

MEDIA ADDICTS IN SERBIA: PROBLEM DIMENSIONS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Advances in mobile devices technology enabled media access anywhere and anytime. The appearance of social networks opened new realms of life simulation, potentially boosting media addictions. Personal characteristics in combination with stressful situations may be causing repression of inner impulses, thus provoking some psychological conditions such as depression, anxiety or loneliness. In this situation, person might look into characteristics and content of different media to find the one which addresses his or her repressed impulses, thus enabling “simulation of life”. Person susceptible to one addiction might at some point decide to change it with another one, like alcohol or drugs use. The results of this research indicate that materialistic persons oriented towards societal success are more likely to become media addicts. Stressful situations coming from family, workplace, education and moral and ethical norms are strongly linked to media addiction. Family as a liberating agent has been found to correlate with a decrease in levels of media addiction. The repression of inner impulses has been increasing with levels of media addiction. Media addiction has been increasing with those research participants with feelings of happiness tied to shopping.

Key words: personal attributes, stressful situations, repression of inner impulses, psychological conditions, nature of media.

МЕДИЈСКИ ЗАВИСНИЦИ У СРБИЈИ: ДИМЕНЗИЈЕ ПРОБЛЕМА И МОГУЋА РЕШЕЊА

Апстракт

Напредак у технологији омогућио је приступ интернету и осталим медијима са било ког места, у реалном времену. Последња деценија донела је појаву и популаризацију платформи за онлајн комуницирање – друштвених мрежа које омогућавају „симулацију живота”. У том савременом контексту, ово истраживање има за циљ да испита аспекте и узроке медијске зависности међу становништвом Србије. Личне особине у комбинацији са стресним ситуацијама утичу на потискивање унутрашњих импулса, што доводи до депресије, анксиозности или усамљености и неке врсте зависности. У зависности од природе потиснутих импулса, особа се „везује” за највернију „симулацију живота”, тј. медиј у односу на који ће бити зависан. Зависник може у једном тренутку да промени једну зависност другом, као на пример

медијску зависност конзумацијом алкохола или уживањем у дрогама. Резултати овог истраживања показују да материјалисти са јаком жељом за друштвено потврђеним успехом имају веће вероватноће да постану медијски зависници. Стресне ситуације које долазе из породице, са посла, из сфере образовања или моралних и етичких норми јако су повезане са медијском зависношћу. Породица као „ослобађајући агент” је у корелацији са смањењем нивоа медијске зависности. Потискивање унутрашњих импулса и жеља за потрошњом новца повезане су са вишим нивоима медијске зависности.

Кључне речи: личне особине, стресне ситуације, потискивање унутрашњих импулса, психолошка стања, медијска зависност.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the impact of technology has been growing in societies around the world. The most important part of technocratic revolution is driven by the development of mass media. People use print, radio, TV and recently the Internet to find information, educate and have fun. The appearance of online social networks made it possible for their users to simulate life. Just within few years, led by Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, social networks got an important role in different aspects of our societies. At the beginning of the smart phones era, citizens were empowered by mobile devices with Internet access.

Because of the appearance and widespread use of new media, there is a need to explore potential hazards of such activities, one of them being media addiction. In order to establish a standardized measure of media addiction, it is necessary to understand how addiction takes place. This study explores whether media addiction may be provoked by the repression of inner impulses connected to stressful situations and depression. Combined with the nature of today's media, including their forms and contents with depression, addictive behaviors might arise.

Personal Attributes

When looking at the nature of TV addicts, McIlwraith (1998) finds they are more neurotic, introverted, and easily bored.

Short Imaginal Processes Inventory (SIPI), shows that the self described addicts are bored and distracted and have less attention control when compared to the non-addicts (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Contrary to McIlwraith's research, Huh & Bowman (2008) find relationships between extraversion and addiction. Online games may act as substitution for socializing. They have communication aspect to themselves. For example, users of computer games may play against each other or in teams. In this sense, online media are different than TV.

As for neuroticism being a fundamental personality trait, an enduring tendency to experience negative emotional states makes persons falling into

this category more likely to experience anxiety, anger, guilt, and depressed mood. Thus, if someone is being neurotic it increases his or her chance to become media addict.

It is found by Freya, Benesch & Stutzer (2007) that viewing TV longer is connected to higher material aspirations. Modern media provide “models of successful lives” to their users. They promote consumption in ads. TV stations are usually driven by commercials, as they function like profit companies. Therefore it is logical that television stations promote highest material aspirations.

A possible relationship between addiction and life satisfaction is indicated by Lemmens, Valkenburg & Peter (2009). This means that people who view advertisements but fail to earn enough money to reach promoted lifestyle may suffer of addiction. If TV succeeds in promotion of materialism, which is difficult to fulfill by TV users, this may be one reason for media addictions to occur.

As found by various researchers, there are some personal attributes that may be in relation with media addiction. Characteristics such as neurotic, easy distraction and materialism are found to be in some relation to media addiction.

Stressful Situations

Experiencing stress may be the initiating factor for media addiction, according to various researchers. Anderson, Collings, Schmitt & Jacobvitz (1996) found positive relationship between stress and looking at the TV. This is confirmed by McIlwraith. Distraction from direct reality and filling time may be the appeal for addicts to watch TV, found Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi (2002). Playing video games, according to Wood (2008) may be response to other problems addicts are escaping from. Other motive for viewing TV may be distraction from negative issues in lives of media addicts, wrote Wood (2008). Coping with stress, according to Grusser, Thalemann, Albrecht & Thalemann (2005), may be the reason for adolescents to play video games. Many net-geners have low self-esteem, are easily bored, suffer from lack of social support and poor personal relations (Leung, 2004). For them, online environment is a place to be emotionally open and therefore feel more comfortable when expressing online. Young & Rodgers (1998) establish connection between Internet addiction and low self-confidence, fear of rejection, low motivation and the need for approval. Media addiction may address some important desire of media addicts, explains Suler (1999). When trying to achieve a goal in life, people may face obstacles and stressful situations, which may lead to repression of that goal and then substitution of it by viewing TV or similar media addiction related activity. That is why stressful situations may play important role in the process leading towards media addiction.

Repressing Inner Impulses

Depression and anxiety are connected to Internet abuse, found Kershaw (2005) Internet addiction is also in relation to male population, depression, low self-confidence, and issues (Yen, Yen & Chen, 2006; Yen, Ko & Yen, 2007; Ko, Yen & Yen, 2007). On the other hand Internet addiction is connected to aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Pettit, 1997; Donnellan, Trzesniewski & Robins, 2005; Bjork, Dougherty & Moeller, 1997). Digital addicts are also found to be lonelier than non-addicts (Nalwa, & Anand, 2003). Chen (2004) also found relation between mobile phone addiction and depression. Internet addiction bears connection to depression, sexual disorders and loneliness, wrote Morahan-Martin (2005). On the other hand, Lemmens, Valkenburg & Peter (2009) indicated possible correlation of loneliness and Internet addiction. Douglas et al. (2008) established positive correlation of online addiction to bipolar disorder, depression, loneliness and sexual compulsion. Underlying psychological issues may cause online addiction, as concluded by Kendell (1998). Young & Rodgers (1998) confirmed high levels of depression to be connected with addictive Internet use. Control is associated with the desire to play games, according to Leung (2004) and Turkle (1984). This may relate to inability to control things in direct environment. Turkle (1995) pointed out video games were something done by players and thus they appeared as more stimulating activity than watching TV. Leung (2004) confirmed these findings. Young and Rodgers (1998) pointed out that interactivity may be the most addictive on the Internet. Being able to simulate direct reality may give Internet addicts the best alternative in satisfying their repressed desires. Zimbardo (1969) wrote that the Internet may provide or unstructured situations, which may be similar to direct reality. But Kraut, Lundmark, Patterson, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, & Scherlis (1998) described pointed online friendships as “weak link” surrogates for “strong link,” direct reality connections. Finally Kershaw (2005) described Internet as an escape from reality.

Bojić (2013) finds a relationship between media addiction on one side and personal traits, stressful situations and repression of impulses on another side. This research aims to expand these findings (see Fig 1.).

Fig 1. Process leading towards addiction as identified in the literature.

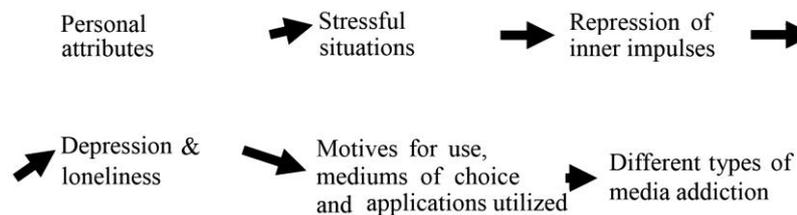


Fig. 1 Progression leading towards media addiction.

Based on the findings above, this study tends to expand past inquiries by asking research questions in the domain of personal attributes, stressful situations and repression of inner impulses. In the first section of this research, personal characteristics of media addicts would be examined by following questions:

(1) Does the number of those who replicate happiness formulas increase with the levels of media addiction?

(2) Does the number of those who value socially recognized success increase with the levels of media addiction?

Further questions examine relationship of stress and repression of inner impulses on one side and media addiction other side.

(3) Does the number of those who feel repressed from family, norms, education and workplace increase with media addiction levels?

(4) Does the number of those who feel freed by family decrease, while media addiction levels increase?

(5) Does the number of those who repress their inner impulses increase as the level of media addiction increases?

Addiction may be chosen based on an activity that fulfils suppressed desire the most. Also, people that are addicted to some activity may possess other addictions as well. Therefore, the following question arises.

(6) Does the number of those who feel happy because of shopping increase, together with the levels of media addiction?

METHODS

This survey done on multistage random sample (Branković, 2014) was implemented to examine research questions. It took place in 2011. The participants are composed of 1170 males (53%) and 1038 females (47.1%). Most of the participants fell in the 15–64 age range (64.2%). There were 21.7% research participants who fell in the 0–14 age range and 13.9 of them who were older than 65 years of age. Occupations were as follows: 30.5% students, 32.9% fulltime employees, 15.1% pensioners, and 31.5% non-employees. The survey encompassed time of media use and seven specific indicators. Persons who use media the longest (40% of the most intensive media users) are placed in category of possible addicts. They are filtered through seven indicators to get different levels of media addicts by number of indicators they fall into. These indicators correspond to factors found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1995). Overlapping factors are overconsumption, attempts to cut use, prolonged use, substitution, withdrawal, continued use and tolerance.

Personal Attributes

The first question that examines path for personal happiness and it offers possible answers such as “there are good examples within circle of my

family and friends or in books and mass media. If I find out how others achieve happiness I can do the same”, “If I think rationally, I can find happiness formula” and “I try to feel my inner impulse to achieve happiness.”

The second question provides a scale indicating importance of socially recognized success.

Stressful Situations

The third question examines which society institutions are repressing towards survey participants. For example these institutions may be family, media, laws, norms, state, corporations - religion, education, science and work.

The fourth question examines which institutions are liberating towards survey participants. Potential answers are the same like in pervious question.

Repression of Inner Impulses

The fifth question concerns repression of inner impulses. It asks research participants to answer how often they feel to repress impulses.

Correlation between Media Addiction and Shopping

The sixth question examines relationship of media addiction and shopping. The main issue is whether shopping makes happy research participants.

Correlations have been calculated by using software IBM SPSS Statistics, version 19. The sample, which is representative for population older than 15 years of age, consisted of 2208 participants. The research was done from January to May of 2011.

RESULTS

Personal Attributes

The first aim of the research is inquiring into the beliefs of media addicts. Those individuals who copy social formulas and thus value socially recognized success are looked through the prism of media addiction. The conclusion is that media addicts are individuals who tend to copy social formulas. Media addiction rises with people who answered this way. In the weakest groups of media addicts (the first and the second levels of media addiction) positive answer is given by 33.3% of respondents. Those who are on the third level of media addiction show rise (36.4% of them gave positive answer to the question about copying social formulas.

Individuals who consider societal success is more important than their intimate wish show high levels of media addiction. Only 13.6% of them have no media addiction. Group which encompasses first level of

media addicts consists of 17% that answered positively, group with second level of media addiction have 19.5% of research participants, group with third level of media addiction has 23.6% of media addicts answering positive and finally the group marked as level four concerning media addiction has 24.6% of those individuals.

Individuals who consider societal success important correlate with some survey results indicating their unawareness of addiction because they are happy with use of media (.087**) and TV (.130**). These individuals oppose the notions mass media are manipulative (.064**) and they think there are too many positive news on TV (.130**), that mass media are realistic when depicting female beauty (.078**). They tend to repress their inner impulses (.173**). Additionally, those individuals are made happy by shopping (.051*).

Stressful Situations

Those research participants that feel stress from family, norms, workplace and education were associated with increasing media addiction (see Fig 2.). When referring to norms it means both moral and ethical. Positive correlation between noted parameters may be that stressful situations are generator of media addiction.

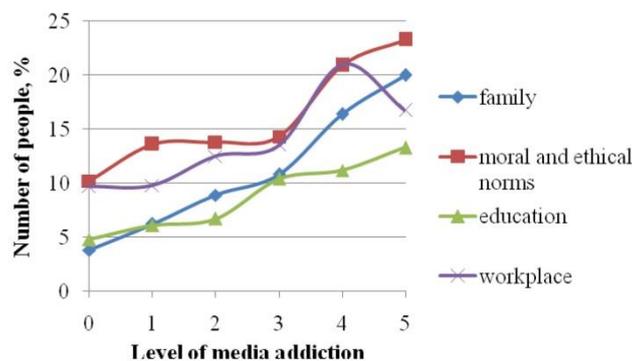


Fig. 2 Media addiction levels and repression from family, norms, workplace and education.

There is only one sphere of life connected to liberation from media addiction. The results of this research inquiry show that those who feel liberated by family are low media addicts. If strong family ties are the most fulfilling than it may be clear why individuals that find happiness within their family circle appear to be liberated from media addiction in great extent. It can be clearly seen on Fig 3. That number of media addicts is decreasing as levels of media addiction rise with those individuals who find happiness and liberation in their families.

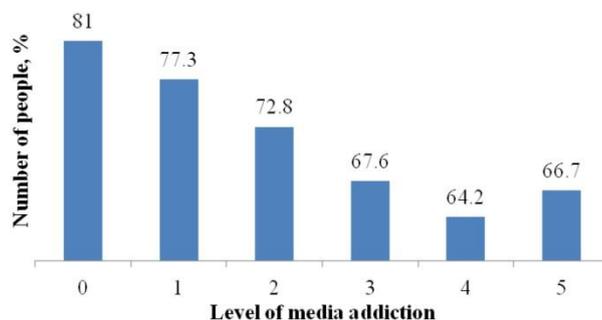


Fig. 3 Those who feel freed by family through the prism of media addiction.

Repression of Inner Impulses

After stressful situation occurs, media addict usually unconsciously decides to repress his or her inner impulses. This is indicated by clear positive correlation between repression of inner impulses and media addiction. For example, when turned down by a lady in his attempt to ask her out, a guy becomes disappointed, but he turns to online dating instead of asking someone in person for a date. This is not itself dependence but may lead towards excessive and addictive media use.

Additional proofs of positive relation between repression of inner impulses and media addiction is in correlation of those research participants that repress their impulses and feeling of media overuse (.122**), using media to stop thinking about problems (.214**), becoming nervous if has to spend some time without media access (.056*), cannot resist media use if wishes to do something else (.078**), feeling the urge to go somewhere without media access to work (.063**), wishing to close social network account, because they cannot resist using it (.091**) and feeling stressfully affected by shocking news (.117**).

Correlation between Media Addiction and Shopping

The idea to check media addiction levels of individuals who feel happy when shopping came into the spotlight of this research inquiry because of indications that persons susceptible to one dependence are usually tied to others as well. This research inquiry confirms the notion of multiple addictions stating that intensive media addicts are also in many cases shopaholics. Also, other correlations of these individuals that tie themselves to both shopping and internet addiction are checked to find out that these individuals tend to be younger (.134**), bored without online and TV access (.047*; .073**), media make them happy (.055*), while they recognize themselves as Internet (.178**) and TV users (.087**). Individuals who are happy because of shopping consume media to put problems under the carpet (.101**). Societal success is important for them (.051*) and feel bad if they

would have to spend some time without media (.082**). “Happy shoppers” love using new (.119**) and old (.061**) media for their entertainment, while some of them use Internet media more than traditional ones (.085**).

DISCUSSION

The goal of this research is to examine what might be provoking media addiction in Serbia. In order to do this, the results of previous research inquiries have been noted. Easily distracted persons, those who are neurotic and individuals having high material aspirations and lower satisfaction of life bear connection to higher levels of media addiction, as previous research inquiries indicate. The results of this study have shown that more materialistic persons tend to be highly addicted to media. This tendency fits to modern society driven by market values and consumption.

Strong connection of stress has been found with media addiction. The second step relates to stressful situations experienced mostly within family, working environment, education or they relate to some moral or ethical standards. This is confirmed by study results as media addiction levels increase with number of people who consider these repressing factors for them. As liberating factor which relate to decrease in media addiction family shows this kind of tendency which may be important for civil society or regulators in promoting family values to achieve a decrease in media addiction within a society.

The research results have shown an increase in media addiction followed by an increase in repression of inner impulses. Above this, the repression of inner impulses is highly connected to each of eight core media addiction indicators.

The repression of inner impulses may cause psychological condition leading to media addiction. These conditions can be anxiety, loneliness, bipolar disorder, depression and sexual compulsion.

The fifth and final step leading towards media addiction is a combination of depression or some other psychological addiction and the characteristics of different behaviors and substances that can lead to addiction.

The most important answer that the person in question is seeking, probably on a subconscious level, is whether some behavior or substance addresses one or more suppressed inner impulses that she or he is scared of deploying as a consequence of negative experiences related to it in the past. In the case of content, potential media addicts look at something which is far from his or her reality which is usually in terms of pornography and going somewhere far, all in an attempt to escape “present moment.” As for characteristics of medium, purpose of use and content deployed through it, there is a need for examination in future research endeavors.

On the other side, previous research inquiries indicate that persons who have been addicted to one substance or behavior may become addicted in the future to some other substance or behavior. This relates to drug abuse, alcohol overuse, eating disorder and pathological gambling. That is why, the issue of “happy shoppers” and media addiction has been examined to conclude that these two parameters increase simultaneously. Survey participants were asked if they feel happiness when shopping. When looked at this question through prism of media addiction strong connection has been found, therefore confirming notion that media addicts are likely to become shopaholics.

Also, correlations have been found indicating that those who highly value social success are older and unaware of their addiction which is mainly related to TV. Similarly, those who repress their inner impulses are older and unaware of their addiction, while those who are made happy by shopping are younger, mostly addicted to online media and television and not fully aware of their dependence.

These results may be used in forming a state strategy of measures to decrease media addiction. A part of this strategy may be based on a research result that strong family is the only real agent in combating media addiction. This may be an inspiration to promote an increase in the birth rate through different government instruments. Also, media literacy classes in elementary and high schools may be another aspect of government effort in decreasing media addiction. Educational programs about how to create happy family and media literacy programs should be broadcast regularly on public television. Further inquiries may establish universal methodologies to measure media addiction levels in different countries around the globe when taking into account the importance media and especially new ones have in daily lives of global citizens.

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МЕДИЈСКИ ЗАВИСНИЦИ У СРБИЈИ: ДИМЕНЗИЈЕ ПРОБЛЕМА И МОГУЋА РЕШЕЊА

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Резиме

Све већи број корисника медија, као и могућност сталног приступа путем мобилних уређаја – чине медијску зависност важном темом за друштво. С обзиром на наведено, ова студија има задатак да проучи како медијска зависност настаје и којим стратегијама и превентивним политикама ју је могуће умањити. У уводу су цитирани различити аутори како би се пружио приказ претходних истраживања повезаних са личним особинама, стресним ситуацијама и потискивањем унутрашњих импулса као предуслова за настајање медијске зависности. Такође је разматрање различитих врста зависности било у средишту истраживања, тј. питање зашто је зависник изабрао баш одређену врсту зависности, а не неку другу. Овде се успостављају истраживачке хипотезе.

Наредна секција у раду објашњава методологију која је коришћена да се испита медијска зависност у Србији. У овом делу излажу се питања из анкете која се односе на узроке настајања медијске зависности.

Затим се излажу резултати истраживања који потврђују хипотезе. Укратко, утврђено је да су људи са материјалистичким аспирацијама који желе друштвено потврђен успех посебно погодни да постану медијски зависници. Такође, окидачи за медијску зависност могу бити различите стресне ситуације из свакодневног живота, што укључује сфере као што су образовање, рад, породица итд. С друге стране, постоји само једна сфера која је у јасној негативној корелацији са медијском зависношћу и то је породица. Мала је вероватноћа да људи који осећају да је „породица њихова слобода” постану медијски зависници. Поред тога, утврђено је да међу људима који воле да купују има више медијских зависника у односу на групу оних који то не воле да раде. Сви поменути резултати истраживања су онда стављени у контекст демографских података испитаника како би се добила и та димензија.

На крају је цео процес медијске зависности још једном разматран кроз завршна запажања. Ово укључује медијску зависност и личне особине, стресне ситуације и потискивање унутрашњих импулса. Потенцијалне користи овог истраживања су наведене као, на пример, коришћења за државну стратегију против медијске зависности. Предлаже се универзална методологија за мерење медијске зависности према свим медијима, као и континуално мерење у више земаља како би се добила слика у односу на ово глобално питање. Стратегија превенције медијске зависности предложена је с обзиром на истраживачки резултат који говори о утицају јаке породице да се смањи медијска зависност.