the religious identity of users becomes weaker (Ghasemi, Adlipour, Kianpour, 2013). Jafari quotes Kazno saying that the media will change our beliefs in two ways. First, the irresistible temptation that engages us somehow and contributes to it, and secondly, the flood of information that flows through this and, if we do not believe, we will overlook some of our beliefs (Jafari, 2016) Due to the dissemination of information on various issues and the lack of monitoring of published information, the possibility of publishing false information will be strengthened. Therefore, attention to this issue is considered important in terms of respondents and cause threats to the users of this information. The results of the research are consistent with the results of this research; in some cases, the results are different as well, due to the research tools and the indicators of the research. Generally speaking, with the growing growth and easy access to social networks, especially mobile social networks such as Telegram, Instagram, etc., the use of these technologies is increasing. The results of this study indicate that social networks have positive effects and effects that facilitating virtual communication and education from the viewpoint of students is the most important consequence and opportunity of using virtual social networks. Also, anti-religious propaganda and the instigation of doubts, the formation and promotion of fast rumors and false news are also a threat to the negative consequences of such networks.

According to the results of the research, the following suggestions are presented:

- Training on the proper use of social networks and the positive and negative effects of social networking
- Holding information literacy training courses for knowledge and detection of false and false information for university students.
- Creating an environment suitable for the proper use of social networks, for example, creating groups and channels of science and education under the supervision of professors.



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