

Published as: Griffiths, M.D. (2012). Facebook addiction: Concerns, criticisms and recommendations. *Psychological Reports*, 110, 2, 518-520.

‘FACEBOOK ADDICTION’: CONCERNS, CRITICISM AND
RECOMMENDATIONS – A RESPONSE TO ANDREASSEN AND
COLLEAGUES

MARK D. GRIFFITHS

International Gaming Research Unit
Psychology Division
Nottingham Trent University

Corresponding author. Professor Mark Griffiths, International Gaming Research Unit,
Psychology Division, Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham, NG1
4BU, UK. mark.griffiths@ntu.ac.uk

Summary – This paper provides a brief critique of the ‘*Facebook* addiction’ research field in relation to the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale developed by Andreassen and colleagues (2012). Just like the term ‘Internet addiction’, the term ‘*Facebook* addiction’ may already be obsolete because there are many activities that a person can engage in on the *Facebook* website (e.g., messaging friends, playing games like *Farmville*, and gambling). What is needed is a new psychometric scale examining potential addiction to a particular online application (i.e., social networking) rather than activity on a particular website (i.e., *Facebook*).

The recent paper by Andreassen and colleagues (2012) contains the development of an interesting new screening instrument to assess 'Facebook addiction' (i.e., the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale; BFAS). However, there are a number of wider issues that require further consideration and comment. This short paper is not a so much a criticism of Andreassen *et al.*'s paper *per se*, but a brief critique of the 'Facebook addiction' research field.

Clearly, the field of research into online social networking has developed rapidly over the past five years alongside the increased popularity of *Facebook* and other social networking sites worldwide. As with the introduction of other new technological phenomena and activities, research papers examining excessive, problematic, and/or addictive use of such new technological phenomena typically follow (Griffiths, 1995). Consequently, the first comprehensive review of 'social networking addiction' has recently been published (see Kuss & Griffiths, 2011) in addition to papers examining particular sub-groups such as adolescents (Griffiths & Kuss, 2011; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012)..

It could perhaps be argued that the paper by Andreassen *et al.* (2012) is merely proactively responding to the fact that researchers studying problematic *Facebook* use currently have no psychometrically validated tool. On this level, the new BFAS is to be commended. However, there are a number of key issues that must be addressed for the 'Facebook addiction' field to move forward. Firstly, it would appear from the spate of recently published academic papers that *Facebook* has become almost synonymous with social networking. However, researchers need to remember when publishing papers that *Facebook* is just one of many websites where social networking can take place. Therefore, the BFAS has been developed relating to addiction to one particular commercial company's service (i.e., *Facebook*) rather than the whole activity itself (i.e., social networking).

Secondly, the real issue here concerns what people are actually addicted to and what the new BFAS tool is measuring. These arguments are almost identical to those in areas such as Internet addiction (Griffiths, 2010a) and mobile phone addiction (Choliz, 2010). Admittedly, *Facebook* is the biggest site for social networking activity but

there are a number of others including some which are sizeable but cater for a different demographic (for instance, *Bebo*, which is primarily populated by young teenagers). Therefore, the FBAS may only be relevant and/or applicable to people that are socially networking of the *Facebook* website.

Thirdly, although *Facebook* was originally set up to facilitate social contact between individuals it is now a site on which people can do so much more than just communicate with other people. For instance, *Facebook* users can play games like *Farmville* (Griffiths, 2010b), can gamble on games like poker (Griffiths & Parke, 2010; King, Delfabbro & Griffiths, 2010), can watch videos and films, and can engage in activities such as swapping photos or constantly updating their profile and/or messaging friends on every minutiae of their life (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). In short – and just like the term ‘Internet addiction’ – ‘*Facebook* addiction’ as a term may already be obsolete because there are many activities that a person can engage in on the medium. Therefore, ‘*Facebook* addiction’ is not synonymous with ‘social networking addiction’ – they are two fundamentally different things as *Facebook* has become a specific website where many different online activities can take place. As Griffiths has pointed out on numerous occasions (1999; 2010; Widyanto & Griffiths, 2006), there is a fundamental difference between addictions to the Internet and addictions on the Internet. The same argument now holds true for *Facebook* as well as activities such as mobile phone use. What this suggests is that the field needs a psychometrically validated scale that specifically assesses ‘social networking addiction’ rather than *Facebook* use. In the BFAS, social networking as an activity is not mentioned, therefore the scale does not differentiate between someone addicted to *Farmville* or someone addicted to constantly messaging their *Facebook* friends.

Finally, it should be noted that in the recent review by Kuss and Griffiths (2011), it was argued that in terms of the internet addiction sub-types developed by Young (1999) that ‘social networking addiction’ was a type of cyber-relationship addiction and that people are addicted to the rewards gained from interacting people within their friendship networks. This does not include activities like playing *Farmville* on *Facebook*. In such typologies, playing *Farmville* would be classed by Griffiths (2010) as a gaming addiction rather than ‘*Facebook* addiction’. Any further development of the BFAS needs to take this distinction into account.

References

- Andraessen, C.S., Tosheim, T., Brunberg, G.S., & Pallesen, S. (2011). Development of a Facebook Addiction Scale. *Psychological Reports, 110* (2), 1-17.
- Choliz, M. (2010). Mobile phone addiction: A point of issue. *Addiction, 105*, 373-374.
- Griffiths, M.D. (1995). Technological addictions. *Clinical Psychology Forum, 76*, 14-19.
- Griffiths, M.D. (1999). Internet addiction: Internet fuels other addictions. *Student British Medical Journal, 7*, 428-429.
- Griffiths, M.D. (2010). Internet abuse and internet addiction in the workplace. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 7*, 463-472.
- Griffiths, M.D. (2010). Gaming in social networking sites: A growing concern? *World Online Gambling Law Report, 9*(5), 12-13.
- Griffiths, M.D. & Kuss, D. (2011). Adolescent social networking: Should parents and teachers be worried? *Education and Health, 29*, 23-25.
- Griffiths, M.D. & Parke, J. (2010). Adolescent gambling on the Internet: A review. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health, 22*, 59-75.
- King, D.L., Delfabbro, P.H. & Griffiths, M.D. (2010). The convergence of gambling and digital media: Implications for gambling in young people. *Journal of Gambling Studies, 26*, 175-187.
- Kuss, D.J. & Griffiths, M.D. (2011). Addiction to social networks on the internet: A literature review of empirical research. *International Journal of Environment and Public Health, 8*, 3528-3552.

Kuss, D.J. & Griffiths, M.D. (2011). Excessive online social networking: Can adolescents become addicted to *Facebook*? *Education and Health*, 29. 63-66.

Widyanto, L. & Griffiths, M.D. (2006). Internet addiction: A critical review. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 4, 31-51.

Young, K.S. (1999). Internet addiction: evaluation and treatment. *Student British Medical Journal*, 7, 351-2