


Investigating the effects and social harms of cyberspace on children

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ABSTRACT

The goal of the present study was to investigate the crisis that children face in the cyberspace. This research was conducted in a library manner and the findings indicate that in the last century and especially in the last decade, one of the topics that has been discussed a lot in various scientific societies and circles is the cyberspace topic. There are several reasons for this. Ease of use, attractiveness, comprehensiveness and variety of information, which can satisfy all ages and all tastes, are among the factors that have made Internet and cyberspace universal, and even children are highly exposed to them. Since the Internet connects different cultures and nations, it greatly impacts the formation or change of the identity of people, especially children, whose identity is being formed. In this research, we first examined the definitions of cyberspace and crisis and stated cyberspace versus identity, and then we examined the damages caused by cyberspace.

Keywords: Children, cyberspace, crisis, mental health.

1 Introduction

Cyberspace is changing the daily life of societies, especially children and teenagers. The attraction of cyberspace has made many children and teenagers choose mobile phones and cyberspace instead of interacting with their peers and parents. It causes tension between children and adolescents with their parents and other family members, and increases the aggression of children and adolescents (Graafland, 2018).

2 Definitions

2.1 Cyberspace

cyberspace is a vast global network that connects different computer networks of multiple sizes and even personal computers using different hardware and software and with communication contracts (Islam et al., 2020). This global network is connected through telephone lines, personal computers, and computer networks. By assigning specific electronic addresses to each of them, cyberspace

provides fast and extensive communication among those connected to the network. It enables them to exchange information through text, sound, image, and video (Graafland, 2018; Nikolovska, 2020).

2.2 Crisis

A crisis is an event that occurs suddenly and sometimes increases and leads to a dangerous and unstable situation for an individual, group or society. The crisis creates a situation that requires fundamental and extraordinary measures to solve it. Crises are different in terms of type and intensity. A crisis is a big and special pressure that causes the breakdown of conventional ideas and widespread reactions and creates new damages, threats, dangers and needs (Graafland, 2018).

3 Cyberspace and identity

With the emergence of the global data network or the Internet, time, place, and identity have found a new definition. The Internet is a place without a place where people can easily communicate with each other, make contracts, create their own groups, send messages, or introduce something. In this place, geographical boundaries have no meaning and separate the person from the fixed and inflexible framework they have in the outside world, allowing them to overexpress themselves. Such an environment that frees people from shackles and allows them to operate in a much more boundless space than the actual world can overshadow religious and national identity (Gálik, 2019).

The most basic effect of Internet social networks on users is that they challenge their current identity. First, they deprive the users of their actual selves and then allow them to express their ideal selves, while unconsciously, this new self is constructed in the discursive space of social networks. Social networks provide a stage where users of any gender, age, social class, race and ethnicity can appear and play their desired role. At this level, virtual social networks lead users to an individualized identity with unique characteristics. In fact, with online social networks, one can redefine and narrate themselves as they want, beyond their actual identity in the physical world (Gálik, 2019; Parsakia et al., 2023).

4 Moral harms

4.1 Easy access to unethical sources

The most important cultural products, including films, photos, text, computer, and internet games, are produced in

the West and sometimes in the East and then promoted and distributed in cyberspace. Thus, one of the dangers caused by cyberspace is directed at countries with opposite cultures to the culture that governs cyberspace (Hosseini, 2020; Ige, Olulowo, & Shawe, 2021).

One of the major concerns regarding the increase in internet access at home is teenagers' exposure to sexual content. The ease of access and abundance of sexual content on the Internet has increased concern about the harmful effects of such content. It is believed that access of children and teenagers to pornography through the Internet is easier than its traditional methods (AlShabibi & Al-Suqri, 2021; Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2021).

Examining the results of research by psychologists at the University of Toronto shows that children mostly choose the afternoons and teenagers and young people at the end of the night visit the Internet. The greater the desire to visit unethical sites, the more the time to use the Internet tends to the hours after midnight (Ali, Haykal, & Youssef, 2023; Allers et al., 2021)

4.2 Weakening religious beliefs and inducing intellectual doubts

Among the challenges of social networks are anti-religious propaganda and attacks on people's religious beliefs. Biased groups with predetermined goals and special methods attempt to shake the beliefs of weak-minded and uninformed users. As it is now, social networks are one of the tools used to propagate false mysticism. Of course, the best way is not only to deal passively and to be satisfied with answering doubts but this presence should also be accompanied by aggression. It means to target the ideas and beliefs of the invading culture with questions about their ideas and attitudes and break their apparent awe (Behnamnia et al., 2020; Nikolovska, 2020; Petrová & Plevová, 2019).

4.3 Conflict of values

Technological changes have affected social values and norms. One of the challenges facing cultures is dealing with this phenomenon. Basically, the arrival of the Internet, along with Western values, has created new challenges in other countries. Since some of the elements in this phenomenon are contrary to insider culture, it can be said that the Internet can cause many harms; For example, the introduction of the Internet in the family sector changes the value system in families. In an experimental study, it was shown that the use of the Internet by young people has reduced family values

(AlShabibi & Al-Suqri, 2021; Behnamnia et al., 2020; Graafland, 2018; Parsakia et al., 2023).

5 Personality harms

5.1 Addiction to cyberspace

Internet addiction can cause serious academic and family problems for the audience. If Internet users cannot tolerate being away from the Internet for a month, they risk becoming addicted to it. Unfortunately, we are witnessing this phenomenon among young people; So that some young people spend the night on the Internet until the morning and are asleep all morning, and this problem also starts many other harms (Behnamnia et al., 2020; Gálik, 2019; Petrová & Plevová, 2019).

During the research on the reasons for people's tendency and addictive use of the Internet, they concluded that the people who spend much time using the computer are the ones who face problems in life. In fact, because these people do not want to deal with their life problems and do not even want to face them, they engage in addictive activities on the Internet (Islam et al., 2020; Smith, Leonis, & Anandavalli, 2021)

5.2 Social isolation

Research shows that Internet users may never be aware of depression and social isolation; if they are aware, they will not confirm it. However, the nature of working with the Internet is such that it drowns a person in himself. Due to its growth and the false attractions it creates for teenagers, the Internet makes them addicted to it and replaces their parents.

High use of the Internet is associated with weak social ties. On the contrary, users who use the Internet less often communicate significantly more with their parents and friends. Of course, these results do not show a specific orientation. For example, it is impossible to say whether teenagers with weak social connections reduce their social connections by tending to internet activity (Gálik, 2019; Parsakia et al., 2023; Smith, Leonis, & Anandavalli, 2021)

5.3 Waste of time

If cyberspace and the amount of its use are not subject to rules and regulations, then young people and teenagers get used to spending their free time in vain and without planning. In addition, this idea is formed in their minds that the end of life is nothing but play and fun and seeking pleasure. The second aspect is using it and referring to sites

that promote abnormal and unethical things. In this way, a person's national identity is attacked, destroying his social personality and psychological sphere. Undoubtedly, millions of young people are currently using the Internet, and every year, millions more are added to their number. In the global network, there are many sites whose purpose is to attract children and teenagers' attention to educational and entertainment issues (Graafland, 2018; Islam et al., 2020; Nikolovska, 2020).

5.4 Solutions

The good thing about the Internet for young people is that they can communicate with others without considering customs and cultural and social restrictions. They can go through these barriers quickly and solve some of their psychological needs to communicate with others. By its nature, the Internet does not create communication problems, but it attracts the attention of people who have social problems but do not find a solution. The expansion of internet communication among the youth of Iran shows part of the problems they face in society (Allers et al., 2021; AlShabibi & Al-Suqri, 2021).

In the case of parental supervision and presence on Internet use by teenagers and young people, its negative effects can be reduced. It is also possible to direct the platform of use towards purposefulness and value and channel it in order to improve the scientific and moral level of teenagers and young people. In general, the internet environment, along with its undeniable and positive achievements and uses in various fields, also has an adverse effect that should be considered by parents, educators, educational officials, and cultural planners (Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2021; Nikolovska, 2020)

5.5 Cyberspace and its effects on children's identity

Nowadays, cyberspace has become one of the most important tools in soft war, and it can eliminate time and affect the mentality of the people, especially the youth, in every way. So, the necessity of cultural investment in this field is felt; In such a way, the rich Iranian and Islamic culture should be cleverly displayed, especially through children's games, because a child's mind is being formed at this time. However, before that, one should look for the roots of what people and, why they turn to cyberspace and how to attract them (AlShabibi & Al-Suqri, 2021; Graafland, 2018; Parsakia et al., 2023).

People attend this space for entertainment, informational needs, socialization, curiosity, liberation, social interaction, and time savers. In fact, they satisfy their interpersonal needs, social contact, personal identity, guidance or information needs. Most parents have gotten used to their child's behavior without worrying about the destructive effects of this commercial-emotional product and have passively accepted this situation (Ige, Olulowo, & Shawe, 2021; Islam et al., 2020).

Today's teenagers, as digital natives, spend their entire lives in the virtual world surrounded by media, especially computers and the Internet. Not surprisingly, their interactions with technology have raised questions and concerns. In today's industrial and urban world where parents do not have much time to spend with their children, parents choose the easiest way to entertain their children in such a way that they provide tools such as mobile phones, laptops, personal computers and the Internet to their beloved child so that he can work with them in his room; In other words, the child only physically lives in the safe environment of the home, but in practice, he steps into a world much bigger than his surroundings. Children encounter things that many parents are not aware of (AlShabibi & Al-Suqri, 2021; Ige, Olulowo, & Shawe, 2021; Islam et al., 2020)

Improper use of the Internet and cyberspace is always common among people, especially children and teenagers. For this reason, cyberspace has become a place for mainly publishing contentless content that harms children's morals and identity (Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2021).

One of the best indicators to evaluate the health of the family relationship is verbal communication between their members. According to the studies, mass media may be harmful in relation to people (AlShabibi & Al-Suqri, 2021; Hosseini, 2020; Nikolovska, 2020)

Research shows that the more the students' membership in groups using the Internet increases, the more violent they tend to be. Instead of learning individually, students communicate and interact with each other using new technologies (Gálik, 2019; Islam et al., 2020).

6 Discussion

The Internet is considered a suitable tool for developing human thoughts and ideas, provided that it is used correctly. People, especially children, must have enough information to enter the virtual world to avoid moral, social, and economic problems. Healthy communication in cyberspace

and the need for young people and families to be aware of threats in cyberspace is the priority. It is very important to prevent moral and social damage and to pay attention to the behavior of children. In order to prevent the collapse of families, parents should be somewhat familiar with today's technologies and know that a change in their children's behavior means a change in their way of thinking. Therefore, if families have sufficient and necessary self-awareness and knowledge regarding the new ways of communicating with their children, many injuries can be prevented.

Cyberspace is a neutral tool, but how people use it now is decisive. If the use is appropriate and positive, it will move towards the development of society while can cause significant problems for the family and its members. In other words, the World Wide Web is a fast information network with countless resources, the misuse and excessive use of which among some people and drowning in the computer world and separation from the real world will turn its benefits into harm so that the misuse of this tool among users has spread so much in advanced societies that it is called a modern disease, a product of the age of communication and the computer revolution.

One of the most influential institutions on the behavior of children and teenagers in cyberspace are parents or families. Correct knowledge of cyberspace and how to deal with it is considered necessary for children and teenagers and their parents. Schools and families with proper management of the quantity and quality of cyberspace use can be effective in improving children's sense of worth and their academic failure. The family can indirectly help their children against problematic and excessive Internet use by strengthening their self-control and emotional intelligence. Parents' strategies can be divided into five groups in terms of the way they interact and the role they adopt in relation to their children's presence in cyberspace. These roles include an active role when present in cyberspace, an active role in securing cyberspace, a restrictive role, a monitoring role, and technical supervision. This partnership reduces risk and harm when parents join their children using the Internet. It seems that the restrictive role and the active role in the use of cyberspace are appropriate prevention strategies. While an active role in cyberspace security and monitoring is more likely to be adopted by parents in the continuation of a negative experience. In other words, when children have a negative experience online, their parents try to prevent more negative experiences from happening by establishing strategies to secure and monitor their child's activities. It is recommended not to assume that protecting children and

teenagers from the dangers of cyberspace means creating restrictions for them and to look at this issue more from the perspective of empowering them in the face of such dangers.

Authors' Contributions

Not applicable.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, I have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

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Ethics Considerations

Not applicable.

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