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# *Social Networks in Life of Modern Teenagers*



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# INTRODUCTION

*We don't have a choice on whether we do social media,  
the question is how well we do it.*

Erik Qualman

Nowadays, social activity in the Internet environment has become very fashionable phenomenon. Almost everyone, including schoolchildren, has an account on Twitter, Facebook, or national networks like VKontakte. Different sorts of chat rooms and services such as Skype are integrated in mobile phones.

It's not a secret that there are a lot of advantages and at the same time disadvantages of such a way of having your free time.

That's why we made up our mind to make a research based on such a great invention of the century of technologies as social networks and everything related to them.

The theme of our research work is "Social networks in life of modern teenagers".

The object of the work is social networks.

The subject of the work is the users of social networks.

The aim of our research is to analyze the influence of social networks on teenagers.

To achieve the set aim we've determined the following tasks:

- to find out information about social networks: their history and general characteristics;
- to analyse and compare the most popular social networks in our country;
- to determine positive and negative aspects of using social networks;
- to interview the users of social networks – the pupils of 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades of our school and the teachers;
- to determine the motives of using social networks by teenagers;
- to describe the results of our research;
- to create a computer presentation and booklets, describing the ways to cope with the problem of becoming net-addicted.

The hypothesis of the work is as following: spending time in social networks is becoming an inseparable part of daily routine of every teenager.

The topic of the research work is very actual, because today teenagers are the most active Internet users. They extensively use the possibilities of modern gadgets. Teenage age is the age of communication, age of the greatest desire to get approval from peers and the group that is significant for a teenager. Teenagers at all times tend to be in the "public network environments" [1]. If their parents spent their time in the parks, yards, for today's young people there is only one favourite place to be with their friends – social network.

The practical importance: our booklets with the set of helpful rules of using social networks can be used by teachers as well as by parents during their conversations with teenagers about the influence of the Internet on people.

# 1. SOCIAL NETWORKING: DEFINITION, HISTORY, TYPES AND MAIN FEATURES

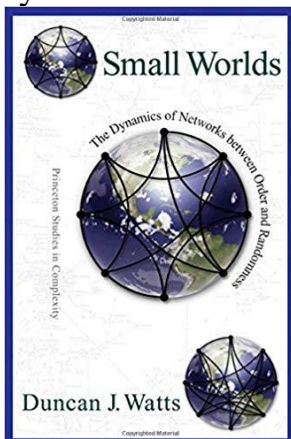
Social networks today – one of the most popular ways of entertainment and communication. They are fast, convenient and simple to use. You can be in touch with your companion, talk with him and even see him. Social networking is available to everyone at any time. It requires only a computer and an Internet connection.

A social networking is the process of creating, building and encouraging virtual communities and relationships between people with the help of different websites and other Internet services [1]. It allows like-minded individuals to be in touch with each other using such web-based applications as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Odnoklassniki and so on.

## The background

The modern theory of social networks originates from the middle of 20th century.

In 1951, Ray Solomonoff and Anatol Rapoport first talked about the possibility of this phenomenon. The Hungarian mathematicians Paul Erdos and Alfred Renyi continued this idea in the years 1959-1968 and wrote eight articles devoted to the principles of the formation of social networks. In the very end, Duncan Watts and Steven Strogach developed the theory itself.



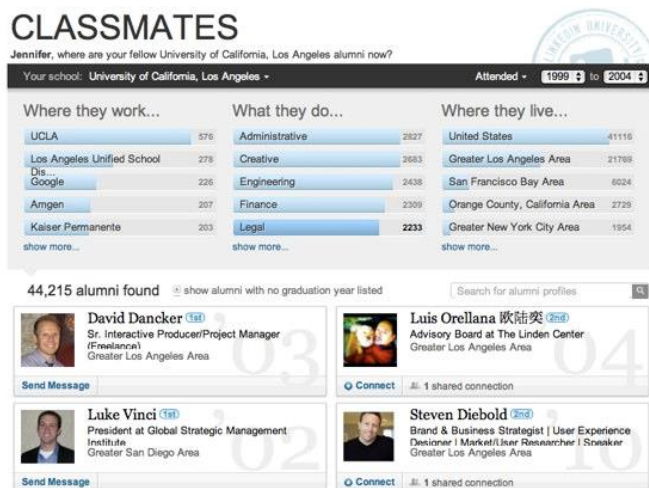
Picture 1.1 — “Small Worlds: The Dynamics of Networks between Order and Randomness (Princeton Studies in Complexity)” by Duncan Watts

The term “social network” was introduced in 1954 by sociologist from the Manchester School, James Barnes.



Picture 1.2 — an Australian and British social anthropologist John Arundel Barnes (September 9, 1918 – September 13, 2010)

The first social network with the use of computer technology in the history of the ARPA Net was created by the U.S. Department of defense in 1971 for their own needs. An American portal Classmates.com has become the first public social network in 1995 (Odnoklassniki – the Russian equivalent).



Picture 1.3 — An American portal

**Classmates.com**

However, social networks started to gain popularity when LinkedIn, Myspace and Facebook were launched. In 2006 in Russia there were Odnoklassniki and Vkontakte.

But for the first time a social network appeared in the form of an e-mail, carrying out communication between people. This is the first way of communication through computer networks. Initially, e-mail was intended for the exchange of information between two persons, but later, due to a small change (mailing lists) whole groups of people became able to communicate with each other.

Some years later teleconferences or newsgroups appeared. Compared with the previous version, this one made saving messages, which were then available to be viewed by each participant, possible. Also, the possibility of grouping messages in various ways was presented.

Telecom continued to evolve, more and more people become permanently work on the Internet. As a result of this service originated in the communication mode of the present time is that the user received a message from a buddy a few seconds after departure. This service is called Internet Relation Chat (IRC), which literally means “akin to communicate over the Internet”. Inside the IRC chat is carried out with the aid of special units – channels, combined with each other topics.

There was not an aim of a free, easy communication before developers of social network. They only tried to facilitate information, communication and problem-solving firms, companies, and just working people. But because of the appearance of the web of individual users, lowering the price of telecommunications and equipment, communication has become to be more informal, and began to appear a community of people with similar interests and views. Discussions became both public and private.

**Types of social media:**

**1) E-mails.** This form of messaging, which was formed the first from the others, demonstrated the possibility of communication through computer networks. It architecturally designed for the exchange of messages between two parties, but with a little modification it is possible to communicate to groups of people. Such modifications are groups or mailing lists.

**2) Blogs, microblogs or online diaries.** A blog is a website in which items are posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order. In blogs, microblogs or online diaries people share their experience, offer creative ideas and speak on different topics. No particular effort is needed to become a blogger. You just need to come up with

the idea of what you want to share with the audience, make a video and upload it on YouTube or other video websites. That's why the number of bloggers is growing rapidly with each passing day. Though, very often it's done for materialistic gains. The more subscribers you have, the more money you'll get. And the content may be good for nothing. In this case it's just a waste of time.

The key difference between a blog and a website is that the blog should be maintained and updated regularly with news and updates. Keeping people up to date normally makes them feel more in touch with your company or product. This allows them to feel more involved and up to date. These "posts" generally contain a mix of text, graphics and hyperlinks to other websites.

Blogging social networks allow their users to communicate with each other through blogging. Recently, this kind of social resources have become increasingly popular. These resources include such projects as Live Journal and Blogs Mail.ru.

**3) Social database or wikis.** It is filled by "the world" a variety of storage media. Wikipedia as a textbook example of a traditional encyclopedia. Wiki-type projects can be done in different areas and different types of content, such as the same anekdot.ru could be similarly organized. Realized the need: to accumulate and create a shared knowledge.

**4) Social networks.** They can be divided into five groups according to their functions:

**1. Relationship networks:** Facebook (the most popular social network in the world); VK; Odnoklassniki; LinkedIn (the most famous network of business contacts).

These are the most common and popular social media today – they try to offer users the maximum opportunities within a single platform. These social networks were the first to invite users to create a free personal mini-website, which later became known as the "profile".

**2. Media sharing networks.** They are different from all other projects because they focus on the interaction between participants via video, audio and photos. There are two types of media sharing networks:

a) photo sharing (Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat):



Picture 1.4 — The logo of media sharing network Snapchat

b) video sharing (YouTube).

This social media gives users advanced features for sharing video and photo content (filters, publishing short videos, private video channels).

**3. Online reviews** (Amazon, Uber, Airbnb). This social media is a huge data base that helps users to gather all the necessary information for making purchasing decisions.

**4. Discussion forums** (for example, 4PDA). The objective of these social networks – discussion of various goods as an expert, the placement of instructional videos from brands.

**5. Social publishing platforms** (Twitter, Live Journal). This type of social media includes services for blogging and micro-blogging where users create and publish text and media content.

**General features of virtual social networking are:**

1. The creation of personal profiles or accounts.
2. Providing opportunities for the exchange of information.
3. The ability to create and maintain a list of other users (friends).

**Specific features of virtual social networking are:**

- Nickname – the formal name for identification of personality.
- Smilies (born smile – a smile) – “smiley face”, allowing to display emotions in a text message.
  - The special jargon (reduction, communication style) to a particular group of people, being in frequent contact, used for identification sign.
  - A free style of communication, because the user is “virtual” – his “name” and personal information are formal [2].

So, summing it up, I'd like to underline that in recent years social media has become deeply integrated in our everyday lives. The concept of social media includes several categories: e-mails; blogs, microblogs or online diaries; social database or wikis and social networks. And all these categories have some general and specific features.

## **2. THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON TEENAGERS**

Today's ideology of using computers and mobile devices provides the fact that a user should always be “online”. When you find something interesting or make an interesting photo you try to post it in your own microblog as fast as possible, then in a full-sized blog, after in your personal web album, and then you can send a link to this photo to friends by email. It is necessary to tell the world about everything, hear reviews from everybody, answer to them, quarrel with someone, because he is not right, and then ban those “wrong” [2]. In fact, we live in this virtual life in parallel with reality. And people have different time ratio devoted to these two beings. Someone spends in social networks an hour or two a day, and someone needs to spend half a day. Of course, the question that worries us is the safety of using social networks.



## 2.1. The positive aspects of using social networks

It's evident that there are positive aspects of using social networks. They are the following:

1. **Communication:** people online have the possibility to express their opinion and can find like-minded people. Communication via the Internet helps to increase people's self-confidence. Social networking sites are very convenient for those who need to keep in touch with people living in different cities or different countries.

2. **New friends:** Many people nowadays get acquainted via the Internet; this is one of the fastest ways to find new friends. Moreover, thanks to social networking sites, you will never lose information about your friend and other important people. You don't need to keep in mind their dates of birth and phone numbers any more. At any moment you can check up this information via the Internet.

3. **Leisure activities:** Social networks offer us a variety of entertaining games and interesting information, the latest news.

4. **Education and self-education:** When reading the news, you can see different tips, from which you can learn something new and try to apply the tips in your daily life. Also, many homework assignments for students are related to information search in the Internet and some of the works should be done electronically: reports, presentations, essays. The Internet is an indispensable tool for these assignments.

Do not forget that in our society there are adolescents with various serious diseases. The social circle for such children is very limited, especially when they are unable to leave home and have to learn at home. Therefore, the computer can be their only means of communication, source of information, the only entertainment and exercise.

5. **New opportunities.** With the help of social networks people can make money – if a person has a large number of subscribers, big companies pay him for advertising their products on his homepage. We cannot exclude the possibility of contacts with famous people.

So, the Internet gives teens the freedom of speech, anonymity, the opportunity to increase their own self-importance and self-confidence. Thanks to social networking, the teenager who wants to separate from parental care, looks for a group where he could prove himself as an adult.

On the other hand, social media has given teens the ability to develop different skills that are important in the real world. Young people are increasingly able to interact more freely and easily in different online social environments, much like they will later on in life in the workplace.

This is a result of the endless exposure they get from being online and talking to different people, some of whom are their potential employers. Young people acquire skills that enable them evaluate and interpret different situations contextually and prepare themselves mentally for situations later on.

## 2.2. The negative aspects of using social networks

There are many potential problems with social networking sites and the teenagers that use them. The negative effects of social media are both physical and mental. It can change your perception of the world and yourself, and not always for the better.

I've analysed a lot of articles about negative effects of social media on teenagers. From my point of view the most important ones are the following.

**Depression and Anxiety.** Spending too long on social networking sites could be adversely affecting people's mood. In fact, such people are more likely to report poor mental health, including symptoms of anxiety and depression. To avoid these diseases it's necessary to remember that the recommended amount of time people should spend on social networks is half an hour per day. [3]

Risks of social networking are evident, we can't refuse it.

Because of their gullibility teenagers may be tempted to **obscene activities** through social networks.

Relatively **free access to the video websites for adults** in the absence of software restricting access to such sites is also a potential danger.

**Sites with destructive content** (for example, "group of death", the nationalist sites, sites with instructions for making drugs or bombs) can negatively influence teenagers.

Passion teens **network games with violence** increase their aggressiveness, and contribute to the formation of other forms of deviant behavior. In addition, there is the problem of computer addiction in teenagers.

On the contrary, the uncontrolled use of technical devices by children causes computer addiction. The term "Internet addiction" (Internet addiction disorder) was proposed in 1996 by the American psychiatrist Ivan Goldberg, under which he understood disorder behavior as a result of the use of the Internet and computer, it has an impact on everyday, educational, social, working, family, financial, or psychological spheres of human activity. Computer addiction forms very quickly – on average within less than a year.

Until recently, computer addiction was considered to be only a kind of psychological dependence, not a disease. However, on 20 December 2017 on the site of the popular science magazine "*New Scientist*" it was published that the World Health Organization should include the game disorder in the international classification of diseases as a mental state for the first time. The latest version of this diagnostic manual will be published in 2018. [4]

Causes of computer addiction are:

- the absence of trust relationships for the teenager in the family and at school;
- the lack of serious interests, hobbies and the availability of a large amount of free time;
- the inability of the teenager to establish contacts with their peers;
- self-doubt;
- insufficient or excessive control from the adults.

As a result computer addiction leads to negative consequences in the psyche and health of teenagers: Among them are:

- loss of control over time spent at the computer;
- loss of interest in social life: deteriorating relationships in the family, lower grades at school, the teen neglects personal hygiene and appearance;
- vision impairment, curvature of the spine, the formation of incorrect body posture, eating

disorders and sleep patterns, constant fatigue, chronic constipation;

- especially evident negative effect of computer addiction on the social-personal qualities: openness, friendliness, the desire of communication. There are also a number of studies that prove the impact of computer addiction (mainly computer games) on the level of aggressiveness and harshness of youth.

There is another issue – the negative impact of social networking on adolescent literacy. Currently, teenagers often express their thoughts on the network without complying with the rules of grammar and spelling, considering that the most important is to convey the message to the interlocutor.

In Russia, this method of communication is called “*olbanian* language”, “*padonkaf* language”.

This is not a purely Russian problem: in Germany there is a similar slang “Fong-Sprach” (Wong-SPRAS). Given the sharp decline in the interest of today's teens to read, they may perceive this style of communication, as the language norm. [5]

## 2.3. Social networks safety

### **Why should parents be worried?**

Not all social media sites are healthy environments for adolescents, however. Bullying, cliques, and sexual experimentation are just as prevalent online as offline. Because children are not good at self-regulation and are susceptible to peer-pressure, social media sites can be dangerous places to “hang out”.

The minimum age to access social media sites is 13, because the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act prohibits websites from collecting information on children younger than 13 without parental permission. However, age is based on self-report, so children younger than 13 can simply lie about their age and open accounts.

“Facebook depression” has joined the concerns people have about children’s social media use. A recent report by the American Academy of Pediatrics defines Facebook depression as “depression that develops when teens and preteens spend time on social media sites and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression due to the intensity of the online world” [5].

The factors that may contribute to depression are the various measures of popularity that Facebook creates. In particular, Facebook can make kids feel inadequate due to the “in-your-face” friend tallies, status updates, and pictures of others having a good time. For well-adjusted kids, however, social media can have the opposite effect, boosting their already positive feelings about themselves.

Why is this? As it turns out, well-adjusted children tend to put their best foot forward, broadcasting only their best attributes and qualities online. They choose what to reveal about themselves and filter or minimize negative characteristics. They are able, in other words, to promote a somewhat deceptively positive sense of self. In response, their friends’ feedback, comments, and posts tend to be overwhelmingly positive, creating a positive feedback loop. For, less well-adjusted children, constantly reading about the seeming success of their Facebook “friends” can make them feel worse than in real life where, at least, their peers visibly fail from time to time. The positive spin that popular kids put on Facebook ends up widening the disconnect between how less well-adjusted or unpopular kids view others and how they view themselves. However, it is unknown whether Facebook Depression is a distinct phenomenon or an extension of depression adolescents feel in other circumstances. The American Psychiatric Association does not list Facebook Depression (or Internet addiction) in its diagnostic manual.

Thus, it’s necessary to underline that social networking sites could be rather useful if all the people used them for their intended purpose – for communicating, searching for friends and sharing information with them. Caring parents should limit their tchildren’s access to social media and regularly check up their actions on the Internet. Otherwise, social networks can make a real harm to children’s and teenagers’ minds.

### 3. PRACTICAL PART

In practical part of our research we want to show the results of investigation that we have done. We asked pupils of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades and some teachers the following questions (see. Appendix):

- What kinds of social media do you mostly use?
- Do you prefer Russian or International social networks?
- In what social networks do you have personal profiles (accounts)?
- What are your motives of using social networks?
- Do you think that social networking is harmful?

58 pupils and 16 teachers were asked these questions.

Here are the results of our survey.

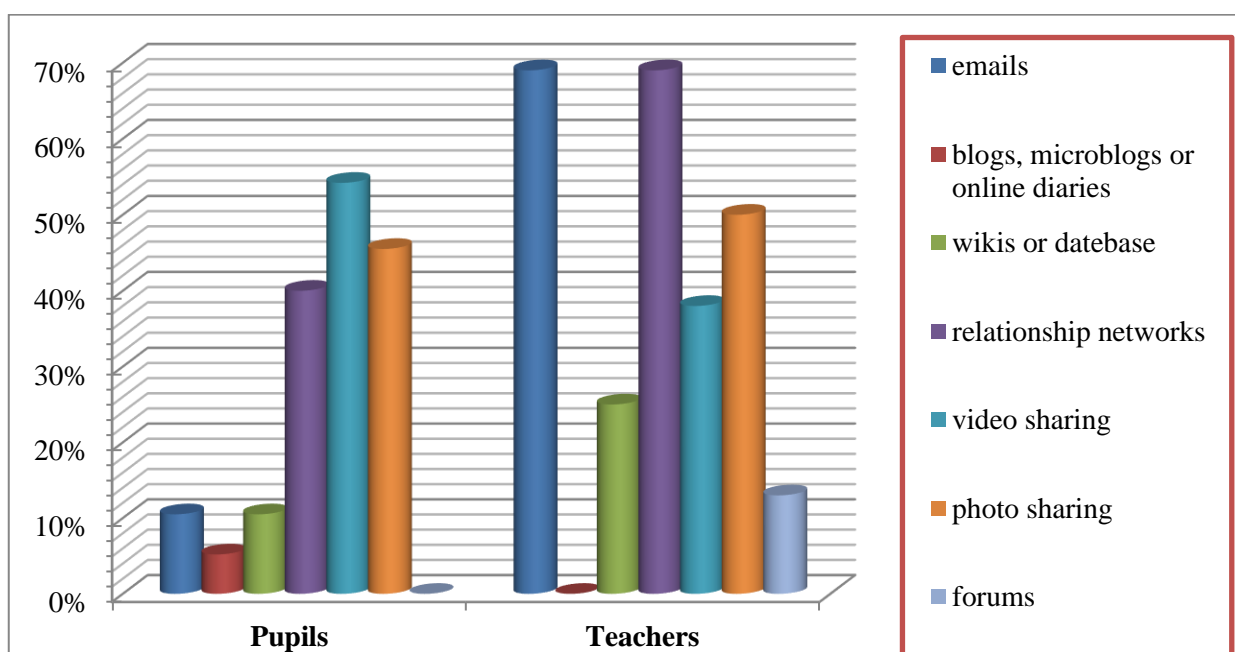
#### 1. What kinds of social media do you mostly use?

##### ***Pupils:***

- video sharing media is used by 31 pupils (54%);
- photo sharing media is used by 26 pupils (46%);
- relationship networks are used by 23 pupils (40%);
- e-mails and wikis or database are used by 6 pupils (11%);
- blogs, microblogs or online diaries are used by 3 pupils (5%);
- forums are not used by pupils at all.

##### ***Teachers:***

- video sharing media is used by 6 teachers (38%);
- photo sharing media is used by 8 teachers (50%);
- relationship networks and e-mails are used by 11 teachers (69%);
- database or wikis are used by 4 teachers (25%);
- different forums are used by 2 teachers (13%).



Picture 3.1 — What kinds of social media do you mostly use?

## 2. Do you prefer Russian or International social networks?

### ***Pupils:***

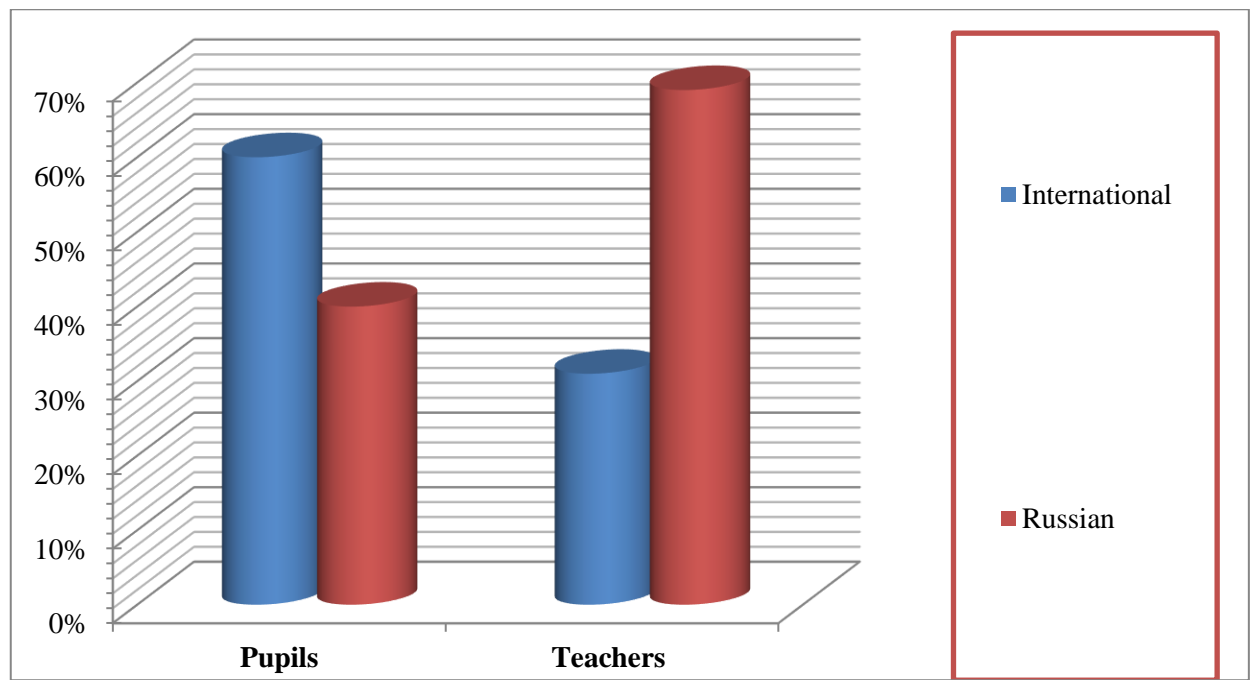
35 pupils (60%) prefer International social networks, such as Instagram and YouTube.

23 pupils (40%) choose Russian social networks, such as VKontakte.

### ***Teachers:***

5 teachers (31%) prefer International social networks, such as Instagram and YouTube.

11 teachers (69%) choose Russian social networks, such as Odnoklassniki.



Picture 3.2 — Do you prefer Russian or International social networks?

## 3. In what social networks do you have personal profiles?

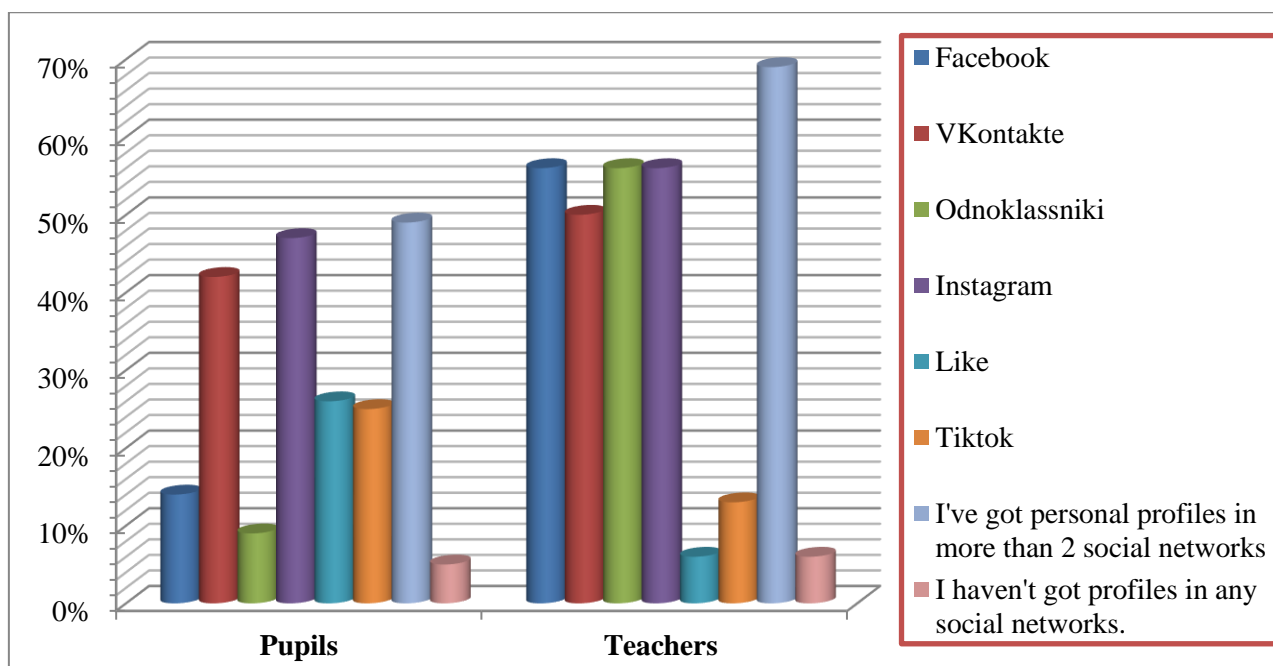
### ***Pupils:***

- 28 pupils (49%) have got personal profiles in two or more social networks;
- 27 pupils (47%) have got personal profiles in Instagram;
- 24 pupils (42%) have got personal profiles in VKontakte;
- 15 pupils (26%) have got personal profiles in Like;
- 14 pupils (25%) have got personal profiles in Tiktok;
- 8 pupils (14%) have got personal profiles in Facebook;
- 5 pupils (9%) have got personal profiles in Odnoklassniki;
- 3 pupils (5%) haven't got personal profiles in any social networks.

### ***Teachers:***

- 11 teachers (69%) have got personal profiles in two or more social networks;

- b) 9 teachers (56%) have got personal profiles in Instagram;
- c) 8 teachers (50%) have got personal profiles in VKontakte;
- d) 1 teacher (6%) has got personal profiles in Like;
- e) 2 teachers (13%) have got personal profiles in Tiktok;
- f) 9 teachers (56%) have got personal profiles in Facebook;
- g) 9 teachers (56%) have got personal profiles in Odnoklassniki;
- h) 1 teacher (6%) hasn't got personal profiles in any social networks.



Picture 3.3 — In what social networks do you have personal profiles?

#### 4. What are your motives of using social networks?

##### ***Pupils:***

The leading motive of using social networks by teenagers is communication, this answer was given by 30 respondents (52%).

35% of respondents (20 pupils) use social networks as the way to relax and have a rest.

The same number of respondents (20 pupils) use social networks to search information for their classes.

7 pupils (12%) agree with the statement that “a social network is a place free from the control of adults”.

For 6 pupils (11%) the most important motive of using social networks is self-affirmation and self-realization. Because they think that in social networks it is easier to express your opinion about anything than in the real life.

5 pupils (9%) have the desire to belong to a group of pupils with the same interests as they have.

##### ***Teachers:***

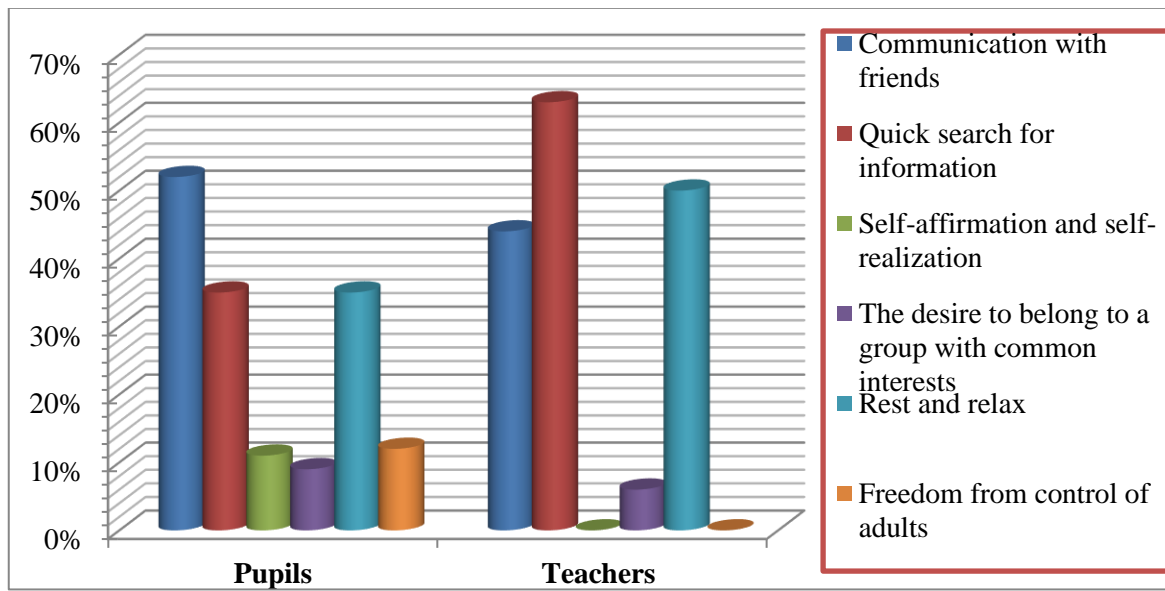
The leading motive of using social networks by teachers is quick search for

information, this answer was given by 10 respondents (63%).

50% of respondents (8 teachers) use social networks as the way to relax and have a rest.

7 teachers (44%) use social networks for communication with their friends.

1 respondent (6%) has the desire to belong to a group of people with the same interests as he has.



Picture 3.4 — What are your motives of using social networks?

**5. Do you think that social networking is harmful?**

***Pupils:***

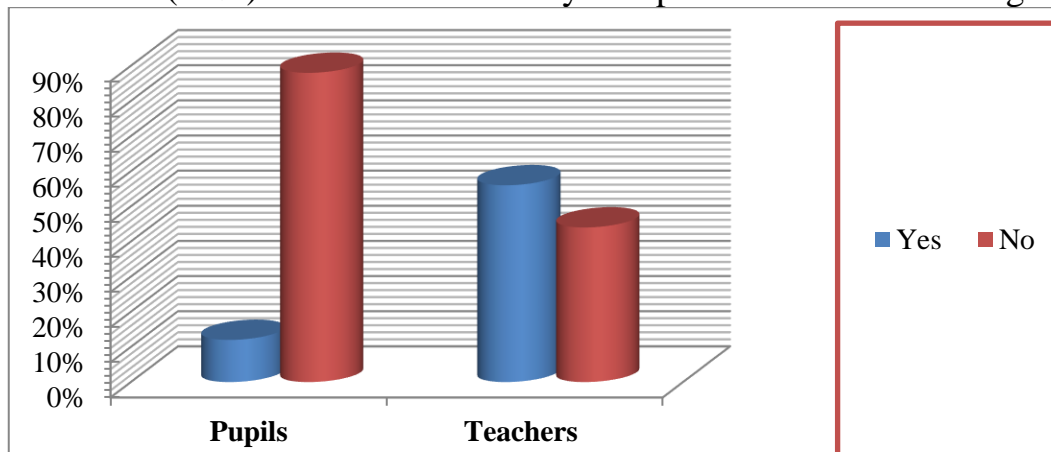
51 teenagers (88%) don't think that social networking is harmful. They can only innumerate a lot of advantages of spending time in the Internet.

7 teenagers (12%) believe that nowadays the problem of net-addicting is really actual.

***Teachers:***

7 teachers (44%) don't think that social networking is harmful. They can only innumerate a lot of advantages of spending time in the Internet.

9 teachers (56%) believe that nowadays the problem of net-addicting is really actual.



Picture 3.5 — Do you think that social networking is harmful?



## CONCLUSION

The work on this project helped us to understand that in recent years social media has become deeply integrated in our everyday lives. The concept of social media includes several categories: e-mails; blogs, microblogs or online diaries; social database or wikis and social networks. And all these categories have some general and specific features.

Social networking sites are platforms for people's remote communication, for example, exchange of different types of information: text messages, music, photo and video content. On the one hand, a social network is a very convenient tool for a quick message exchange, searching for old friends and making new acquaintances, keeping important information and discussing pressing issues in groups, right in the comfort of one's home.

On the other hand, psychologists and psychiatrists of the world ring alarm bells: social networking addiction too often becomes the cause of serious mental and nervous disorders, such as depression, social isolation, autism and even suicide attempts of teenagers.

Caring parents should limit their children's access to social media and regularly check up their actions on the Internet. It is necessary to teach children how to use the computer and the Internet safely and monitor the time spent by the child at the computer.

In conclusion it is worth saying that the hypothesis of our research work is proved: social networks are becoming an inseparable part of daily routine of every Internet user. And this process is inevitable. At the same time, we would like to warn teenagers about the risks of becoming net-addicted to the social networking. That's why we created booklets with the set of helpful rules of using this source of communication.

The results of our questionnaire show that the users of social networks in our school use practically all kinds of social media. The most popular one among pupils is video sharing media and among teachers is e-mails. Our pupils prefer International social networks, while our teachers choose Russian social networks, such as Odnoklassniki. 49% of teenagers have got personal profiles in two or more social networks. The most popular relationship networks among them are Instagram and VKontakte. As for our teachers the most popular relationship networks among them Instagram, Odnoklassniki and Facebook. The leading motive of using social networks by teenagers is communication. Moreover, they prefer to use social networks as the way to relax and have a rest and as the way of a quick search for information. The leading motive of using social networks by our teachers is a quick search for information.

We hope that our research will attract other students' attention to the problem of becoming net-addicted and will help them to acknowledge both the positive and negative sides of social networks and make use of the benefits while at the same bearing in mind the consequences.

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## APPENDIX

### Questionnaire “Social Media in My Life”

**1) What kinds of social media do you mostly use?**

- a) e-mails;
- b) blogs, microblogs or online diaries (Twitter, Live Journal, etc.);
- c) wikis or database (WikipediA, etc.);
- d) relationship networks (VKontakte, Facebook, Odnoklassniki, etc.);
- e) video sharing (YouTube, etc.);
- f) photo sharing (Instagram, Pinterest, etc.);
- g) forums or conversational threads.

**2) Do you prefer Russian or International social networks?**

- a) Russian (VKontakte, Мой [Мир@mail.ru](mailto:Мир@mail.ru), Odnoklassniki.ru, etc.);
- b) International (Facebook, MySpace, Instagram, etc.).

**3) In what social networks do you have personal profiles?**

- a) Facebook;
- b) VKontakte;
- c) Odnoklassniki;
- d) Instagram;
- e) Tiktok;
- f) Like;
- g) I've got personal profiles in more than 2 social networks.

**4) What are your motives of using social networks?**

- a) communication with friends;
- b) quick search for information;
- c) the desire to belong to a group with common interests;
- d) rest and relax;
- e) freedom from control of adults;
- f) self-affirmation and self-realization (in social networks it is easier to express your opinion about anything than in the real life).

**5) Do you think that social networking is harmful?**

- a) yes;
- b) no.