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REVIEW ARTICLE

Internet as Influencing Variable in Child's Socialization: A Review

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Abstract:

Socialization is a process whereby an individual learns the norms, values, behavior and social skill appropriate to one's social position. It also refers to the process by which young people acquire various patterns of cognitions and behaviours (Moschis and Moore, 1979). The process of socialization is an endless process that begins at the earlier years of life and continues till the last breath. However the most influencing period is childhood where the individual is most receptive during these growing years of life. Psychologists, Sociologists and Anthropologist recognize and acknowledge the role of family, culture, school, peer groups as the vital agents in influencing the pattern of socialization in children. Recently, another factor has emerged as the powerful influencing variable affecting the socialization of a child –Internet. Internet has a growing influence on children as children often take the rescue of their virtual self as defense mechanism to satisfy their innate needs. Children often get absorbed in this cyber world which virtually presents them with their demanded gadgets, dolls, accessories, sports items and

sportswear, toys. Etc. and help them attain an unrealistic personality. Children are spending so much time online that one in three now struggles with offline activities that require concentration such as reading a book. This paper intends to review and present the important issues of the effect of Internet on the socialization of children.

Introduction:

Socialization is the process whereby an individual learns to adjust to a group (or society) and behave in a manner approved by the group (or society). Socialization essentially represents the whole process of learning throughout the life course and is a central influence on the behavior, beliefs, and actions of adults as well as of children (Spitzberg and Huwe, 1991). Socialization involves a variety of outcomes, including the acquisition of rules, roles, standards and values across the social, emotional cognitive and personal domains. It can be accomplished by a variety of individuals including parents, teachers, peers and siblings as well as by school, the media and the least but not last, internet (Grusec J.E. and Hastings P.D., 2007).

Scientific Rationale:

This paper intends to review and present the important issues of the effect of Internet on the socialization of children. The Internet is a primary educational and developmental tool for many parents and teachers (Demner, 2001). As Tony Blair has said “Technology has revolutionized the way we work and is now set to transform education. Children can’t be effective in tomorrow’s world if they are trained yesterday’s skills.” (<http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5090/1/issues-of-ict-school-reform-and-learning-centred-school-design.pdf>)

Some socialization issues like social inclusion and exclusion, children’s identities and friendships in on-line and off-line worlds and their relationships with families and teachers and immediate social environment are key issues in this context. There are other issues too, like contemporary modern panics about children’s risk from dangerous strangers online, about corruption and lost innocence from adult centered material on the web and about the addiction of life on screen. Positive socialization is the type of social learning that is based on pleasurable and exciting experiences. We tend to like the people who fill our social learning processes with positive motivation, loving care, and rewarding opportunities (Patel C.K, 2013).

There are couple of areas where the internet is influencing the socialization which are extensively studied globally. Few of them are as follows:

1. Internet affecting the language

Language usage and vocabulary are the parts of socialization. The usage of language has been drastically changed in the era of internet. People have evolved novel ways to communicate through as little words as possible to facilitate the SMS or Whatsapp communications. This is also reflected in the children’s use of language in daily communication. Computer slang is developing pretty fast as children more and more use laptops tablets and mobile phones. According to Warschauer, M. (2002), new colloquialisms spread like wildfire amongst groups on the internet. People using word play to form groups and impress their peers is a fairly traditional activity, he added. In recent years, the Internet has come to dominate our lives. E-mail, instant messaging and chat are rapidly replacing conventional forms of correspondence, and the Web has

become the first port of call for both information enquiry and leisure activity. (<http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-10971949>).

On the basis of socialization of children, the main effect of medium of instruction was significant on the family influences and relationship with teachers (Tripathi A.K., 2014).

2. **Internet as a technology affecting socialization:**

The most modern form of socialization is technology socialization. (Parente et al., 2009) have coined that technology socialization is accomplished via personal experience to a large extent especially when the internet usage is specific, such as for entertainment, communication of information search. Kids today have more exposure to internet than in the past since they have grown up in the environment with advanced technologies.

As reported by Lindstrom and Seybold (2003), today's kids are the first generation of teenagers and tweenagers to be born with a mouse in their hands. They are as comfortable being online as they are when offline. This generation has growing passion for a medium which is both 'interactive' and 'instant'. Today, because of plethora of social working sites, kids have virtual presence in sites like Facebook, Orkut, skype, whatsapp and others, which gives them broader avenues of self expression. They further express that personal websites are like detailed electronic business cards.

URLs are exchanged in chat rooms, parties and on school playgrounds. Most kids have global address books and are constantly exchanging information. They not only surf the net with unprecedented speed and ease but also think in terms of megabytes and screen resolutions. Due to the advent of technology in the 1990s, electronic and digital media offer such comfort zones to the kids that they often see themselves as cyber kids". Facebook use is reported to have bad influences like addiction, wasting time, information overload, and isolation from physical society. (Altarawneh, H.A. 2014) Media is a significantly greater source of information than all other sources like personal experience, parents, peers or school (Parente D.H. et al., 2009).

3. **Internet and children's consumer behavior**

One aspect of socialization is Consumer socialization. In the modern publicity world, the children are targeted as most prominent and easily available consumers (Ali A. et al., 2012) mentioned that today they not only make purchases for themselves but also influence family purchase decisions. Children in the joint family are more influential than children in the nuclear family in the initiation of the final buying process (Chaudhary M., 2013). Research company TNS'S CAPI kids study found that over half (57%) of the 991 people aged between 10 and 19 surveyed reported that they used the Internet to research their purchases. They were also aware of the shopping comparison sites. Online shopping was more popular with boys among the age of 10-19 years olds surveyed (www.tns-global.com).

4. **Internet and parent-child relationship:**

General internet knowledge is most informed by schools and media. Therefore, it is important to be directive in our children's personal experiences. We should help to shape the attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors of our students in technology. This may be accomplished by educating parents to be proactive in their children's experience with technology to be sure to pass along appropriate information to them (Parente D.H. et al., 2009).

5. Internet affecting physical activities

It is believed that children become kind of “internet couch potatoes” which results into obesity which in turn affects child’s self perception in relation to its peers affecting socialization. However, Obesity is not found to be associated with children’s internet use but is related to physical activity (Salmon et al., 2000) but overweight children had less positive attitude towards physical activity in the “ social growth, social continuation and vertigo dimensions (Kim Y., 2003). It is observed that offline physical activities strongly influence the socialization as the child gets lots of opportunities to observe imitate and get motivated by physically interacting with peers and other children in real world. (Caspersen C.J. et al., 1999) suggested that early and continued intervention will be necessary to offset these declines in physical activity throughout adolescence and adulthood.

6. Internet affecting offline social activities

The amount of the internet use was found to decrease face to face interaction with siblings. Children used the internet for communication with friends. The internet was a place where children continued to maintain friendship from offline to online. Gustavo (2001) found that frequent internet users had lower levels of pro-social attitudes such as importance of helping others however (Kim Y., 2003) study results were vice versa and her data supported the internet as a place for social relations and communication.

Recommendations Or future Prospects in the study:

Children’s amount of internet use is predicted by the number of internet capable computers at home, ownership of a computer with internet access by child and internet experience (Kim Y., 2003) thus recommendation and future prospects for the study can be the following:

1. India is one of the main countries where online social activities run at the full speed especially after the easy and cheap availability of lap tops, tablets and smart phones. Social science researchers in India should put emphases upon studying the effects of internet on the socialization.
2. The use of Personal Computer and internet is mandatory in most of the schools in India now. Hence the school going kids extensively resort to using such gadgets for the education purpose but at the same time they are also exposed to the perils of harmful online activities. There is a dire need to protect them from such online activities that may harm the normal and desirable socialization. This calls for the active assemblance and cooperation between Psychologist, Sociologists, Social workers, School authorities, Teachers and last but not the least the cyber protectors and legal experts.
3. Attempts should be made to indulge the children more and more in activity based learning, outdoor activities and physical exposure to social activities like sports, picnics, welfare activities etc. so that they leave the cocoon of virtual cyber world and get the realistic view of the their environment.
4. Taking a social learning perspective, research should also be made to examine if there are differences in the way boys and girls are socialized to the Internet. Specifically, the study should investigate if:

- a. there is a significant difference between adolescent males and females in the perceived amount of knowledge regarding internet usage provided by various socialization agents (i.e. parents, school, media, and peers) and
 - b. within gender, there is a significant difference in the amount of knowledge regarding internet usage provided by various socialization agents.
5. Language is an important ingredient of socialization as it plays an active role in communication.
 6. The effect of online activities also depends on the time the child spends on internet which may depend upon the age, gender, ethnicity and social/economic class of the child. These factors need to be studied with a large size of samples.
 7. The issue of internet addiction would be interesting to investigate in terms of the displacement effect as well as children's physical and psychological health. Since Internet addiction apparently will influence children's time spent on daily activities as well as physical and psychological development, it is recommended to examine those factors (Kim Y., 2003).

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