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RELATION BETWEEN INTERNET AND SPIRITUALITY AT ROMANIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract

Nowadays the Internet is a great resource for education especially online learning. However, there is also a danger that students spend a large amount of time on Internet on things that are not related to education or non-leisure activities. In the current article we investigate the relation between Internet and some of the bad consequences that it has and the spirituality of students at graduate level. The research is done on a sample of eighty-six students in Romania. We used purposive sampling. We used quantitative research with close-ended questions. The research was done on a sample of Christian students. From the survey we found out that most of the students declare that they have a good connection with God through practices such as prayers, reading from religious books, etc. When it comes to horizontal relation with people, they are less active in things like helping others, community service, etc. However, when it comes to Internet usage, most of them declare that they use Internet most of the time for educational and non-leisure activities purposes and that they are not very attracted by activities that can cause problems to their education and general well-being. From the surveys done it can be concluded that there is a relation between the spirituality of a student and time spent on Internet on things not related to education and non-leisure activities, in the sense that spirituality helps students to get more focused on using the Internet for education and non-leisure activities.

Keywords: Internet, education, non-leisure activities, spirituality.

1. Introduction

One of the technologies most commonly used by young people in the 21st century is the Internet. It is used not only as a means of communication and study, but also as a means of entertainment. It is almost universally acknowledged that the internet has developed and continues to grow at an impressive speed. The spread of the Internet and computerized information technology (ICT) has given unprecedented access to information and resources, transforming the way people communicate, how they collaborate within institutions, how governments interact with their citizens, and especially how people learn and communicate with each other.

The Internet has radically changed the way young people carry out their learning activities and their leisure time. Not only are their daily activities now are different but the level of psychological welfare, school failure and work performance are disturbed (Yuan, Qin, Liu, & Tian, 2011). The excessive use of the Internet, whether they are video games or simple navigation on different channels of communication lead to the young people to be more anxious, introverted, with a high degree of boredom and low self-esteem (Leung, 2014).

Several countries in Europe, such as Estonia, Germany, Italy, Romania and Spain (Kaess et al., 2016), participated in a study evaluating the spread of Internet addiction among adolescents. For this purpose, comparable data were used from two multicentre studies conducted in 2009/2010 and 2011/2012. The results show that the spread of internet addiction is increasing (4.01% -6.87%), except for Germany. The study highlights the idea that the spread of Internet addiction is a consequence of the increase in Internet accessibility.

Internet usage becomes problematic when used in excess. Recent studies show that Internet addiction influences the spiritual condition of adolescents and young people in the wrong way, the longer they spend on the Internet, the less time they spend in prayer, study, worship and service (Wood, Center, & Parenteau, 2016).

A weak relationship with God predisposes the individual to a stronger addiction to the Internet and video games, causing social dysfunctions and even emotional problems (Knabb, & Pelletier, 2014), while a strong attachment to religious and spiritual values reduces the dependence on different Internet domains such as pornography (Short, Kasper, & Wetterneck, 2015).

Accessing and using the Internet takes time, and time is limited, which makes hours spent in the online environment diminish from time spent face to face with family members or friends (Subrahmanyan & Lin, 2007). As for the relationship with peers, studies show that adolescents who spend a lot of time in the on-line environment have weaker relationships with family and others than adolescents spending little time on the internet (Sanders et al., 2000).

Spirituality defined by a series of practices, such as Bible study, prayer, participation in worship services, and involvement in the service of peoples, is very important at the age of adolescence. These activities, which are seriously and consistently addressed at the age of adolescence, are a very important factor in strengthening spirituality in adulthood (O`Connor, Hoge, & Estrelada, 2002).

2. Problem Statement

The quality of education and overall life quality of students may be affected if their activities on the Internet are a priority for them. Second there are few studies that looks to the relation between the use of Internet and the spirituality of the students. The present study is done in the context of Romania, a Christian country where such studies are even fewer than in the general literature. That is why we consider it important to study the influences on Internet on the overall life quality of students in connection with their spirituality, especially in the context of our time, characterized by a tendency of problematic use of the technology, respectively of the online environment.

In this context, we want to study the effect of using the Internet on a group of Christian students (AMICUS)[1] in connection with the following aspects: a) the relationship with God, b) the relationship with their follows. AMICUS is a Christian student association that has been set up to help students to accommodate the changes brought by student life and to support them their attempt to make their faith known among their peers.

3. Research Questions

The question of the present research is the following: Is there a significant relationship between the Internet dependence and the two dimensions of Christian spirituality mentioned above, the relation with God and the relationship with the peers for the Christian students in Romania?

4. Purpose of the Study

In a globalized world where technology has changed, communication is increasingly being made at the virtual level. Not only technology has seen changes but also people. Children born in the digital age are so-called digital natives (Prensky, 2011) who know how to quickly and easily use the ever-changing technology. Ideally, new technologies will only be used when needed, perhaps strictly in communication and / or learning, but it does not always happen just as any educator wants from his students, that is, a temperate use of these technologies.

Students sometimes overwhelm the face-to-face communication with the virtual one, in which not only the real characters are present, but also the unreal (avatars), bringing them to live in the reality of video games.

Families, educators have great expectations from young students. They desires excellence at academic, social and well-being levels. Internet dependence has been correlated with a low family relationship and a lower level of religious devotion to adolescents participating in a national survey conducted in several Iranian provinces (Ahmadi, 2014). On a group of 1596 pupils, there was a negative relationship between religiosity and internet dependence in all four studied religions (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity). However, such studies are few. And this is even more true for Romania.

The age of studentship is the one in which the most important choices are made for the rest of the life. It is the age at which profound changes occur at the spiritual level. The way in which this period of life is managed, wise, and temperance will depend on the spiritual future of students. As mentioned above, this

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[1] Adventist Ministry to College and University Students

research seeks to understand the relationship between Internet addiction and its impact on participation in Christian spirituality and Christian students in Romania.

5. Research Methods

This research has the following general hypothesis: There is a relationship between Internet dependence and the dimensions of Christian spirituality in Christian students in Romania. From this general hypothesis, the following research hypotheses are deducted:

H1: There is a relationship between the dimension of the relationship with God and Internet usage for Christian students in Romania;

H2: There is a dependence between the relationship with neighbours and Internet addiction to Christian students in Romania.

As regarding research objectives, this study aims to establish the correlation between the Christian spirituality and Internet usage for Christian students in Romania.

This research responds to a quantitative, descriptive, transversal and correlational research model (De Vos, Strydum, Fouche, & Delport, 2002).

The study used purposive sampling. The sample of this research is composed of 86 Christian students. We send them questionnaires related to Internet, questionnaire designed by Thacher, A and Goolam, S in 2005[2]. The questionnaire related to spirituality is Christian Spiritual Participation Profile by Dr. Jane Thayer[3]. The questionnaire is designed to measure the intensity of involvement in Christian spirituality, which is a dynamic process and occurs in time, spirituality being a dimension of the human being that is in a continuous process of transformation. The questionnaire captures ten fundamental Christian practices: worship, prayer, meditation, Bible study / reading, fellowship, service, evangelism and patience.

The questionnaire comprises 50 items grouped into two subscales: the relationship with God and the relationship with the peers. The two sub-scales correspond to the two major areas of spiritual growth, so the relationship with God (the first 33 questions) and relation with the people (the last 17 questions).

6. Findings

The findings of this study are represented below.

Christian Spirituality - Descriptive statistics for the global score of spirituality and each of the subdivisions of the two sub-components: the relationship with God and the relationship with the peers are presented in the following table.

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[2]https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258185036_Development_and_Psychometric_Properties_of_the_Problematic_Internet_use_Questionnaire
[3] http://circle.adventist.org/download/CSPP.pdf

Table 01. Descriptive statistics for the global score of spirituality

Component	Subcomponent	Average	Standard Deviation
Relation with God	Prayer	3.20	0.59
	Repentance	3.13	0.72
	Worship	2.99	1.04
	Meditation	2.09	0.83
	Examine of conscience	2.80	0.62
	Bible Study	2.42	0.95
	Total	**2.77**	**0.79**
Relation with our fellows	Evangelisation	1.60	1.17
	Fellowship	2.02	0.98
	Service	1.9	0.95
	Stewardship	2.51	0.84
	Total	2.00	0.985
	Global	**2.38**	**0.88**

The scale that we used in the questionnaire is as follows: Never:0; Sometimes: 1; Average: 2; Many times: 3; Always: 4. From the table above, overall, it can be seen that the relation with God is stronger (above *Average* towards *Many times*) than the implication of the students in the relation with others (which is towards *Average*), although the difference it is not that big. From the spiritual activities, the most important ones for the students are: *prayer, repentance, examine of conscience and worship*. When we speak about relation with other fellows, the most important one is: *stewardship* while *service* and *fellowship* are towards *Average* done. The global distribution of the spirituality is given in the Figure 01.
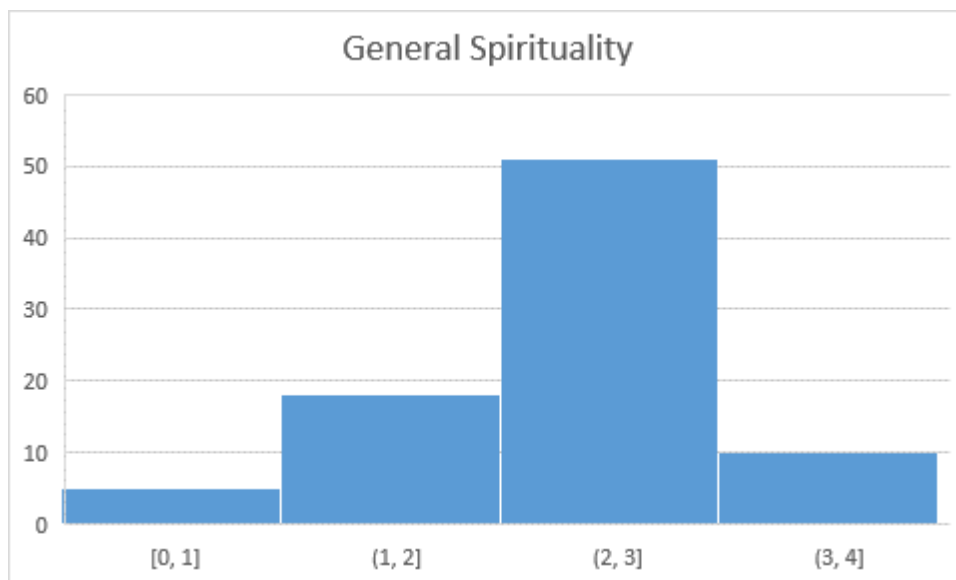

Figure 01. The global distribution of the spirituality

From the histogram above, we can find out that most of the answers resides between *Average* and *Many times*. Therefore, we can conclude that students have quite an active spiritual life.

Regarding Internet usage, we used the same scale. The overall mean is 2.08 which means that students from the sample are using averagely the Internet. Also students declare that they did not have

psychological consequences after using Internet (score 1.58 – towards *Sometimes*) or financial consequences (1.28) or health consequences (score 1.26).

For judging the correlation between Internet and relation with God, we used a t-test at a significance level of 0.5. The t-test has a value of -8.13852. The p-value is < .00001. The result is significant at p < .05. That means that we reject the null hypothesis and we accept the alternative hypothesis, which state that there is a correlation between relation with God and usage of Internet by Christian students, with other words a good relation to God decreases the consequences of Internet usage for the students that are Christian.

For judging the correlation between Internet and relation with their neighbours, we used a t-test at a significance level of 0.5. The t-value is -0.67534. The p-value is .25019. The result is not significant at p < .05. That means that we accept the null hypothesis and we reject the alternative hypothesis. With other words the fact that the students are not so involved with their neighbours makes to not have a direct impact on the usage of Internet.

For the general correlation between Internet and relation with God and neighbours, we also used a t-test at a significance level of 0.5. The t-value is -3.45501. The p-value is .000348. The result is significant at p < .05. That means that we reject the null hypothesis and we accept the alternative hypothesis. With other words, the fact that the students have an active spiritual (overall with God and with their neighbours) life makes to have a direct impact on the usage of Internet.

As a general conclusion, we can state that the problems of using the Internet are decreased by having an active spiritual life.

7.   Conclusion

It is almost universally acknowledged that the Internet has developed and continues to grow at an impressive speed. The students probably spend much of their free time browsing the internet for academic training, recreation, and perhaps non-leisure activities. There is a danger that new technologies will favour a degradation of the minds of young people. Exposure to such dangers may have adverse consequences on adolescent spirituality. Taking into account the temptations to which Internet for students in Romania exists, the fact that few studies of this type exists, we consider it appropriate to research on factors that would low the tendency of using the Internet in non-leisure activities, especially its connection with the spirituality.

In the current article we investigate the relation between Internet and some of the bad consequences that it has and the spirituality of students at graduate level. The research is done on a sample of eighty-six students in Romania. We used purposive sampling. We used quantitative research with close ended questions. The research was done on a sample of Christian students from AMICUS a Christian student association. From the study, overall, it can be concluded that the relation with God is stronger (above *Average* towards *Many times*) than the implication of the students in the relation with others (which is towards *Average*), although the difference it is not that big. From the spiritual activities, the most important ones for the students are: *prayer, repentance, examine of conscience and worship*. When we speak about relation with other fellows, the most important one is: *stewardship* while *service* and *fellowship* are averagely done. We found *that* there is a correlation between relation with God and lower usage of Internet by Christian students, with other words a good relation to God decreases the consequences of Internet usage

for the students that are Christian. Taking into account that their relation with neighbours is lower, this does not directly affect the usage of Internet, but overall the fact that the students have an active spiritual life makes to have a direct impact on the usage of Internet.

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