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## Relationship between Using Mobile Social Networks and Life Satisfaction Moderated by Perceived Social Support

Hedayat Allah Nikkhah<sup>1✉</sup>, Mahmood Raoofi<sup>2</sup>, Parnian Sarafraz<sup>3</sup>

1. Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Human Sciences, University of Hormozgan, Bandar Abbas, Iran, [hedayatnik22@gmail.com](mailto:hedayatnik22@gmail.com)
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Human Sciences, University of Hormozgan, Bandar Abbas, Iran
3. MA Student, Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Human Sciences, University of Hormozgan, Bandar Abbas, Iran

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** As an integral component of psychological well-being, life satisfaction pertains to an individual's overall assessment of life quality, shaped by various determinants including social networks and social support, among others. Consequently, the current investigation sought to examine the impact of mobile social networks on life satisfaction.

**Methods:** The research sample comprised 300 students enrolled in state, Payam-e-Nour, and Islamic Azad Universities located in Bandar Abbas. The sampling method employed was stratified, taking into account the gender and academic qualifications of the participants. Data collection was executed through the administration of questionnaires. The statistical analyses required were performed utilizing AMOS and SPSS software.

**Results:** Structural equation modeling (SEM) initially validated the model's fit. The fit indices were recorded as RMSEA=.66, GFL=.97, AGFI=.93, DF=17, NFI=.95, CFI=.91, X2/df=2.31, and  $p \leq .002$ . In essence, the interrelated variable model demonstrated an adequate level of fit.

**Conclusions:** Experts in the field concurred regarding the influence of group affiliation on social support and, by extension, on life satisfaction. Nevertheless, the findings of the present study indicated that while social support has the potential to enhance life satisfaction, membership in social networks did not augment the participants perceived support, resulting in a negative correlation with life satisfaction.

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## Introduction

Today, social networks play a major role in interconnecting people in the world. Thus, they have become an inseparable part of everyone's life. These networks basically aim to facilitate public relations and pull people closer to each other. Today, the significant role of media is known to everyone in the contemporary world known as the age of communication. The ever-increasing effect of mass media especially the internet system and internet-based social networks has globalized the information community. It is no longer a local or national concept. Nevertheless, the adverse effect of the means of communication on the gradual disintegration of real communication and dividing human communities is undeniable. It has led to the growth of personal cultures dominated by one's imaginations, thoughts and conceptions.

Today, the widest interactive communications have been made in social network websites (Ghasabi & Naghibosadat, 2015). A network includes relations that directly or indirectly link people to each other. A network consists of different social bonds among people who are always interacting with each other (ibid). Social networks provide a space for old and new friends to interact and exchange ideas. These networks are innovative forms of social communication that prevail in people's lives. People of different age groups or different social domains can communicate with each other, and their lives are influenced both socially and individually. Therefore, social networks play a major role in today's world, which cannot be underestimated. The spread, quality and popularity of these networks among the public have changed the form of communication.

Today, the form of life has changed and family relations have been largely replaced by disintegrated relations influenced by mass media. Thus, the level of satisfaction and happiness, as the main determinants of life satisfaction, have been affected too. From 2000 on, the United Nations (UN) has introduced perceived social happiness and satisfaction as a major index of developed countries. In other words, if the population of a society do not feel adequately happy and satisfied, that society cannot be considered socially developed (Faraji & Khademian, 2013). Life satisfaction is a psychological health index (Shamsaei et al., 2014), which represents one's attitude toward the overall present and past life (Singh & Jha, 2008). These evaluations include one's emotional reactions to events, their mental state and perceived satisfaction with different aspects of life such as education and job (Lyubomirsky et al, 2005). Several researchers showed

that life satisfaction is a predictor of psychological health, and a high level of life satisfaction can produce positive emotions and feelings in people (Bakhshipour Roodsari et al., 2015). It also has positive effects on education, job and interpersonal well-being and health (Lewis, 2008). In addition, a sense of satisfaction within community members increases the inherent dynamicity and improves personal communications. Therefore, the overall feeling of happiness is increased. The popularity of mobile social networks among Iranians, who actively use social networks has raised the question of the underlying relationship between the frequency of using mobile social networks (e.g. What's App, Telegram) and life satisfaction. Whether this relationship is moderated by social support or not is also enquired.

### **Research background and literature Review:**

In a thesis, Golzari (2019) explored the causal relationship between using internet-based social networks and life satisfaction in Payam-e-Nour University, the west branch. The results revealed that using internet-based social networks along four dimensions (type of use, type of content searched for, trust in content and the rate of perceived mental security) were positively and significantly correlated. Two dimensions (i.e., type of application used and the frequency of using each social network) had no statistically significant correlation with life satisfaction among students at Payam-e-Nour University. The results also showed that for the type of application dimension, only using Telegram was significantly correlated with life satisfaction in the target population. Finally, Pearson's correlation coefficient showed a statistically significant positive correlation between trust in content and perceived mental security dimensions (of using mobile social networks) and perceived life satisfaction among university students.

In a similar vein, Gholamzadeh Bafghi and Jamali Bafghi (2018) conducted some research to explore the correlation between internet-based social networks and satisfaction with married life among 100 married students at Islamic Azad University, Bafgh branch. The results showed a lower rate of satisfaction with married life among members of social networks than non-members. Membership to social networks can reduce satisfaction with married life in the long run.

Akhavan Malayeri et al. (2014) conducted some research on internet-based social networks and explored the effect of internet-based social networks on social capital and the level of members' happiness. They conducted a survey and their sampling was multi-stage clustering in type. They found that membership to social networks widened communication networks, increased the

chances of joining different groups, abiding by rules and regulations, gaining others' trust, gaining information and support, and access to different sources. Because these are all the constituent elements of social capital, it can be concluded that the act of increasing social capital in these networks can increase happiness.

Oduaran and Akanni (2018) conducted their research on perceived social support and life satisfaction among freshmen moderated by academic self-efficacy and academic adaptation. The sample included 621 university students. The results showed a statistically significant correlation between perceived social support and life satisfaction. Moreover, socially supportive networks within families or among faculty members showed to be capable of increasing students' life satisfaction.

In a similar vein, Zhan and Sun (2016) investigated the effect of social media on life satisfaction along two competing explanatory mechanisms. This research was done as an online survey to explore the correlation between using social networks and social benefits, social overload and life satisfaction. The results revealed that using social media has social benefits for people and, thus, can lead to more life satisfaction. Unexpectedly, though using social media can have adverse effects (e.g. social overload), social overload cannot predict the reduced life satisfaction. With a focus on the results of social aspects via social media, this research suggested the dual role of social media rather than a single, one-dimensional role.

Trepte et al. (2015) conducted their longitudinal research on the effect of received social support in online and offline conditions on satisfaction with social support and with life. They explored the difference between social interactions in online and offline conditions as well as the users' satisfaction with social support in these conditions. It was hypothesized that the users' perceived satisfaction with the online and offline support was the same. However, only the social support in offline conditions can lead to life satisfaction. All hypotheses were accepted by the longitudinal data (n=327) used for exploring social support within two years and four points of measurement (measurement degrees).

Jung Oh et al. (2014) published a work of research on how to use online social networks to increase life satisfaction. The aim was to find whether supportive interaction in social networks affected perceived social support, emotions, the sense of social belonging and life satisfaction due to using these websites and the number of friends in these websites. In this research, the sampling was done

instantly to explore the relationship between supportive interaction and feelings within a 5-day's time span. The analysis of data from 339 adult participants revealed a positive association between supportive interaction and positive emotions after the interaction. In the linear model, positive correlations were found among the number of friends, supportive interaction, feelings, perceived social support, sense of social belonging and life satisfaction.

Shahyad et al. (2011) investigated the correlation between perceived attachment and social support and life satisfaction among 293 students at Shahid Beheshti University. The results revealed the positive and direct effect of social support and attachment on life satisfaction, and the positive significant effect of attachment on perceived social support. The results also showed the indirect but the significant and positive effect of attachment on life satisfaction, and the significant effect of overall perceived social support and attachment on life satisfaction.

Kasprzak (2010) explored the relationship between perceived social support and life satisfaction. This researcher also explored the association between life satisfaction, the features of interpersonal relations and life satisfaction. In this research, satisfaction with relations with family members, friends, colleagues and acquaintances was explored. Also, the strength of these relations and the perceived social support were explored. The sample consisted of 60 participants and the results showed that practical support and satisfaction with relations with friends were the best predictors of life satisfaction.

### **Theoretical underpinning**

Social media are considered one of the most rapidly growing communication technologies (Xiang et al, 2010: 181; Gretzel et al, 2008: 101). Although social media is represented in a variety of forms such as photo sharing sites (e.g., Flickr), video creation and information sharing sites (e.g., YouTube), online communities, social tagging (e.g., Digg), and news readers (e.g., Google Reader), the most popular ones are social networking sites (SNS) (e.g., Facebook) (Oh et al, 2014: 70; Blackshaw, 2005). The popularity of SNS can be proven by the number of people using them. Continued interest in SNS use can be explained by the social and affective benefits users receive from SNS (Cheung, 2011:1338). SNS are virtual communities that enable their members to connect and interact with other users on a particular subject and share knowledge and experiences (Murray, Waller, 2007: 57). Many researchers within information and communication technologies (ICT) and social psychology areas have begun investigating SNS use, focusing on

the main reasons that influence SNS acceptance and continuous use (Cheung, 2011:1340; Li, 2011: 563), psychological outcomes of SNS use (Oh et al, 2014: 72; Kim, Lee, 2011: 359), and major indicators of social networking (Kalpidou et al, 2011: 134; Vitak et al, 2011: 2).

Online social networks are similar to social networks in reality. In other words, SNS users can share information and enjoy special benefits related to virtual space (Oh et al, 2014: 70; Chung et al, 2016: 78). The dynamic and multimodal features of SNS allow users to share, post, and discuss interests with similarly interested users without time and distance constraints (Jansen et al, 2009: 2170), eventually expanding users' social circles and increasing the frequency of interpersonal contacts (Chung and et al, 2017: 2).

The concept of life satisfaction, which was first introduced by Neugarten in 1961, refers to a situation or result obtained by the comparison of what a person wants and possesses (Cited by Özer & Karabulut, 2003). Life satisfaction is defined as the main goal of life by many people. It is suggested that consistency or inconsistency between the goals of an individual and the extent these goals are reached by him/her has a vital role in reaching happiness (Rask et al, 2002). Life satisfaction refers to emotional reactions of an individual outside his/her work life. In other words, it refers to general attitude of the individual towards life. Being happy in daily life, feeling physically good, economic security and social relationships are the factors affecting life satisfaction (Schmitter, 2003).

life satisfaction forming the cognitive component of the subjective well-being may be positively influenced by the social support that individuals receive. Hence, this is observed in a number of studies. Froh et al,(2009) found positive relationships between life satisfaction and social support. In another research, Morgan et al. (2017) found significant positive relationship between self-esteem and perceived social support from family.

Social support describes social resources or social assistance received by people when they are in need of help, consultation, confirmation or protection. It could be offered by family, friends, relatives colleagues, and other significant people. In other words, social support is the perception that one is cared for, protected, respected and valued by others, treated as a part of social network with assistance and commitment.

Some studies have shown that the lack of social support may precipitate the use of Internet and cyberspace. For example, Argyris et al. (2015), studied addiction to Internet and loneliness among

high school students in Greece, reporting a positive and significant correlation between addiction to Internet and loneliness. It seems that there is a relationship between excessive use of Internet or addiction to Internet and social phobia. Also, Jung et al. (2019) demonstrated that individual social networks, as well as the perceived quality of social support received in the routine life prevent the incidence of Internet use disorder (or addiction to the social network).

Social support theory is based on the works of Don Drennon - Gala and Francis Cullen, who drew on insights from several theoretical traditions. The theory is centered on the proposition that instrumental, informational, and emotional supports reduce the likelihood of delinquency and crime (Kort - Butler , 2017 ) . Later on, this theory was developed and applied to many disciplines such as psychology, medicine, sociology, nursing, public health, education, rehabilitation, and social work.

A large body of empirical works support this view, suggesting that people who are more socially integrated and are in supportive and rewarding relationships have better mental health and higher levels of subjective well - being (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Notably, the results of a meta-analysis (Holt - lunstad & Smith, 2012) show that being socially integrated in a network of meaningful relationships is a greater predictor of mortality compared to many other lifestyle behaviors such as smoking, physical activity and so forth social support theory has also been extended to the Internet and social media. As technology advances, the online support becomes more pervasive. Social support can be offered through social media websites such as blogs, Facebook groups , and online support groups . According to Hwang, this support resembles face - to - face social support , but also offers unique aspects of convenience , anonymity , and non - judgmental interactions ( Wong & Ma , 2016. Hossein Eskandari, 2020: 130-132)

### **Research Hypotheses:**

H1: Using mobile-based social networks is correlated with life satisfaction and this relationship is moderated by perceived social support.

H2: It seems that using internet-based social networks and social support are correlated.

H3: It seems that using internet-based social networks (the type and frequency of using social networks) and life satisfaction are correlated.

H4: It seems that social support and life satisfaction are correlated.



## Material and Methods

The present research was quantitative in data collection and analysis methods. It is considered as field research in the way it approached the topic of interest. This research also employed a descriptive type of investigation. A survey method of data collection was adopted using the required questionnaires with items that enquired about the dependent and independent research variables.

The present research population comprised students at Hormozgan, Payam-e-Nour and Azad universities in Bandar Abbas. Cochran's formula was used to estimate the sample size ( $n=300$ ). The sampling method was proportionate stratified and the strata were based on gender and academic level. In this type of sampling, the participants are usually divided into groups of similar features to minimize within-group changes. Then, from each stratum, a number of participants are selected randomly. In the sampling procedure of the present research, at first, the quota for each university was decided on from the whole sample and then the final participants were selected in terms of gender and level of education. Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and that the data collected from the questionnaires would only be used for research purposes. At last, the data collected using the questionnaires were statistically analyzed in Amos and SPSS.

## Instruments

**Life Satisfaction:** Participant's life satisfaction was measured utilizing five statements from previous studies (Kim et al., 2020, Wang et al., 2016). The reliability of the questionnaire was tested via Cronbach's alpha and found to be .81. For face and content validity, a panel of experts was consulted. Example items contain "In many ways, my life is close to my beliefs; The state of my life is perfect; I am satisfied with my life; I have gained whatever important I ever wanted in life so far; If I am to come to life again, there is nothing I like to change". Participants were required to rate the extent to which they agree with these questions according to a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

**Mobile social networks:** In the present research, this variable was measured as the frequency and hours of using mobile social networks as well as communicating with contacts or groups that link the user with others in the same network.



**Social support:** To measure perceived social support, Zimet's (1988) standard questionnaire was used with 12 items. The items measured perceived social support as an ordinal variable on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Cronbach's alpha was estimated at .78. For the face and content validity of the instrument, a panel of experts was consulted. The items included: "I have someone who is there for me when needed; I have someone to share my happiness and sadness with; My family always tries to help me; I receive the emotional support mainly from my family; I have someone for me, someone whom I can truly trust; My friends really try to help me; I can count on my friends when things go wrong; I can talk to my family about my problems; I have friends with whom I can share my happiness and sadness; I have someone to myself who cares about my feelings; My family is always ready to help me in decision-making; I can confide in friends to tell them about my problems".

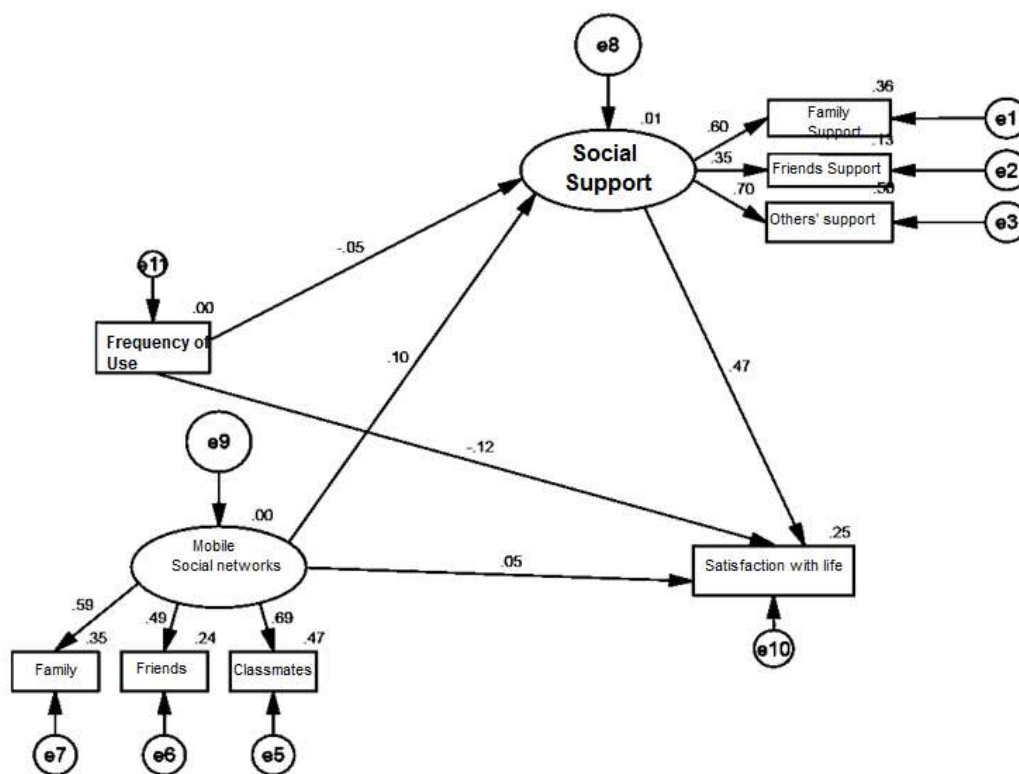
## Results

The findings of the present research were summarized as descriptive statistics and the final model was mapped in Amos.

### Descriptive statistics

Among the final sample of 330 respondents, there were 178 (59.3%) female and 119 (39.7%) males. 3 participants did not mention their gender. As for marital status, 220 participants (73.3%) were single and 77 (25.7%) were married and 1 (.3%) marked "other". Concerning the residence, 142 participants (47.3%) lived a dormitory life; 154 (51.3%) lived in their personal accommodation and 2 (.7%) marked the "other" choice. The participants' field of study showed that among the 300 participants, 25 (8.3%) were majoring in basic sciences, 8 (2.7%) in technical sciences, 7 (2.3%) in agriculture, 177 (59%) in human sciences, 68 (22.7%) in engineering and 2 (.7%) in medical sciences. 13 participants did not respond to the items. Besides, 185 participants (61.7%) held a bachelor's degree; 112 (37.3%) a master's degree and 3 left this item unanswered.

## Research model analysis



**Figure 1.** The final structural equation model

**Table 1.** Model fit indices of the hypothetical model

Index	X <sup>2</sup> /df	df	P	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	NFI	CFI
Accepted range	1-3	≥0	≤.05	≥.90	≥.90	≥.01	≥.90	≥.90
Model goodness of fit	2.31	17	.002	.97	.93	.66	.95	.91

According to the acceptance range of estimation in the table above, the model can be said to be fit. The chi-square estimate of the model above is 2.31, which ranges between 1 and 3 (the normal range). The GFI is higher than .90 as it is .97. The standard error of measurement exceeds .01. RMSEA is estimated at .66.

**Table 3.** Factor loadings and estimated values of life satisfaction

Variable	path	component	Unstandardized estimate	Standardized estimate	p-level
	-->	Family	1.000		
Mobile social networks	-->	Friends	.805	.152	***
	-->	Classmates	1.296	.261	***
Social support	-->	Family support	1.000		
	-->	Friends' support	.728	.162	***
	-->	Others' support	1.007	.174	***
Frequency of using internet-based social networks	-->	Social support	-.034	.045	.456
	-->	Life Satisfaction	-.160	.074	.030
Mobile-based networks	-->	Social support	.079	.073	.281
	-->	Life Satisfaction	.094	.118	.428
Social support	-->	Life Satisfaction	1.020	.185	***

Figure 1 was drawn to show the relationship between the frequency of using mobile-based social networks, social support and life satisfaction. It also addressed the relationship between mobile social networks, social support and life satisfaction. The goodness of fit index in evaluating the structural model of the relationship between mobile social networks, social support and life satisfaction showed that the data generally supported the hypothetical structural model. Besides, standardized estimates indicated a statistically significant correlation between social support and life satisfaction. The p-values reported above (.000) confirmed the significant positive correlation between social support and life satisfaction. Also, the estimated p-value (.03) showed a statistically significant correlation between the frequency of using internet-based social networks and life satisfaction. As the estimated values show, a significant negative correlation exists between the frequency of using internet-based social networks and life satisfaction.

## Discussion

The present research aimed to explore the relationship between using mobile-based social networks and life satisfaction moderated by perceived social support. The analytic results showed that the participants' level of life satisfaction was moderate and the rate of their social support was above average.

Besides the above-mentioned indices which were among the background and descriptive statistics, variables such as mobile-based social networks and the frequency of using them (e.g. What's App,

Telegram, Instagram) were also measured. The results revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between the frequency of using mobile social networks and life satisfaction. In other words, the higher the frequency of using mobile social networks, the lower the level of life satisfaction. These findings were contrary to the findings reported by Jung Oh et al. (2015), and Zhan et al. (2016), who showed that social networks through social support can increase life satisfaction. The findings are consistent with the findings reported by Gholamzadeh Bafghi and Jamali Bafghi (2018). The findings revealed no statistically significant correlation between mobile social networks and social support. In other words, it was hypothesized that using different social networks and the frequency of using them increased the participants' perceived social support. Yet, the present findings showed to the contrary and no significant correlation was found. However, Jung Oh et al. (2015) showed that social networks can attract more social support.

Structural equation modelling results showed a statistically significant correlation between perceived social support and life satisfaction. In other words, increasing social support helps promote life satisfaction. This finding is in agreement with a body of research by Oduaran and Akramai (2018), Kasprzak (2010), Edward and Lopez (2006), which proved the effect of perceived support on life satisfaction. This finding can be explained by the fact that those with a privilege of high social support assess their own qualifications and achievements in interpersonal relations (Thompson, 1999). These positive perceptions of life affect people's lives.

In conclusion it is pinpointed that specialists in social sciences perceive membership to different groups as a way to increase social capital which can, in turn, increase social support and consequently life satisfaction. However, according to the present findings, though social support can increase life satisfaction, membership to internet-based social networks and the frequency of using them could not increase social support. To the contrary, they lowered the participants' level of life satisfaction. It seems that social networks are not adequately supportive to the participants. Thus, it can be concluded that mobile-based social networks lack the required supportive role and have somehow changed their function.

### Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

### Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

### Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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