IPA
International Journal of Psychology
Vol. 13, No.2, Summer & Fall 2019
PP. 109-140

Iranian **P**sychological
Association

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

Qualitative Study of Using Online Social Network Sites (SNS) based on Attachment Styles in College Students

Parisa Seyed Mousavi, PhD*
Family Research Institute
Shahid Beheshti University
Evin, Tehran, Iran
p_mousavi@sbu.ac.ir

Mohsen Porganji, MA
Researcher in Centre for
Addiction and Mental Health,
University of Toronto, Ontario,
Canada

Received: 16/ 9/ 2018 Revised: 30/ 3/ 2019 Accepted: 10/ 4/ 2019
Doi: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054

Considering the increasing tendency of people to access social network sites, the current study purposed to qualitatively investigate the amount, reasons, and perceived impacts of using social networks sites (SNS) based on attachment styles in college students. To this end, 200 students from three universities were selected by available sampling and asked to complete the adult attachment questionnaire. Thereafter, 36 students were classified into secure, ambivalent, or avoidant attachment style groups. Then, a 60-min interview was conducted with each participant to assess the amount, reasons for, and perceived impacts of different aspects of social network usage. Data w analyzed using the content analysis method. The results showed that although the amount of social network use was not different in the groups, the reasons for social network use differed. The reasons were categorized based on the facilities of SNS studied in this research. The main categories included leisure and entertainment, communication and interaction, research and learning, emotional and sexual needs, consumption and transaction. The results of using social networks were categorized under four positive and negative categories of personal, family, social, and educational outcomes. The perceptions of outcomes differed in the groups, and avoidant people reported fewer negative ones overall. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that individuals with different attachment styles utilize social networks in the same level and usually with similar reasons but different motives. The

outcome of using social network sites might be different; further investigation is needed to explore these outcomes.

Keywords: students, attachment style, social network sites, qualitative study

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

Having become one of the most utilized features of the internet, social network sites (SNS) are being used increasingly throughout the world. Statistics show an 8% increase from 15% to 23% in social network usage in the US, and the amount of time spent on these networks is double that spent on other activities (Nielsen, 2011). Social network sites were first defined as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Ellison & Boyd (2013) recently defined SNS as "A *networked communication platform* in which participants 1) have *uniquely identifiable profiles* that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can *publicly articulate connections* that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with *streams of user-generated content* provided by their connections on the site.

One study in Iran (Erfanian, Javadinia, Abedini & Biglari, 2013) reported that more than half of Iranian university students are familiar with social networks, and 38.8% of them are members of at least one SNS. Moreover, 26.6% of the students surveyed reported that they check their page at least once a day, and the most common usage was rekindling relationships with old friends. According to Alexa (quoted from YJC, 2016), Iranians rank 9th in terms of Instagram use, one of the most popular SNS. What makes SNS unique is that they make it possible for

individuals to connect with strangers and show their social networks to social network sites of others. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made; however, that is often not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between "latent ties" (Haythornthwaite, 2005) who share some offline connection. Social aspects of the Internet have been argued to augment social relationships and support mental health. In particular, SNS connect people to friends, family, colleagues, strangers, and celebrities; they can help users maintain friendships and make new ones, express thoughts and feelings, and express identity (Buote, Wood & Pratt, 2009).

The primary social functions that SNSs perform may augment the benefits of engaging in face-to-face interaction by extending the reach and accessibility of social networks. Indeed, SNS use is associated with lower levels of loneliness and greater feelings of belonging (social connectedness), social capital, and actual and perceived access to social support, and it is generally associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem (Yaakobi and Goldenberg, 2014; Oldmeadow, Quinn & Kowert, 2013). In fact, there seems to be a positive correlation between the use of SNS and both social connectedness and social capital; however, it is also negatively correlated with level of loneliness. Life satisfaction and self-esteem are both positively associated with SNS use.

Many studies have shown a correlation between SNS use and reduced self-esteem (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006), lower educational performance (Morahan-Martin, 2005), depression, dysfunctional inhibitory control (Choi et al., 2015), and impulsivity as well as an increased feeling of loneliness (Yao & Zhong, 2014) in students. Study results have indicated that the intensity of SNS use was unable to predict an individual's

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

perceived social capital and psychological well-being. The effect of SNS use varies according to the functions it serves. Specifically, SNS use for social and informational functions (SIF) increased individuals' levels of perceived bridging social capital and perceived life satisfaction, while SNS use for entertaining recreational functions (ERF) was unable to predict perceived social capital but increased individuals' levels of loneliness (Gou, Li & Ito, 2014).

Some studies have reported that abusing social networks results in reduced interactions in the real world with people of the same age (Valkenburg et al., 2006). Results have also illustrated that these people feel less safe in the real world, and such conditions threaten the development of a proper social identity (Barker, 2009). Sponsil and Gitimu (2013) explored the use of social networks in college students and showed that their use influenced students' self-perceptions and their relationships with others.

In investigating the reasons for the tendency to use these networks, studies have considered different variables, personality factors being one of them. The results have shown a positive correlation between the over-use of social networks and neuroticism to free oneself of loneliness, extroversion, acceptance (McCarty & Green, 2005), and openness (Correa, Hinsley & De Zuniga, 2010), while a negative correlation has been observed between conscience and over-use of social networks. Dong, Yang, Wang, and Lee (2013) also detected a high level of neuroticism as a significant factor in Internet abuse addiction. Other studies have demonstrated the effect of family, such as parents' strictness (Li, Li & Newman, 2013), receiving social support from parents [Gunuc & Dogan, 2013], family

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

interactivity (Şenormancı, Şenormancı, Güçlü & Konkan, 2014), and family relations (Ahmadi & Saghafi, 2013) on SNS use.

Most studies on the tendency to use SNS have been based on the pleasure theory, which hypothesizes that people use media to satisfy their needs and demands. This theory concentrates on motivations to use the media and focuses mainly on factors related to personality, social texture, and individual attitudes (Stigers, 2006). Elison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) believed people use social networks to increase their social capital. It seems these networks facilitate the creation and maintenance of shallow (weak) social relationships (Donath & Boyd, 2004)

In spite of the importance of social and communicational motivations in predicting tendencies towards social networks, the majority of studies have concentrated on the negative outcomes and predictive personal characteristics. In addition to the pleasure theory, the attachment theory is one of the most significant, well-known theories in the field of interpersonal communications used to explain the tendency toward social networks as a way to satisfy communicational needs. Even though this theory was the topic of the majority of studies in developmental psychology, its effects in the context of 21st-century technological changes and modifying dynamics of family and interpersonal communication structures have been overlooked (Rao & Madan, 2013).

According to the attachment theory, the quality of the relationship between an infant and its caregiver, when s/he is needed, forms one's expectations (in other words, internal working models) in future relationships (Bowlby, 1969; 1980). Since a secure person believes he is worthy and loveable for others, he can trust others and feel comfortable in intimate relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Anxious-insecure people have a negative perception about themselves and are too

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

keen about signs of rejection, accessibility, and threat in their environment; therefore, these people usually develop a high level of social anxiety and have trouble in interpersonal communications, i.e. high levels of intervention, rage, and control, attention seeking, and demanding too close relationships. On the other hand, insecure-avoidant ones often utilize defense mechanisms more and deny their need for intimacy and belonging while they neglect or suppress signs of threat or attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

According to research, people spend a lot of time on SNS, because they want to establish a relationship with others (Barker, 2009; Oldmeadow et al., 2013). Although all people with different attachment needs desire to communicate with others (Oldmeadow et al., 2013), those with different attachment styles have various perceptions and emotions toward themselves and others. This variety affects their interaction with others through social networks (Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright & Hudiburgh, 2012). These networks let a person communicate with others free of non-verbal behaviors such as facial gestures and body language. This feature is what insecure people are in need of, for they lack non-verbal communication skills (Oldmeadow et al., 2013). Empirical evidence has supported the predictive role of attachment in Facebook and online social networking use, demonstrating that attachment style contributes to the conceptual integration of online social networks with personality characteristics (Rom & Alfasi, 2014; Yaakobi & Goldenberg, 2014). Research has shown that securely attached individuals have larger social networks and more social ties with others (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2012). Anxiously attached individuals use Facebook more frequently and are constantly concerned about how they are perceived by others on Facebook (Lin, 2015; 2016). High attachment

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

avoidance is associated with less interest in Facebook and its use (Oldmeadow, et al., 2013). In addition (and given this study examines Italian participants), only one Italian study has investigated the relationship between Internet addiction and attachment styles, suggesting a prevalent role is played by those with an anxious attachment attitude (i.e. the Preoccupation with Relationship) (Schimmenti, Passanisi, Gervasi, Manzella & Fama, 2014).

Rao and Madan (2013) showed that secure and insecure teenagers utilize social networks in different ways. Insecure teenagers demonstrate low self-confidence and negative perspectives toward others. To protect their privacy, they have a tendency to use SNS. This finding is in accordance with the results of previous studies showing a higher tendency to use SNS in those who have developed low self-confidence. Marshal et al. (2013) showed that insecure-anxious people use Facebook more than avoidant ones do. On the other hand, Anders and Tucker (2000) showed that avoidant people are not interested in using social networks to communicate, because they generally do not show any interest in interacting with others. In contrast to some findings that indicate avoidant people are more introverted and less concerned with meeting new people, one study showed a positive relationship between the avoidance dimension and SNS addiction (Monacis, De Palo, Griffiths & Sinatra, 2017). In this regard, the results of previous studies have not been in accordance, and they have focused mainly on other consequences of Internet addiction.

Reasons for social network use can also differ based on culture. While, previous studies have indicated that people with different attachment styles show different tendencies for using social

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

networks, a few studies have focused on the reasons for using these networks and the perceived outcomes of using them.

The use of social networks has been increasing day by day, and their ease of use as well as their high level of accessibility have made them more popular. Because research has shown that the use of social networks has a negative impact on people, determining why people have a tendency to use these networks has become an important research goal. Because of the communication-based nature of these networks, the scrutiny of factors affecting the communicational needs of people seems necessary. Attachment theory is one of the most prominent psychological theories in the field of interpersonal communications (Rao & Madan, 2013); however, the results of previous studies (Rao & Madan, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2012; Oldmeadow et al., 2013; Schimmenti et al., 2014) were not in accord with this theory. Moreover, these studies did not investigate the motives of social networks use. Based on their working model in a relationship (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), individuals with different attachment styles may perceive different motives and outcomes related to SNS use. Thus, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Does the amount of SNS use differ in students with secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles?
2. Do the reasons for SNS use differ in students with secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles?
3. Do the students' perceptions of the impact of SNS use differ in students with secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment style?

Method

In the different approaches to qualitative research, the directed content analysis method was chosen for this study. Content

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

analysis explores the transparent content in a specific text. In fact, this technique analyzes the content and tries to extract some data from the text (Holsti, 1969). Based on prior research in this field, directed content analysis was used in this study, and the reasons for SNS use were classified based on prior studies.

The research population comprised all unmarried university students in Tehran aged between 18 and 30 years. The sample of the research was 39 people, including 13 with secure attachment style (7 women and 6 men), 13 with insecure ambivalent attachment style (8 women and 5 men), and 13 with insecure avoidant attachment style (7 women and 6 men). The main demographic data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Data

Demographic variables	
Age	Mean: 20.89; SD: 1.39
Field of education	Art: 16% Mathematics and Physics: 25% Humanities and Social Sciences: 35% Biology: 24%
Employee status	Part-time job: 35%
Salary	24,500,000 IRRials

At first, three universities in Tehran were selected. Then, using convenience sampling, 200 students (100 males and 100 female) were selected and responded by completing the attachment questionnaire for adults. Being a university student, having Iranian nationality, being unmarried, using social networks, and

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

being aware enough to respond to the questions carefully were the major criteria according to which the participants were filtered. In the next step, to select the sample, those who ranked the highest in three attachment styles (secure, insecure avoidant, and insecure ambivalent) were chosen. In the first step 58 students were selected based on their scores. To meet the saturation level, one male and one female were chosen from each university and interviewed. Then the others were selected with the same procedure until the sample reached saturation level; ultimately, 39 people were selected. To compare the number of responses, the number of samples in the three groups was the same.

This research respected the code of ethics: participant consent was obtained prior to the interview, the interviewer remained neutral during the interview, making judgments was avoided, confidentiality was maintained, the participants' sentences were not misinterpreted, and the exact phrases used by the participants were used in writing the research findings.

Instruments

To classify the participants into three different attachment styles (secure, ambivalent, and avoidant), Hazan and Shaver's (1987) measure was utilized. In this measure, the three attachment styles presented by Ainsworth et al. (1978) were presented briefly in three paragraphs. The terms were paraphrased to adapt them to the romantic relationships of adults. Each subject selected the paragraph which demonstrated their feelings in intimate relationships. Both the reliability and validity of the measure were certified by the authors (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Much research in various countries, including the US and China, has shown the homogeneous model of distribution in attachment styles as a result of using the Attachment Style Profile

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

(ASP) (Collins & Read, 1990). This fact can be used to clarify the reliability of the ASP. The relationships between attachment style and attachment history and/or perceptions of self and others as well as the high level of predictability of the criterion variables by ASP classification show adequate construct validity (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Shi, 2010). Internal reliability in this research was .88, and test-retest with a 1-month interval in a sample of 25 students was .91.

In this research, a semi-structured interview extracted from the research of Rao and Madan (2013) was utilized. Instagram, Telegram, What's-app, and Facebook comprised the studied social network sites (SNS). A pilot study on 50 students identified these networks as the most popular ones. Based on the main goals of this research, some changes were applied, and eventually the following questions were designed:

1. How much time do you spend on SNS every day, and which ones do you use the most?
2. Why and for what do you use these SNS? (Based on the interviewee's response, the question was extended to motives and enjoyable activities, and family-related, recreational, social, etc. reasons were questioned.)
3. From your point of view, what effect has SNS use had in your life? (In the succeeding questions, this effect was explored regarding family-related, educational, and social issues.)

Every interview lasted approximately one hour. Recorded interviews were printed and analyzed in the next step.

To analyze the data, Directed Content Analysis was used. Immediately after the interviews each day, all interviews were transcribed and analyzed by coders. At first, the transcript of each interview was fully written, specific words and phrases were highlighted in the text, and key concepts were identified as

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

primary coding categories; then, some subcategories were added. Because the method of using these websites is limited to their features, the reasons for using them were categorized in advance; thus, categories in each section were extracted separately for all three attachment styles. The frequency of each code in every category was also calculated. To code and categorize the findings, three experts explored the interviews and extracted the classifications. Those who coded the findings were not aware of the individuals' attachment styles.

Member check was utilized to explore the reliability of the data. The findings were sent to some of the interviewees, and they were asked to share their opinions about them. The participants were also asked to compare their stories with the findings and rate similarities between them using a Likert-scale in which 1 = (not similar at all) and 5 = (completely similar). The results demonstrated an average score of 4.33, which indicated a high level of similarity between the findings and the interviewees' stories. Two qualitative researchers, one in the field of psychology and one in computer software engineering, were asked to analyze the data independently to further explore the validity of the data. The findings were then compared, and any disagreement was resolved by discussion to find a common point.

Results

The findings of the current study are presented in three sections: amount of use, motivations for use, and perceptions of impacts.

A) The amount of SNS use

No significant difference was found in the groups in amount of time spent using social networks (F=1.52; SIG=.234). The average time spent using SNS (hours per day) for the secure,

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

ambivalent, and avoidant style groups was 2.10 (SD=.658), 2.35 (SD=.569), and 2.50 (SD=.369), respectively.

B) Reasons for using SNS

The goal of this section of the interview was to extract reasons why and for what the participants used SNS. The responses were first categorized based on the type of use (for what). The main categories included *leisure and entertainment, communication and interaction, research and learning, emotional and sexual needs, consumption and transaction*. These categories were the same in all groups, but the frequency of the subcategories differed in them. The results and examples for each category are presented in Table 2. The main codes are underlined in the examples.

Table 2

Reasons for SNS Use

Attachment style	Main categories	Subcategories	Frequency
Secure	Leisure and entertainment	Photos and movies	
		Music	
		News and events	
	Communication and interaction	Chat with friends and other followers	
		Finding new connections	
		Joining groups	
		Sharing with others	
	Research and learning	Searching for information	
		Educational groups	
	Emotional and sexual needs	Alleviating boredom or other negative emotions or sexual needs	
	Consumption and deals	Online jobs	
		Online deals	
Am	Leisure and entertainment	Photos and movies	
		Music	

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

		News and events
	Communication and interaction	Chat with friends and other followers
		Finding new connections
		Joining groups
		Sharing with others
	Research and learning	Searching for information
		Educational groups
	Emotional and sexual needs	Alleviating boredom or other negative emotions or sexual needs
	Consumption and deals	Online jobs
		Online deals
Avoidant	Leisure and entertainment	Photos and movies
		Music
		News and events
	Communication and interaction	Chat with friends and other followers
		Finding new connections
		Joining groups
		Sharing with others
	Research and learning	Searching for information
		Educational groups
	Emotional and sexual needs	Alleviating boredom or other negative emotions or sexual needs
	Consumption and deals	Online jobs
		Online deals

According to Table 2, all subcategories were the same in all groups. Using SNS for leisure and communication was the priority for all groups, but the descriptions of the uses given by people were different. For example, using SNS for communication was mentioned by individuals with secure and ambivalent attachment styles, while those with the avoidant attachment style prioritize entertainment and deals. For people with the avoidant attachment style, communication was the last priority.

Examples of explanations given by participants are given below.

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

"*I can talk to several friends at the same time and it's really fun. We can send photos and videos to each other and we communicate more than before. It's easy to access each other,"* (participant with secure attachment style).

"*The main reason that I use social networks is that I can easily communicate with other people and thereby transmit information easier and faster. In addition, we can plan, discuss, and have a lot of fun,"* (participant with secure attachment style).

"*The most important thing about these networks that I love is that I can find the people I like whenever I want. I can even know if they have seen my messages, so they cannot lie to me saying that they haven't seen my messages. Also, in social networks, I can say anything without worrying about what others think about me,"* (participant with ambivalent attachment style).

"*Communicating with the ones I love is the most important thing for me. In addition, the social groups help me get to know new groups, and as a member of these groups, I feel a sense of belonging,"* (participant with ambivalent attachment style).

"*A good thing about social networks is that you don't necessarily have to be yourself. You can be anyone you want and also be in a relationship when you want and cut it when you want without any difficulty. This makes me feel comfortable and secure,"* (participant with avoidant attachment style).

"*My most important purpose is to have fun without needing other people to go out with or to have obligatory relationships. In social networks, I can find photos and videos on my own and I don't have to beg my friends to send me a video. I also communicate with my friends on social networks. You know, these days everyone is busy, and it's the best way to stay in touch without wasting a lot of time meeting each other,"* (participant with avoidant attachment style).

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

As seen in Table 2, the most important reasons for SNS use by avoidant people are entertainment and the possibility of virtual relationships, while ambivalent people prioritize convenience in communication and availability. For avoidant individuals, the most important reasons for using SNS as means of communication are that they can remain unknown and that there is no commitment in the relationships they form in these networks. Despite the fact that all groups mentioned communication as a motivation, the model of this communication was different in the groups. Friends' pressure was mentioned as a reason for using social networks for the motivation of communicating with friends by the avoidant group, which was unique. For example, one member of this group said, *"I have to use them, because everyone interacts with others in this way, and you are pressured to use them."* Social network use for commercial purposes such as online shopping and online businesses was higher in the avoidant group.

Perceiving outcomes of SNS use

The outcomes of using social networks were classified into the four categories of personal, family, social, and educational impacts. They were also divided into two sections of positive and negative. The results are shown in Table 3.

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

Table 3

Perceptions of SNS Use Outcomes

Attachment style	Main categories (positive and negative)		Subcategories	Frequency
Secure	Personal	P	Pleasure and fun	
			Developing info	
		N	Waste time	
			Pretention	
			Being fashionable	
			Getting shallow	
	Familial	P	Accessibility	
			More interaction	
		N	Less direct interaction	
			Challenge with parents	
	Educational	P	Ease and speed of accessing info	
			Possibility of exchange info	
		N	Limited time to study	
			Distraction	
	Social	P	Developing communications	
			Getting social news	
			Social unity	
		N	Decreasing direct interactions	
			Decreasing privacy	
Ambivalent	Personal	P	Peace of mind and security	
			Pleasure	
			Self-confidence	
		N	Being alerted	
			Stress	
	Familial	P	Accessibility	
			Being more aware	
		N	Challenge	
			Getting far from each other	
			Possibility of cheating	
	Educational	P	Easy access to information	
		N	Distraction	
			Less motivation	
			Less time	
	Social	P	Increasing number of friends	
			Self-confidence	
			Security	
		N	Lying and pretention	

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

			Lack of trust
Avoidant	Personal	P	Independence Peace of mind
		N	Getting shallow Lower possibility of self-development
	Familial	P	No need to direct interaction
		N	Challenge
	Educational	P	Ease and speed of accessing information Access to more databases Possibility of indirect communication with classmates
		N	Distraction
	Social	P	Communication with favorite people Knowing new people Communication without judgment
		N	Decreasing privacy

All groups reported both positive and negative consequences of using SNS in each category, though avoidant people overall reported fewer negative results. From a personal point of view, the secure group believed that even though these networks had been pleasant to use, using them made them think more of their appearance, and they developed more enthusiasm for fashion and competition. Individuals in the ambivalent group indicated they felt more secure as a result of having a higher level of accessibility to others and the possibility of connecting with more people. On the other hand, they felt more confident about having no direct communication. Because they are always worried about knowing about others, people in this group suffer a high level of stress. Moreover, these relationships are neither reliable nor satisfactory for them. As an example, one member of this group mentioned:

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

"*It is really good that I can talk to my friend whenever I want, but to know if he is there or not and check what he is doing, I have to check his status all day long. This forces me to check his page regularly, and I am always stressed if I see something I do not want to see.*"

Avoidant people considered using social networks a waste of time, but they also felt more independent, because their relationships are not face-to-face. From the familial perspective, almost all the groups believed using these networks made their parents or spouses nag a lot. However, individuals in the secure and ambivalent groups thought social networks facilitated reaching others in times of necessity.

In the educational domain, all groups mentioned easier access to information. The avoidant group also said that by using social networks, they can be made aware of updates in their educational environment without the essence of direct dialogue with their classmates. For example, one member of the avoidant group said: "*Since we have created a "Telegram group" in our class, we get informed of everything, and there is no need to call each other or to follow someone to get the information. There is no more need to connect to somebody to get a message.*"

Finally, in the social perspective, secure people believed that in addition to expanding their social communications, these networks have made it easier for people to broadcast messages and make huge decisions. Starting a campaign to oppose an issue was an example of unification through a social network. On the other hand, this group also believed that by using these networks, they met their friends in person less often, and keeping their private information safe has been made difficult. People in the ambivalent group also declared finding friends as a positive point, and they believed they had a higher level of social confidence in

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

these networks; however, they usually cast doubt on their friends and feel people lie more (in social networks) and mostly pretend to be what they are not in reality. As an example, one member said:

"*You can no longer determine who is telling the truth and who is lying. I also always feel threatened by those with whom my fiancé is connected.*"

People in the avoidant group believed that communicating with new people is easier, "those who do not know you and do not judge you." On the other hand, they also thought privacy is endangered.

"*I sometimes feel that everyone knows me, and I feel they might have seen me as I am walking in the street, or probably someone secretly records a movie of me and shares it on social media.*"

Discussion

The current research investigated the amount of time spent on and reasons for the tendency of SNS use based on secure and insecure attachment styles as well as the subjective perceptions of people regarding the impact of using such networks.

The results showed no significant difference in the amount of time spent using SNS in the three studied groups (secure, ambivalent, and avoidant attachment styles). This result shows that people have the same level of tendency to use these networks regardless of their attachment style, which may demonstrate the popularity of these networks in everyone. However, the amount of use in the avoidant group was higher in comparison with the secure and ambivalent groups. This result was primarily in contrast with that of Andangsari, Gumilar, and Godwin (2013). They showed that insecure-anxious people are more active in using Facebook than the other groups, and avoidant people are

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

not seriously active on this social network. This difference can be the result of the focus of the study; Andangsari, Gumilar, and Godwin focused mainly on Facebook, while the present study considered social networks that are more accessible, the use of which is more widespread, and those usually used on phones. Other studies have also proven the greater use of social networks by anxious people (Anders & Tucker, 2000; Oldmeadow et al., 2013). Because anxious people have a negative perception of themselves, which affects their self-esteem in interacting with others, social networks can be easier tools for them with which to communicate with others (Anders & Tucker, 2000; Jenkins-Guarnieri, 2012; Marshall et al., 2013). More time spent on social networks results in more messages being sent and received and more responses received from others. This can gradually change the perception an anxious person has of himself and boost the feeling of being intrinsically valuable. Feelings of self-sufficiency and independence in these people cause them not to think of these networks as a tool to facilitate their communication with others, and these networks will not affect their need for attachment. In fact, using social networks to interact with others can be a reminder of unpleasant experiences in their childhood (Bott & Spillius, 2014).

Based on the widespread use of social networks, their use in almost all daily interactions of people, including school and workplace, and their current use as a tool for scientific and professional interactions, examining communication needs to find social network use levels is not appropriate. As the results of the current study have shown, an individual's attachment style is not a predictor of SNS use level; however, it can identify the motives and methods of using these networks with relatively good accuracy.

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

The findings of the current research identified five categories of general reasons for using social networks: leisure and entertainment, communication and interaction, research and learning, emotional and sexual needs, consumption and transaction. This finding is in accordance with those of previous research. For example, Ebersole (2000) studied new media, including the Internet and social networks, and summarized the motivation of users in eight main categories: research and learning, easy access to leisure and entertainment, social communication and interaction, getting rid of boredom and doing something when feeling bored, having access to substances that are not accessible by other ways, producing information and technical support, game and sexual needs, and finally consumption deals (exchanging goods). Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade (2004) also showed three main factors of Internet use: searching and processing, gaining pleasure and social dimensions (communication with others). The results of their study showed that all categories were used by all groups, but the frequency of reasons in the subcategories differed slightly. For example, students with ambivalent attachment styles used SNS more frequently for communication, and students with avoidant attachment styles used them more frequently for transaction. Students in the avoidant group used SNS for communication less than the other groups.

Overall, using social networks for leisure and communication was a priority for all groups. Seeing photos and movies, listening to music, obtaining information about events, interacting with friends, joining groups, and finding new friends were mentioned by most students. However, more variety was observed in the motivation of secure people. Reasons for such motivations were same between the secure and insecure groups. The secure group

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

chose social networks mainly as tools for communication, for leisure and entertainment, and for ease of use. People in the ambivalent group, however, prioritized more accessibility to others, always being aware of others, and unity of some friends. Generally, people with ambivalent attachment styles believed that communicating with people who do not know them well results in being judged less. These findings were in accordance with those of Zoppos (2009), who demonstrated that insecure teenagers spent more time talking to their friends and strangers, while secure ones spoke more to their family members and friends rather than strangers. Need for affection and tenderness was in the other motivations of ambivalent people to use Facebook, which is in accordance with the results of the current study. Insecure people believed that online communication is easier than communication in the real world.

People with avoidant attachment styles used social networks mainly for motives such as membership in channels, watching movies, news and photos, etc. Easy use of these networks, the speed of getting information, and leisure were their main reasons for using social networks. Studies have demonstrated that generally, as a result of experiencing weak social models, insecure avoidant and ambivalent people suffer more social anxiety and have less interpersonal value (Anders & Tucker, 2000). This social anxiety shows itself differently in the two groups. For avoidant people, communication with others is important, but anonymity and virtual communication helps them feel safe. Also, in accordance with previous studies, easy access to others on social network sites means they are accessible when needed (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), and this brings more safety for people in this group. For avoidant people, however, this anxiety presents itself in the form of avoiding interactive

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

communications. Previous studies have shown that avoidant people both search for less support and provide less support for others (Simpson, Rholes & Nelligan, 1992). Bargh and McKenna (2004) demonstrated that the benefits of the Internet for users who have low levels of psychological excellence are related to the absence of face-to-face communication. Those who have a lower level of tendency to live interactions may feel they can express their emotions on SNS more easily since self-expression boundaries are fewer.

All groups mentioned convenience in usage and high level of access to information as positive educational consequences of using social networks, while challenges arising in families was mentioned as a negative consequence. Spending a lot of time on social networks can cause dissatisfaction in parents and form conflicts between them and their children. Secure individuals, however, counted joy and relationship possibilities as positive consequences and time waste, shallowness, and lack of face-to-face communication as negative consequences of SNS use. For ambivalent individuals, easy access to people and the opportunity to increase one's self-confidence in communicating with strangers were in the positive consequences, whereas the stress of being lied to or betrayed by close friends or family members was a negative consequence. The possibility of being anonymous allows people to introduce themselves in an arbitrary way, but it can also cause ambivalent individuals to feel insecure and tensions to arise in interpersonal relationships. According to Ellison et al. (Ellison et al., 2006), having more control over self-expressive behaviors in social networks helps people manage and control their interactions more efficiently. It allows them to hide and censor some information about themselves, but at the same time, it causes them doubt about the information presented by the

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]
[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

people with whom they are interacting. Avoidant individuals believed that the possibility of having virtual relations without facing people in person and having more independence were considered to be positive consequences of SNS use, but they also believed that social networks have made it hard to protect privacy. This was one of their major concerns.

Overall, the results of the current research showed that even though the amount of SNS use is the same in all people as a result of its widespread use, the reasons for social network use are somewhat different in people based on their backgrounds, initial interactions, and attachment styles. It seems that individuals with different attachment styles utilize online social networks, and everyone benefits from them according to their own needs. For example, avoidant people can make money without the essence of social interactions and social conflicts. They also can satisfy their emotional needs to some extent. It can be said that except for a few minor differences in the type of use of online social networks, there is no difference in SNS use in different attachment styles. However, people with different attachment styles have shown different perceptions of the effects SNS use has in their lives. Therefore, it can be concluded that although individuals with different attachment styles utilize these networks, the outcomes of using them might differ. Further investigation is needed to explore these outcomes.

Despite these interesting findings, the current research faced some limitations. Firstly, considering the selection of accessible people and the limited sample, controlling demographic variables (factors) was not possible. This may result in some limitations to the generalizability of the results. The sample was comprised of unmarried people; different results may be observed with married people. It is recommended that future studies focus on

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

demographic factors, other groups (age groups), and mediating factors affecting the relationship between attachment style and type of SNS use. Finally, it was not possible to use the interview to discriminate participants' attachment styles; thus, this study was limited to using the categorical scale to assess attachment styles.

References

Ahmadi, K. H., & Saghafi, A. (2013). Psychosocial Profile of Iranian Adolescents' Internet Addiction. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, *16(7),* 543-548.

Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Oxford, England: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Andangsari, E. W., Gumilar, I., & Godwin, R. (2013). Social networking sites use and psychological attachment need in Indonesian young adults population. *International Journal of Social Science Studies, 1(2),* 133-8.

Anders, S. L., & Tucker, J. S. (2000). Adult attachment style, interpersonal communication competence, and social support. *Personal Relationships*, *7(4),* 379-89.

Bargh, J. A., & McKenna, K. Y. (2004). The Internet and social life. *Annual Reviews*, *55*,573-590.

Barker, V. (2009). Older adolescents' motivations for social network site use: The influence of gender, group identity, and collective self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, *12(2),* 209-213.

Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles in young adults: a test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 61*, 226–244.

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

Bott, E., & Spillius, E. B. (2014). *Family and social network: Roles, norms and external relationships in ordinary urban families*. Routledge.

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment*. Attachment and Loss (vol. 1) (2nd ed.). New York: Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1980). *Loss: Sadness & Depression*. Attachment and Loss (vol. 3); London: Hogarth Press.

Boyd, D. M., & Elison, N. B. (2007). Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13(1),* 210-230.

Buote, V. M., Wood, E., & Pratt, M. (2009). Exploring similarities and differences between online and offline friendships: the role of attachment style. *Computers in Human Behavior, 25,* 560–567.

Choi, J. S., Park, S. M., Roh, M. S., Lee, J. Y., Park, C. B., Hwang, J. Y., Gwak, A. R., & Jung, H. Y. (2015). Dysfunctional inhibitory control and impulsivity in Internet addiction. *Psychiatry Research, 28(2),* 424-428.

Collins, N., & Read, S. (1990). Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *58,* 644-663.

Correa, T., Hinsley, A. W., & De Zuniga, H. G. (2010). Who interacts on the Web: The intersection of users' personality and social media use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(2):247-253.

Donath, J., & Boyd, D. (2004). Public displays of connection. *BT Technology Journal, 22(4),* 71-82.

Dong, G., Wang, J., Yang, X., & Zhou, H. (2013). Risk personality traits of Internet addiction: a longitudinal study of Internet-addicted Chinese university students. *Asia-Pacific Psychiatry, 5(4),* 316-321.

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

Ebersole S. (2000). Uses and gratifications of the web in students. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communicatio*n, *6(1).*

Ellison, N., Heino, R., & Gibbs, J. (2006). Managing impressions online: Self-presentation processes in the online dating environment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *11(2),* 415-41.

Ellison, N. B., & Boyd, D. (2013). *Sociality through Social Network Sites*. In W. H Dutton (Ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies (pp. 151-172). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Erfanian, M., Javadinia, S. A., Abedini, M., & Biglari B. (2013). Iranian students and social networking sites: prevalence and patterns of usage. *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *1(83),* 44-48.

Fraley, R. C., & Shaver, P. R. (2000). Adult romantic attachment: theoretical developments, emerging controversies, and unanswered questions. Review of General Psychology, 4:132–154.

Feeney, J., & Noller, P. (1990). Attachment style as a predictor of adult romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *58,* 281-291.

Guo, y., Li, Y., & Ito, N. (2014). Explorig the Predicted Effects of Social Networking Site Use on Perceived Capital and Psychological Well Being of Chinese International Students in Japan. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networks*, *17(1),* 52-58.

Gunuc, S., & Dogan, A. (2013). The relationships between Turkish adolescents' Internet addiction, their perceived social support and family activities. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *29(6),* 2197-2207.

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

Hart, J., Nailling, E., Bizer, G. Y., & Collins, C. K. (2015). Attachment theory as a framework for explaining engagement with Facebook. *Personality and Individual Differences, 77,* 33–40.

Hazan, C., &Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52,* 511-524.

Holsti, O. R. (1969). Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities. Addison-Wesley Pub. Jenkins-Guarnieri, M. A., Wright, S. L., Hudiburgh, L. M. (2012). The relationships in attachment style, personality traits, interpersonal competency, and Facebook use. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 33(6),* 294-301.

Haythornthwaite, C. (2005). Social networks and Internet connectivity effects. Information, Communication, & Society, *8(2),* 125–147.

Jenkins-Guarnieri, M. A., Wright, S. L., & Hudiburgh, L. M. (2012). The relationships in attachment style, personality traits, interpersonal competency, and Facebook use. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 33,* 294–301.

Kenny, M. E., & Rice, K. G. (1995). Attachment to parents and adjustment in late adolescent college students current status, applications, and future considerations. *The Counseling Psychologist, 23,* 433–456

Li, X., Li, D., & Newman, J. (2013). Parental behavioral and psychological control and problematic internet use in Chinese adolescents: The mediating role of self-control. *Cyberpsychology Behavior*, *16(6),* 442-447.

Lin, J. H. (2015). The role of attachment style in Facebook use and social capital: Evidence from university students and a

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

national sample. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 18(3)*, 173–180.

Lin, J. H. (2016). Need for relatedness: A self-determination approach to examining attachment styles, Facebook use, and psychological well-being. *Asian Journal of Communication, 26(2),* 153–173.

Marshall, T. C., Bejanyan, K., Di Castro, G., & Lee, R. A. (2013). Attachment styles as predictors of Facebook-related jealousy and surveillance in romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, *20(1),* 1-22.

McCarty, C., & Green, H. D. (2005). Personality and Personal Networks. Sunbelt XXV, Conference Contribution.

Monacis L., de Palo, V., Griffiths, M. D., & Sinatra, M. (2017). Exploring individual differences in online addictions: The role of identity and attachment. *International Journal of Mental Health Addiction*, *15(4),* 853-868.

Morahan-Martin, J. (2005). Internet Abuse Addiction? Disorder? Symptom? Alternative Explanations?. *Social Science Computer Review*, *23(1),* 39-48.

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change.* Guilford Press.

Nielsen Company, (2011). *Global Audience Spends Two Hours More a Month on Social Networks than Last Year*; The Nielsen Company: New York, NY, USA.

Oldmeadow, J. A., Quinn, S., & Kowert, R. (2013). Attachment style, social skills, and Facebook use inst adults. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *29(3),* 1142-1149.

Rao, G., & Madan, A. (2013). A study exploring the link between attachment styles and social networking habits of adolescents in urban Bangalore. I*nternational Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, 3(1), 1-12.*

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

Rom, E., & Alfasi, Y. (2014). The role of adult attachment style in online social network affect, cognition, and behavior. *Journal of Psychology and Psychotherapy Research*, 1, 24–34.

Saw, G., Abbot, W., Donaghey, J., & McDonald, C. (2013). Social media for international students–it's not all about Facebook. *Library Management*, *34(3),* 156-174.

Schimmenti, A., Passanisi, A., Gervasi, A. M., Manzella, S., & Fama, F. I. (2014). Insecure attachment attitudes in the onset of problematic Internet use in late adolescents. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development, 45(5),* 588–595.

Şenormancı, Ö., Şenormancı, G., Güçlü, O., & Konkan, R. (2014). Attachment and family functioning in patients with internet addiction. *General Hospital Psychiatry, 36(2),* 203-7.

Severino, S., & Craparob, G. (2013). Internet addiction, attachment styles, and social self-efficacy. *Global Journal of Psychology Research*, *3(1).*

Shi, L. (2010). Adult attachment patterns and their consequences romantic relationships: A comparison between China and the U.S (pp. 259-277). In P. Erdman & K-M, Ng (Eds.), Attachment: Expanding the Cultural Connections. Routledge/Taylor and Francis.

Simpson, J. A., Rholes, W. S., & Nelligan, J. S. (1992). Support seeking and support giving within couples in an anxiety-provoking situation: The role of attachment styles. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *62(3),* 434.Sponcil, M., Gitimu, P. (2013). Use of social media by college students: Relationship to communication and self-concept. *Journal of Technology Research, 1(4),* 1-13.

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]

Sponcil, M., & Gitimu, P. (2013). Use of Social Media by College Students: Relationship to Communication and Self-Concept. *Journal of Technology Research*, *4,* 1-13.

Stafford, T. F., Stafford, M. R., & Schkade, L. L. (2004). Determining uses and gratifications for the Internet. *Decision Sciences*, *35(2),* 259-88.

Stigers, R. L. (2006). Online Social Network Behaviors as Predictors of Personality. A thesis for Master of Arts in Psychology, Faculty of California State University, Chico.

Valkenburg, P. M., Peter, J., Schouten, A. P. (2006). Friend networking sites and their relationship to adolescents' well-being and social self-esteem. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *1(5),* 584-90.

Yaakobi, E., & Goldenberg, J. (2014). Social relationships and information dissemination in virtual social network systems: an attachment theory perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior, 38,* 127–135.

Yao, M. Z., & Zhong, Z. J. (2014). Loneliness, social contacts and Internet addiction: A cross-lagged panel study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *30,* 164-70.

Zoppos, E. (2009). Attachment Style and Facebook Use: Can Facebook be used to help overcome attachment style-related issues? *Behavioural Studies Working Paper Series*

[Downloaded from ijpb.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.20081251.2019.13.2.5.2]

[DOI: 10.24200/ijpb.2019.148929.1054]