

THE RISKS OF EXPOSING CHILDREN TO INTERNET

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Abstract

This study was undertaken to investigate the risks involved in exposing children to internet. A well-structured questionnaire which was the major instrument of data collection was administered on 250 children in secondary schools who were familiar with internet.

Data collected were analysed using frequency counts, percentages and weighted means. The results of the study revealed that majority of the respondents were highly aware of the use of internet and high frequency in the use internet. The study also identified risks exposed to by children on internet which include exposure to pornographic pictures and videos, involving in online gambling, receiving sexual messages with their weighted means and ranked first, second and third respectively. Opinions of using internet were also revealed by the respondents. There were eight statements, ranked from children deriving enjoyment using internet to internet use which makes children to get educational information.

Recommendations such as children being discouraged using phones with internet facilities at a stage in their life, advising children about their use of internet in their daily activities, parents should also encourage family meeting to discuss online issues and even placed it on parents to have monitoring software to keep up with their children's activities online were made.

Key words: Internet, Risk, Children

1.10 INTRODUCTION

There are various definitions that have been given to internet since its invention. The dictionary of contemporary English has defined internet as a computer system that can allow millions of computer users around the world to exchange information . It connotes that people all over the world can find all kinds of information on the internet. The modern information and communication Technologies which brought about internet have created a " global village" thereby, the world at large is " compressed" , in which people can communicate with each others across the world as if they were living next door to each other . The coming on board of internet as a result of significant advancement in Information Communication Technologies has become a welcome development Wildbit (2005).

The diversity of internet makes it difficult to define it precisely, people view it as a medium for exchanging information. To some, it is a medium to send mails, transfer files and documents. Users of internet use it for chatting and discussions which makes it a forum for sharing ideas and information. The use of internet from all indications, shows that a lot of advantages can be derived from using this tool.

What is amazing about internet is that, it is not a "respector" of anyone, once you know how to use it to get needed information, your chance to get all information at your fingertips cannot be contended with. The world of internet is ever changing everyday, new services are carried out through this global network. It has affected the society considerably and has revolutionized the ways of communicating, teaching, learning and so on. The internet offers innumerable services and facilities to people, and it is highly essential to understand the use of the internet and the services offered by it in a productive and positive ways. Internet influences the day-to-day lives of children in different ways. Perhaps, it is the only technology that has affected people irrespective of their age, location or profession and it has shrunk the whole world and brought people together in this information age, James (2010).

This period of information age which is characterized by the shift from traditional industry to an economy based on information computerization. This age is formed by capitalizing on the computer advances, with a transition spanning from the advent of the personal computer in the late 1990s to the internet's reaching a critical mass in the early 1990s and adoption of such technology by the people in the two decades after 1990. This critical transition has brought a fast evolution of technology in daily life, educational life style, as well as social life style in which children are mostly affected, and this has allowed rapid global communications and networking to shape modern society. Kids are more intellectually and socially engaged than ever before as a result of exposing them to internet. The ever changing nature of the internet continues to fuel questions as to its benefits and positive drawbacks. Internet provides advantages in different ways, this diversity makes it difficult to define the internet precisely. Internet users especially children not only consider the internet as an aid for living, but have seen it as a means of enjoyment in the areas of online music, movies and other sites. As the internet being used for useful purposes, so also being used for disgusting and unproductive activities in which children are exposed to. Internet has brought many advantages in the areas of getting information, analyzing it and used it for social, economic and academic advancement. There is a lot of damages that the same internet can cause as a result of abuse by children, going by this, according to a study, a child's internet use development begins aged nine and over the next four years period, their internet activity evolves from simply viewing content online to being active on internet.

1.11 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Children are known to be very unduly curious to learn and exploit things. The time when a child is considered educated after being exposed to a few educating materials is gone. The coming on board of internet has taken over the role of teacher, parent, hospital, religion to children. However, increasing reports on the psychologically additive characteristics of internet use by children have led to a growing concern amongst educators about the impact of the internet on children's well-being. This has brought many unpleasant changes in the life of children that are exposed and obsessed with internet. The ever changing nature of the internet continues to fuel questions as to its benefits and possible drawbacks. They spend long hours of day and night dating, chatting and sharing life experiences on internet, and this has made children to be more intellectually engaged than ever before. The internet has been undisputable to be a wonderful research and communication tool, but not all the sites visited by users are trustworthy, and not everyone a child encounters online has their best interest at heart. It is pathetic to observe that young people are accessing the internet at increasingly earlier ages, from a variety of devices and places and it is important to study this issue and to deal with possible exposure to likely dangers on internet. It is worth investigating to know the likely dangers children can encounter since their free time has been filled with internet activities,

especially when even the most remote corners of the world are just one click away. It is worth note that, for the first time in history, children have mastered knowledge much needed by adults.

1.12 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research examines the risk of exposing children to internet among others, with the following objectives:

1. To know their awareness of internet use.
2. To know their frequency of use of internet.
3. To determine the perception of Children about risks encountered on internet.
4. To know the opinion of children on the use of internet.

1.13 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Apart from highlighting the dangers involved in exposing children to internet , the finding of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge particularly in which internet is very relevant . The recommendations resulting from this study will also enable parents and guardians to checkmate their children in the use of internet. This can be used to formulate appropriate policies to enforce the use of internet by children in a productive and meaningful ways.

2.10 LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth of today is exposed to digital technology to a degree previously unseen. Modern technology can become an invisible but integral part of their lives. As well known, technology literacy is almost a requirement for employment these days, thus digital lifestyle in the area of using internet can be often advantageous, but it can also be a double-edge sword, Amanda Lenhart et.al (2007)

The impact of technological inventions, especially those connected with information and communication in which internet is at the centre stage of the whole affair are far-reaching on socialization, ways of thinking, and modes of learning. In light of the changes that have taken place in the life of kids, one wonders who the child of internet age might be? Edna Aphek(2002). He further stated that, children in the era of internet world to whom all the secrets of adulthood are revealed, especially those concerning violence and sex,making them seemingly matured because they are matured externally but not emotionally. This age of internet for children in the society has made it at risk, living in a sinking world without books, without order, a chaotic meaningless world.In the view of Tapscott(2002),he stated that whereas adults control television,children control much of their world on the Net. Tan Chan-Jin(2014)made the comment at a Children forum and stated that bullying and harassment are some possible consequences of exposing Children to internet.

Internet use by children should been seen as a tool for effective change in their stages of learning. Selinger(2000) observed that all forms of learning are enhanced by internet in the area of ICT (Information and Communication Technology), especially problem solving situations where children can learn to develop skill such as being systematic, logical and deductive through engaging themselves with carefully selected internet based tasks. This has been reversed by youths of today where the knowledge and use of internet is at the centre of their lives, and blames it for many of the illnesses of today's youngsters.

According to Ogunsola, (2004) the use of internet has revolutionized access to information and with its technology continues to have a profound effect in promoting on both social and academic development of our

children, and this has made internet to be like a playground for children and land of limitless possibilities and opportunities . Where an internet is available, acquisition of knowledge does not pose any form of difficulty because it offers unique and exciting opportunities to explore the world.

3.10 METHODOLOGY

Students in their junior classes were used for this study and which was carried out when their schools were in session. The respondents were randomly selected for the administration of self-made questionnaires. These questionnaires were design to elicit information needed from respondents going by the objectives of the study. Three junior schools were used and fifty questionnaires were randomly distributed in each school and monitored by the researcher. This helped in filling the questionnaires properly and response rate was high. The return rate achieved for the questionnaires was 98.0%. Out of total of one hundred and fifty questionnaires administered, one hundred and forty-seven were found useful for analysis. In executing the study, frequency count, percentages and weighted mean were adopted.

4.10 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 provides awareness level in the use of internet by children sampled for the study. This reflected that majority of the school children used for the study are aware of the use of internet. It reveals that 86 (58.82%) of the respondents are aware of internet use. This finding shows that, awareness level of internet use by children is on high side as indicated in table one.

Table 2 reflects the frequency of use of internet by sample school children .The frequency of use of internet shows the addicted level of respondents in the use of internet. As indicated above, 81(55.10%) of the respondents often used internet for different reasons. The table also revealed that 49(33.33%) of the respondents always engage in the use of internet since they have started using internet. The frequency of internet use by respondents in the table varies as shown, 10(6.80%). Sometime use internet while 5 out of the respondents rarely engage in the use of internet represented by 3.40%. The lowest response in the frequency of use of internet was 2(1.37%) indicated that the respondents never used internet.

Table 3 revealed the various risks that respondents have been exposed to in their course of using internet. The researcher used the weighted mean to rank the risk statements raised in the questionnaire and one of the statements was ranked first with the highest mean of 61.0. Thus, 122 respondents (children) out of 147 respondents agreed that exposure to pornographic pictures and videos on internet have been the risk that they are constantly exposed to in their course of using internet among the risks examined. This regular exposure to these illicit scenes can have advance effects on the morals of children.

The table also revealed that, children on internet are exposed to online gambling in which they are addicted to. This was next to pornography which was ranked second as danger encountered on internet by children through use of internet, among these risks are sexual messages being received by them when using internet in which they are familiar with. This portends a great risk on children and it has weighted mean of 59.0 and ranked 3rd on the table. Abuse of messages on internet was also part of risks encountered by children in their course of using internet with weighted mean of 53.5 and ranked 4th in the table.

This is possible for these children to freely send wrong messages with contumelious language. This improper use of language is achieved when using internet by children since sometimes, it does not involve face to face communication. It was also stated in the table that, violent pictures are easily received or seen on internet, this was ranked 5th with the mean of 50.0.

Anorexia as a result of psychological feelings of dangers exposed to on internet and radicalization which is a behavior that devalues morals in children also form part of the experiences encountered on internet by children. These two statements of risks were ranked sixth with weighted mean of 47.5, while bullying as an act of fierce way of expressing displeasure was part of what children exposed to on internet and it was ranked eighth with weighted mean of 47.5.

Table 4 provided statements on opinion of children on internet use. These statements were used to find out the children's opinions on internet use and the researcher used the weighted mean to rank the perception of respondents. Nine statements were raised and ranked first on the opinions of children on internet use was that children derived enjoyment using internet and the entertainment received can hardly be quantified by them. It shows that, it is pleasurable for children using internet and it had the highest mean of 62.0, thus 124 children out of total of 147 respondents agreed that they enjoy using internet. The table also indicated that children greatly involved in online game which is likened to online gambling, this is engaged with, in a bid to get cash reward. Most of the respondents also indicated that meeting people from all over the world can be achieved through internet which provided platform for this statement. The connection of people on internet was ranked 3rd on the table with the mean of 53.0. Respondents use internet to get the latest news of interest like entertainment, sports, fashion, technologies etc., this was agreed to by 98 respondents with mean of 49.0. Children use internet to view sex oriented materials and to influence a group or joining group of like minds. It is very surprising to observe from respondents that they use internet to get educational information which is ranked very low as compared to other statements ranked in the children's opinion of using internet. This was ranked eighth among the statements that were raised in the questionnaire.

5.10 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Internet has been seen to be a tool that has brought advantages to people's life in the areas of academics (Teaching and Learning) business, in which all forms of learning are enhanced by internet. This does not mean that, there are no drawbacks in the use of internet especially when children have been addicted to it. The internet itself is a whole new playground. It is full of information, games, music and everything else a child is interested in, but it is also full of hazard that unaware children could stumble upon, inadvertently placing them in dangers. This is because; children have shown an increased interest in its use for different purposes. It has been observed that, children tend to use internet more than adults, and what they use the internet for is disgusting and embarrassing going by reasonable things that internet can be used to achieve.

The following recommendations were made based on the findings from this study:

1. Children should be advised about their use of internet in their daily activities.
2. Parents should also encourage family meeting to discuss online issues.
3. Children can be discouraged using phones with internet facilities at a stage in their life.
4. Computer with internet facilities at home should be placed in a central room of the house in which parents could see what is being done.
5. Parents should be advised to have monitoring software to keep up with their children's activity online.

Table 1: Awareness of use of Internet

Extent of use of awareness	No of responses	Percentage distribution
Very High	49	33.33
High	86	58.50
Low	08	05.45
Very Low	05	02.72
Total	147	100

Table 2: Frequency of use of internet

Frequency of internet use	No of responses	Percentage distribution
Always	49	33.33
Often	81	55.10
Sometime	10	6.80
Rarely	05	3.40
Never	02	1.37
Total	147	100

S/N	Risks encountered	AGREE				DISAGREE				Rank
		Seriously Agree	Agree	Total Weight	Weighted Mean	Seriously Disagree	Disagree	Total Weight	Weighted Mean	
1.	Exposure to pornographic pictures and videos on internet	74	48	122	61.0	6	19	25	12.5	1
2.	Sexual messages are encountered on internet	69	49	118	59.0	7	22	29	14.5	3
3.	Exposure to internet makes children involve in online gambling	70	51	121	60.5	7	19	26	13.0	2
4.	Abuse of messages on internet	60	47	107	53.5	5	35	20	10.0	4

5.	Bulling can also be encountered on internet	47	48	95	47.5	32	20	52	26.0	8
6.	Violent pictures form part of risks encountered through use of internet.	58	42	100	50.0	9	38	47	23.5	5
7.	Anorexia as a result of psychological feelings of danger exposed to on internet.	52	43	95	47.5	18	34	52	26.0	6
8.	Radicalization is part of risks encountered on internet.	50	45	95	47.5	22	30	56	26.0	6

Table 3: Risk encountered by using internet

S/N	Statement	AGREE				DISAGREE				Rank
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Total Weight	Weighted Mean	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total Weight	Weighted Mean	
1.	Children derive enjoyment using internet.	78	46	124	62.0	7	16	23	11.5	1
2.	Internet use makes children get educational information	22	38	60	30.0	33	54	87	43.5	8
3.	Children use internet to play game/online gambling	71	44	115	57.5	14	18	32	18.0	2
4.	Internet use gives sex oriented materials	39	53	92	46.0	19	33	52	26.0	5

5.	Children use internet to read latest news of interest e.g. sports,entertainment,fashion, Technologies etc.	60	34	98	49.0	12	37	49	24.5	4
6.	Meeting people or connecting people	66	40	106	53.0	18	23	41	20.5	3
7.	Products of values can be found on internet	18	31	49	24.5	37	61	98	49.0	9
8.	To influence a group and joining group of interest	51	19	70	35.0	35	42	77	38.5	6
9.	To communicate via available social media	22	43	65	32.5	23	59	82	41.0	7

Table 4: Children’s opinion on internet use

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