

Social and Psychological Effects of the Internet Use

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ABSTRACT

Background and Aims: Over the past two decades there was an upsurge of the use of Internet in human life. With this continuous development, Internet users are able to communicate with any part of the globe, to shop online, to use it as a mean of education, to work remotely and to conduct financial transactions. Unfortunately, this rapid development of the Internet has a detrimental impact in our life, which leads to various phenomena such as cyber bullying, cyber porn, cyber suicide, Internet addiction, social isolation, cyber racism etc. The main purpose of this paper is to record and analyze all these social and psychological effects that appears to users due to the extensive use of the Internet. **Materials and Methods:** This review study was a thorough search of bibliography data conducted through Internet and library research studies. Key words were extracted from search engines and data bases including Google, Yahoo, Scholar Google, PubMed. **Findings:** The findings of this study showed that the Internet offers a quick access to information and facilitates communication however; it is quite dangerous, especially for young users. For this reason, users should be aware of it and face critically any information that is handed from the website

Key words: Internet, Social Network, Cyberbullying, Cyber racism, Internet Addiction, Internet Risks, Online scams.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is an undeniable fact that both computers and the Internet have become one of the most important achievements of modern society. They bring their own revolution in human daily life (science, education, information, entertainment etc) eliminating the distances and offering immediate and easily access to information and communication. With the continuous development of new technologies, the Internet users are able to communicate anywhere in the world to shop online, use it as an educational tool, work remotely and carry out financial transactions with various services offered by banks. The infinite possibilities that are offered by the Internet can often lead users to abuse it, or to use it for malicious purposes against other users, organizations and public services. With the rapid spread and growth of the Internet, they have appeared some social phenomena such as cyberbullying, internet pornography, grooming through social networks, cybersuicide, Internet addiction and social isolation, racism on the web. Moreover, there is always the risk of any sort of fraud exploitation by the so called

experts of technology systems who use Internet as a mean to carry out illegal acts.

Social Networks

The human being is often considered as a “social being.” Therefore, it is no surprise that the Internet is continuously transformed from a simple tool for publishing information to a mean of social interaction and participation. Social networks (1) are characterized as online services that allow individuals to create a public profile within an entrenched net system. Additionally, the users publish a list of other users with whom share a connection and view and interchange their own lists of connections and those who are created by others in the system. Social networks are a set of interactions and relationships. The term is also used today to describe websites that allow interface between users sharing reviews, photos and other information. The most famous of these websites are Facebook, Twitter, My Space, Skype, OoVoo, LinkedIn, Tumblr, YouTube, TripAdvisor. These websites are virtual communities where people can communicate and develop contacts through them.

A social network is a social structure made up for a number of factors, such as individuals or organizations. On the internet, social networks are a platform that is maintained for the creation of social relations between people, usually as active members of the social network, with common interests or activities.

Social networking sites are organized sites on the web with more centered character providing in their overwhelming majority, a series of basic and free services such as creating profiles, uploading pictures and videos, commenting on actions taken by other members of the network or group, instant messaging and other more

Internet Risks

Social networking is an amazing technological phenomenon of the 21st century. Social networking websites allow each user to create and design a personal website, using graphics, color, music, pictures and give it a unique character. This activity is particularly popular among young people and does not require specific technical knowledge. On these websites, users through their virtual profile work interactively with other users, publishing photos and videos, join groups of common interests, publish and exchange their artistic creations, visit pages of other users and use a variety of applications. The Internet is a powerful tool in our hands, but if it is not used properly can put someone in a very risky situation. The challenge of the Internet is to be able to recognize potential hazards, to know how to prevent the risks and create options to avoid and terminate them.

The most significant problems that may be found in the social networking sites are:

Online Grooming (2), describes the behavior that tries to inspire confidence to the young user, so that to be able to perform a secret meeting with the user. The sexual abuse of the victim, physical violence or child prostitution and abuse through pornography may be the outcome of this meeting which makes it a kind of psychological treatment that is conducted online. Another definition says that the «grooming» is a smart handling process, which typically starts without sexual approach, but is designed to entice the victim to sexual encounter. Moreover, sometimes is characterized as a seduction to highlight the slow and gradual process of disclosure of information from the younger user and build a relationship of trust.

Cyberbullying (3) is an aggressive behavior using electronic means. Such behaviors can make young people feel lonely, unhappy and frightened, to feel insecure and think that something is wrong. They lose confidence in their selves and may not want to go back to school or try to find ways to be isolated from their friends. Furthermore, in extreme cases, continuous, persistent and intense bullying has led to terrible consequences such as suicide intent. Harassment among children and adolescents may occur in very different forms not only manifested through roughhouse and aggression, but also through different types of intimidation that leaves the victim exposed.

Cybersuicide (4) describes the suicide or the attempt of suicide, which is influenced by the Internet. The Cybersuicide has caught the attention of the scientific community from the time that the recorded incidents of suicide are growing over the internet. It has been suggested that the use of the internet and specifically that the websites about suicide can promote suicide and thereby contribute to increasing rates of Cybersuicide. People who do not know each other come together and meet online and then they are gathered in a certain place in order to commit suicide together. Apart from committing suicide on the internet there is the case of users who commit this act while they are connected to the Internet: «committing suicide in real time via webcam». In response to the above and other similar cases,

the issue of the impact of the Internet in facilitating suicide has begun to be actively discussed. On a practical level, the scientific research regarding the Cybersuicide is still in a native stage, and the empirical evidence that the Internet has contributed to the increase of suicides is currently minimal. However, the Internet bears some features that allow someone to assume that a user can facilitate the act of committing suicide.

Cyber Racism (5) refers to the phenomenon of online racism. The expression of racism on the internet is common and frequent and is facilitate by the anonymity which is offered by the internet. Racism may be expressed through racist websites, photos videos, comments and messages on social networks.

Internet addiction (6) is a relatively new form of dependency, which is under review by the scientific community. Essentially it refers to the increasing number of people who report more and more involvement with the Internet to raise the feeling of satisfaction and a systematic increase in the time spent for pumping this feeling. The Internet addiction although not officially recognized as a clinical entity is a condition that causes significant reduction in the social and professional or academic functioning of the individual. Experts of mental health are increasingly invited to approach therapeutically people with problematic Internet use.

Online scams: (7) the internet facilitates electronic transactions, every day for millions of people and businesses and arrange their economic works through the net. As a matter of fact, it is necessary that the navigation on websites that include transactions should be performed with extreme caution and with confidence that they have been taken into account the forthcoming legislation and the compulsory insurance transaction regarding personal data. The most common scam is the method of Phising. It comes from combining the words password (code) and fishing (fishing). This is a particularly smart technique for economic deception through revealing both the personal data and in particular information concerning financial transactions. Misled unsuspecting users may disclose personal information to a fake form on the Internet. Evidence of the faked victim are double crossed and used for gaining access to personal data.

Electronic Gambling, [8] with the term Electronic Gambling can be identified the activity during which two or more people meet online to exchange bets. Such activity involves the risk of real financial loss or gain. One of the main problems of gambling is loss of money. This can lead to lose ones' savings, home, or property etc. Many people become addicted and they cannot stop thinking that during the next round will get their money back. Therefore, wasting a lot of money one can waste considerable time in parallel, neglecting existing obligations with all the other ensuing consequences of the addiction. It is found that even the frequent attendance in gambling environments where there is no use of real money, can cause addiction. The ease of access to online gambling websites increases the risks of engagement of young adults in such activities.

Physical problems associated with the use of Computers: The ever-increasing use of computers has a negative impact on the health of users affecting various systems and causing physical and mental problems. Due to these problems there is a discrepancy on the body functionality of some user's system with consequent changes in their quality of life. The most important of these problems affect the following systems: a) The ophthalmology system, b) The nervous system, c) The musculoskeletal system, d) Headaches, e) Tendency to obesity.

Internet Security: Used as a tremendous source of information and services the Internet should filter the bulk of such information, so that would never be accepted without criticism.

Some readily provided information seeking valid practices and technique are listed below:

- Search of information sources by using valid techniques
- Assessment of the information provided
- Disclosure of information provided for ideological or economic benefits
- Safe management of electronic transactions
- Protection from potential online scams

2. METHODS

This review study was conducted through bibliographical search of national and international research articles relevant to the subject matter. The Social network sites are increasingly attracting the attention of academic and industry researchers intrigued by their affordances and reach. Research has indicated that social networking internet sites are being used extensively by young adolescents and adults. As a matter of fact, some communications are of an improper and illegal nature, in which personal information is gathered to facilitate financial fraud, child grooming and new type of racist culture. All of the above are possible in cyberspace.

3. RESULTS

The spread of the Internet and the growing influence of it to such an extent as to constitute a dominant element in the lives of users, led to the exploration of the consequences that may cause the frequent usage of the internet in the physical and mental development of both young people and adults. Among the multitude of parameters that make up this new and constantly evolving situation are the exposure of users to propaganda and racist ideas. Additionally, Internet may offer inappropriate material and misleading ideas that medicate suicide as a solution. Internet addiction may be caused by the online gambling and various other forms of gambling for users over the Internet. Especially the younger users bear a high risk from exposure to the online world through social networks, as the new phenomena that have appeared such as seduction online, cyberbullying, cheating by hidden advertising messages, etc. greatly influence their psychology and emotional development and often irreversibly stigmatize them forever. Furthermore, the development and the spread of the Internet transformed and modernized the definition of scam. Once users began to use plastic money for transactions conducted solely on the Internet appeared the cases of extortion of money by deceit, through the theft and use of personal data of users. Although frauds have always existed, the abolition of personal contact and the extermination of geographical boundaries provided an opportunity to grow.

4. DISCUSSION

Questions arise about how certain personality characteristics and up to which point the social and family situation and the existing of psychiatric disorders may affect the use of the Internet and may lead to the misuse of it. Excessive use of the Internet has both internal and external effects for users. The internal output is the psychological and emotional sector and personality problems that may arise, such as reduced psychological wellbeing for excessive users according to research findings. The external influence refers to the functionality of the user and the problems associated with reduced activities in real life and minimal to non-existent interaction with the social environment. The excessive use of Internet may lead to poor relationships with friends and family, lack of interest in daily life and neglect of domestic, academic, professional and other responsibilities that

gradually lead to a discount of the quality of life. Besides the above mentioned risks of inappropriate Internet usage the benefits of the Internet are numerous and contribute to progress to the human well-being in all areas. It offers a quick access to information and facilitates communication, providing entertainment, education and assistance in medical issues. Unfortunately, it offers anonymity that can make it equally dangerous, especially for young users. For this reason, users should be aware of and ensure the proper use of the Internet so it will not adversely affect their personal lives and their prosperity.

According to this more and more mental health professionals and other specialists are invited to work with people who have problems related to poor or excessive use of the Internet. There are now organized multilateral efforts to address the social and psychological effects of the Internet on a global and national level, implemented by public and private bodies. Campaigns, discussions at schools, advertising campaigns in mass media, sessions for information and sensitization parents and teachers on the safety and security of the Internet. Additional complaint lines and counseling-psychological support work are functioning around the clock for users to prevent scams, gambling, cybercruiside, cyberbullying and cyber grooming

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one would say that the Internet benefits are numerous and contribute to the progress and prosperity of humans in all areas. It offers quick access to information and facilitates communications. However, Internet is provided in abundance and is easily accessible and the illogical use of the Internet makes it be quite dangerous, especially for young users. For this reason, users should be aware of and face critically the information handed at the websites, so that to ensure a proper behavior and delimit the excessive use of it. The result will be to never appear any effect that will endanger the personal welfare of the users. As a matter of fact the logical use and the maintain balance are the key to maximizing the benefits of the Internet.

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