THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTION REGULATION DIFFICULTIES AND SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ADDICTION

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ABSTRACT

One of the internet facilities that help run social activities is social networking sites. The use of social networking sites is stable on an annual basis at a duration of 3.5 hours/day and is said to bring positive emotions to the users. However, excessive use that tends to lead to the formation of social networking sites addiction can be associated with difficulty in regulating emotions. Previous study had suggested a relationship between social networking sites addiction and emotion regulation difficulties in the context of Chinese social networks. To examine this hypothesis in another location of Jakarta, this study used a non-experimental quantitative method with a self-report questionnaire, namely the adapted version of Social Networking Addiction Scale (SNAS) and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS). Participants in this study were determined by the cross-sectional approach, involving 391 students (18-24 years) domiciled in Jakarta or who are enrolled in any university in Jakarta. Data was analyzed using Spearman correlation, and the result shows that there is a significant positive relationship between emotion regulation difficulties and social networking sites addiction {r (389) = 0.330, p < 0.01}.

Keywords: *Social networking sites, social networking sites addiction, emotion regulation difficulties, university students*

1. PREFACE

The Internet has become one of the most important aspects in the world of technologies we are currently living in. With the pandemic still on-going and limiting most social activities, the internet and its feature to enable social interaction through social networking sites are the choices that people use to replace and facilitate their social life. According to the statistics published by We Are Social [1], the users of both internet and social networks from Indonesia has reached more than 202.6 million users and 170 million users respectively. The average duration Indonesian users spend on the internet is 8 hours 52 minutes and social networking sites (SNS) for 3 hours 14 minutes in one day [2]. By comparing the number to the previous data by the same publisher [3][4], it can be said that the duration of Indonesian users spend on SNS has been stable at about 3.5 hours per day.

Although the use of SNS has been much help, excessive use of the social networks may bring negative effects to the users. An article written by ABC [5] told the story of Indonesian university students who had the hobby to spend more than average time of use and keep opening their social networks account every five to seven minutes. They also admitted they even had dreams of the contents they saw while they were repeatedly opening their SNS account. It is said they had to delete (uninstall) the said SNS application to stop those effects and become more

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productive, even though they also admitted they would still try to return to the old habit of opening their SNS. This case written by ABC is one example of social networking sites addiction. As described by Griffiths et al. and Echeburua & de Corral, social networking sites addiction is a pathological behavior of using social networking sites until the individual feels negative effects to one's self. These negative effects, as described to the story in ABC (2019), may include dependence, disruptions to one's daily activities, and many more such as irrational procrastination [8] or lower academic performance [9].

The cases of social networking sites addiction in previous articles have one thing in common, and that is the positive feelings (becoming entertained) coming from exploring SNS and causing one to maintain the use of it. The positive feeling caused by use of social networks is a kind of emotions that social network users feel and want to maintain, thus the use of social networks can be regarded as a method for regulating emotions. Emotion regulation itself is the process of one changing what, when, and how their emotional experiences are felt and expressed [10][11]. Although using SNS can be regarded as one's method of regulating emotion, depending on it solely may indicate that the individual has no other way to regulate their emotions. This may suggest they have difficulties in regulating their emotions.

A previous study by Liu and Ma has already explored the significant relationship between emotion regulation difficulties and social networking sites addiction. However, the research was done in the context of three Chinese social networking sites, which are barely used by Indonesian SNS users. The social networking sites addiction scale used in the research also has yet to differentiate between the excessive use of SNS because of obligatory needs (such as one's job that requires them to stay and explore SNS) or recreational purposes.

The researchers in Liu and Ma have explained the relationship between emotion regulation difficulties and social networking sites addiction: one compensates for the difficulties in regulating emotions by using social networking sites as SNS use brings them the positive emotions they may not be able to get otherwise. This cycle repeats and until they develop social networking sites addiction because of their emotion regulation difficulty. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between emotion regulation difficulties and social networking sites addiction in a broader SNS context, by using another scale to measure the variable of social networking sites addiction adapted to Indonesians' preferred social networking sites.

Hypothesis: Emotion regulation difficulty has a significant positive relationship with social networking sites addiction.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study included 391 university students that are domiciled in Jakarta or currently enrolled as an active student in any university in Jakarta. Data from participants were collected by a non-experimental quantitative method via a self-report online questionnaire (Google form). Participants in this study ranged from 18-24 years of age (M = 20.03 years ± 1.31) and 72.63% of them are female. On average, participants have/use 5-6 SNS accounts from 10 specified (Youtube, Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook including Messenger, Twitter, Line, Linkedin, Tiktok, Pinterest, and Skype). About 23.013% participants were employed when they filled in the questionnaire.

Social networking addiction scale

Social networking sites addiction is measured with Social Networking Addiction Scale (SNAS) by Shahnawaz and Rehman [13]. This scale originally includes 21 positive items for six dimensions, which are (a) salience (4 items), (b) mood modification (3 items), (c) tolerance (3 items), (d) withdrawal (4 items), (e) conflict (3 items), and (f) relapse (4 items). The total score of social networking sites addiction is calculated by summing the score of every item, and higher score indicates higher tendency to have social networking sites addiction.

Several examples of the original items are "These days, I spend more and more time on social networking sites," and "I have failed to cut down the time I spend on social networking sites." In this study, 9 additional negative items were adapted from the original 21 items and added into the original items line-up, totalling the use of 30 items. The Cronbach Alpha's score of this adapted version of SNAS is 0.882, which is gained after excluding two items (item 19 and 22, both are added, negative items) that have their corrected correlation below 0.2.

Difficulty in emotion regulation scale

Emotion regulation difficulty is measured with Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) by Gratz and Roemer [14]. This scale includes 36 items for six dimensions, which are (a) lack of awareness, (b) lack of emotional clarity, (c) non-acceptance, (d) impulse, (e) lack of regulation strategies, and (f) difficulty engaging in goal-directed behavior. The score of DERS is calculated by transforming 11 negative items and summing them with the other 25 positive items. Higher score indicates higher possibility to have emotion regulation difficulties.

Two examples of the item used from this scale are "I have difficulty making sense of my feelings," and "When I'm upset, I have difficulty concentrating." The Cronbach Alpha of DERS in this study is 0.933, which is gained after excluding three items (item 3, 17, and 34) that have their corrected correlation below 0.2. After item reduction, the Cronbach Alpha for each dimensions is acceptable: awareness, $\alpha = 0.778$; clarity, $\alpha = 0.885$; non-acceptance, $\alpha = 0.779$; impulse, $\alpha = 0.891$; strategies, $\alpha = 0.763$; and goals, $\alpha = 0.832$.

3. RESULTS

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted before any statistical analysis, and the result shows that data in this study does not have a normal spread. Thus, non-parametric tests are used to analyze the hypothesis. As shown on Table 1, based on the Spearman correlation done, there is a significant relationship between social networking sites addiction ($M = 3.251$, $SD = 0.542$) and emotion regulation difficulties ($M = 2.662$, $SD = 0.626$), $rs\ (389) = 0.330$, $p < 0.01$. This result means the more difficult one's ability to regulate their emotions, the higher the probability for them to have social networking sites addiction.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis Result

	Variable	M**	SD**	1	2
1	Social Networking Sites Addiction	3.251	0.542	1.00	-
2	Emotion Regulation Difficulties	2.662	0.626	0.330*	1.00

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Note: *p < 0.01; **Based on a continuum scale of 1-5.

Other than examining the correlation of the two variables as a whole, this study also examined the effect of gender and employment status differences of the participants. As there is an inequality between the number of male and female participants, Mann-Whitney U test was conducted on both social networking sites addiction and emotion regulation difficulties. As shown on Table 2, there is no gender influence (Mdnmale = 2.636; Mdnfemale = 2.727) on emotion regulation difficulties, but there is a significant difference between male (Mdn = 3.071) and female (Mdn = 3.321) regarding social networking sites addiction. The result shows that female students tend to have significantly higher scores on social networking sites addiction than male students, and this effect is relatively small (d = 0.384).

Taking the result into account, another Mann Whitney U test was performed to examine gender differences on each dimension of emotion regulation difficulties. Based on the result shown on Table 2, there is also no gender difference between male and female scores on each dimension of emotion regulation difficulties. Female participants have higher mean scores on all dimensions, except for Impulse where male participants have the higher score of.

Additionally, participants' employment status was also taken into account whether there is any difference between the unemployed and employed students. Once again, Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to test this. Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference in social networking sites addiction score between employed students (Mdn = 3.161) and students who have yet to be employed (Mdn = 3.250). This test result shows that unemployed students have higher probability to have social networking sites addiction compared to students who are employed. The effect of this difference is relatively small (d = 0.255).

Table 2
Mann-Whitney U Test Results on Gender Differences

Variable / Dimension	Male		Female		U	z	p
	M**	SD**	M**	SD**			
Social Networking Sites Addiction	3.101	0.550	3.308	0.529	11539.00	-3.670	< 0.001*
Emotion Regulation Difficulties	2.598	0.649	2.686	0.617	14170.00	-1.028	0.304
Lack of awareness	2.159	0.842	2.192	0.744	14456.50	-0.745	0.456
Lack of clarity	2.456	0.853	2.651	0.979	13611.50	-1.593	0.111
Non-acceptance	2.882	0.764	3.004	0.798	13635.50	-1.569	0.117
Impulse	2.508	0.998	2.500	0.907	15118.00	-0.076	0.939
Limited strategies	2.759	0.741	2.793	0.690	14976.00	-0.219	0.826
Difficulty in goals	2.585	0.873	2.747	0.839	13992.00	-1.210	0.226
N = 391	n = 107		n = 284				

Note: *p < 0.001; **Based on a continuum scale of 1-5.

Table 3
Mann-Whitney U Test Results on Employment Status Difference

Variable	Unemployed		Employed		U	z	p
	M**	SD**	M**	SD**			
Social Networking Sites Addiction	3.284	0.531	3.144	0.567	11684.00	-1.979	0.048*
N = 391	n = 107		n = 284				

Note: *p < 0.05; **Based on a continuum scale of 1-5.

Through this study, the relationship between emotion regulation difficulties and social networking sites addiction in Jakarta university students. This research is a replication of the previous study by Liu and Ma [12] which was conducted in China and aims to see the relationship in another context, namely in Indonesians' preferred social networking sites. This study also found new and different findings from previous research.

In this study, emotion regulation difficulties have a significant positive relationship with social networking sites addiction. The result is the same as the previous study done by Liu and Ma [12], thus both variables have the same relationship whether in the context of Chinese's preferred SNS or Indonesians' preferred SNS. This relationship means that the more difficulties one has when regulating their emotions, the higher the probability of them having social networking sites addiction.

However, compared to the previous study's empirical continuum mean (social networking sites addiction: M = 2.779, SD = 0.693; emotion regulation difficulties: M = 2.455, SD = 0.752), the data from this study has higher empirical continuum means. This result may be caused by the COVID-19 pandemic still on-going while the study was performed. This proposed explanation is supported by several other researches in the context of COVID-19 pandemic [15][16][17][18] of which said that pandemic brought the higher tendencies towards addictions related to social networking sites and emotion regulation difficulties.

Along with the correlation analysis, this study also compared the result with the comparison test from Liu and Ma. The previous study showed that there are significant differences between gender on both emotion regulation difficulties and social networking sites addiction. The result differs from this study, which showed that only social networking sites addiction had significant differences between the two genders of the participant. Additionally, this study's female participants also had higher scores than male participants, which once again differed from what Liu and Ma had found. This inconsistency with the previous study may require more research into the gender differences on social networking sites addiction scores, however this result is not entirely new since there is another study ([19] in [20]) that said female participants have higher probability to have addiction involving social interactions than male.

The insignificant differences based on gender in emotion regulation difficulty scores also pushed this study to conduct more tests on the six dimensions of the scale. The comparison study on all dimensions showed there is no significant difference, but the result showed that all but one

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dimension (Impulse) had female participants scored slightly higher than male participants. This is a new finding that has yet to be described in Liu and Ma.

Another new finding this study has found is the differences of the score between unemployed and employed students. The result of Mann-Whitney U test showed unemployed students scored higher significantly compared to the employed students. The result aligns with a study by Aydin et al. where it is found that employed participants significantly scored lower on social networking sites addiction compared to students or job-seekers. This is yet another new finding that has not been described in the previous study by Liu and Ma, which also requires future in-depth research to study this result.

The authors realized that this study has limitations that may allow bias in the results. Similar to the previous study by Liu and Ma, the number of participants differentiated by gender was not balanced. Even though it did not bring any significant effect towards emotion regulation scores, this imbalance is still significant enough since there is a significant difference on social networking sites addiction scores. Additionally, the number of participants in this study is less than what Liu and Ma had conducted, nor did this study take any pandemic contexts into account anywhere.

Despite the limitations, this study adds information to previous study with the result of how there is a case where gender differences may have different higher scores on certain dimensions in emotion regulation difficulties and how employment status on university students brings an effect of differences on social networking sites addiction. Future studies should examine a risk factor of emotion regulation difficulties. One example that may fit can be whether one's skill to understand their own and others' emotions to think and act—that is, emotional intelligence [22][23]—is a risk factor of emotion regulation difficulties. By examining the emotional intelligence of an individual who has difficulties in regulating their emotions and social networking sites addiction, future study may be able to design future intervention towards improving emotional intelligence to lower the probability of developing social networking sites addiction.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the analysis conducted in this study, it can be concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between social networking sites addiction and emotion regulation difficulties in university students.

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