Title: The Positive and Negatives Effects of Online on Children

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Abstract

Abstract

Understanding the pros and cons of online activities for children in any setting is crucial in providing parents and children important information about the benefits and adverse effects of accessing the Internet. It would also provide agencies an opportunity to develop strategies in managing foreseeable risk. In the present paper, the authors investigate by exploring the advantages and disadvantages of children being allowed online for whatever reason. With the advent of the COVID 19 pandemic, the importance of online access cannot longer be underestimate as both children and adult are forced to communicate and live an online life. Data from NSPCC and CEOP clearly indicates an increase in online activities by children and the enormous risk this comes with. Online resources are not only consumed by "able children" worldwide, but most "intellectually disable children" now uses the Internet as a way of breaching the cap and pulling down some of the physical barriers they may face. Children use the Internet from different types of Internet enabled devices and for several reasons, ranging from education, social media, shopping, gaming, socializing, cyber bullying, peer control, contact with family members. The use of the Internet can significantly change the life of a child. However, the risk associated with the use of online resources is also significant and would impact children based on any adverse experience or disability (162 words).

I INTRODUCTION

Research articles and interest regarding the positives and negatives of online technology has multiplied during the covid-19 quarantine period around the world. Most of these researches are generic and has concentrated on the pros and cons of online learning over the risk of child abuse. Via the Internet, some children can develop some self-harmful behaviour such as self-injury. This type of behaviour can result to unintentional suicide. However, (Whitlock, Powers and Eckenrode, (2006), followed by Swannell et al., (2010), suggested that Internet also plays a positive part for those children who are hurting themselves, because they turn to share information about coping strategies. In spite, the advantages highlighted by some researchers mentioned above, when children hurt themselves, they may be at risk of suicide, though the primary intention using the Internet was not to commit suicide per se. The risk is heightening when the harmful practice is for a significant period. Nonetheless, not all children who self-injure are suicidal, though it can be term as non-suicidal self -injury.

Other negative aspects of children Internet addiction are depression and anxiety (Ramazanoğlu, 2020). Some children will experience different signs of depression such as mood disorder, also known as bipolar disorder, otherwise known as manic depressive disorder. A study carried out in Korea amongst adolescents by Kim et al (2006) with more than 1500 high -school students, demonstrates that not only children can become Internet addicts, and suffer with depression (Al-juboori, 2020), (Bazrafshan et al., 2019). Those students who were classified as Internet addict or possible addict, (about 40%) were highly linked with depression and suicidal ideation, and there is a need to explore the correlations between Internet dependency and psychological health issues (Kim et al., 2006).(Ryu, Choi, Seo and Nam, 2004). About one percent of adults below the age of 40 years old have bipolar disorder during their course of their lives(NHS

Choices: Your Health, Your Choices, 2011), NHS Choices, 2016) and this condition does not differ in both genders (Slade et al., 2009)

Ongoing technology improvement is influencing people's lifestyle in the entire world. Children seem to be more influence and impacted that other age groups as most of their daily activities are centred on online communication and interaction. Online technology is mounting immense pressure on children and having a considerable impact on their daily lives. In spite the pressure and harm that constant Internet access can bring to young people, some aspects of online activities such as social media/network can help in improving social and communication skills of some children.

The Internet is a virtual world for children and they only use some aspects of it, such as social media. Internet can be very useful and a save environment for those children who generally have a high level of competency in technology (Mehall, 2019). Though, Mehal (2019) is of the view that the more technologically competent a child is the more they can navigate the net safely, this view was not confirmed by Livingstone and Haddon (2008) during a European wide research on the Risky Experiences for children Online", as a review of available literature, it was unanimously agreed that children across European were at risk while online (Livingstone and Haddon, 2008)

Children holds strong views about the advantages of Internet, for instance, they use the Internet as a support when they feel low, can talk to several people at once, be able to reach relatives and friends living far away, share ideas and opinions and can share content faster than any other medium.

According to Ofcom (2017), younger children spend the largest proportion of their media time watching the TV set, while older children spend more of their time online (social media) and on their mobile phone. The research by Ofcom (2017) identified that children of different ages

groups use different devices and as they get older, their Internet devices changes. For instance, "65% of children age 3- 4 use a tablet, 74% of 12-15 years olds have a profile on social media or messaging site or app and when given the choice, children age 8-15 would prefer to watch YouTube content rather than TV programmes on a TV set". Whatever, the devices children use to access online materials; research suggests that as they get older, most of them spend more time online than when they are younger. In 2017, Ofcom reported that 8-11 years olds now spend 13 hours and 24 minutes a week online and 12-15 years olds spend 20 hours and 48 minutes.

COVID-19 and Child Online Safety:

Pre- Covid 19 era, children and their families were able to enjoy more off line activities. However, the lockdown brought its own challenges which include the reliance of online for most aspects of our daily lives. While lockdown intensified, teens and many adults could only keep touch with others via social media and other platforms. The sharing of images and locations was the norm. The use of hashtags when sharing photos with families or friends online was customary, and most of these photos are then made available in the public domain. This discourse around a social media account been considered as a private or public domain will not be considered in this research paper, but is a possible for future research.

The high number of children who used Internet during the COVI-19 pandemic has caused child protection professionals to be worried about children safety, as the process in protecting children was also impaired by the use of technology and unable to have a face to face approach (Sistovaris et al., 2020).

Though, the use of some social media apps can pose a risk to a child, some of the companies have technical control tools which can allow parents to use in keeping their children safe while online, however , it not clear if these tools are use adequately by parents. The content filters and parental control software are sometimes already built into the devices by manufactures to enable safe use of their devices. Amongst this technical control software are Google SafeSearch, YouTube Restricted Mode, or TikTok Family Safety Mode. However, these are free and are not always reliable and efficient compare to paid and expensive software.

During the lockdown, children mostly used hashtag to help share and disseminate information on the social media, which some parents are unable to recognise or identify what the sign for hashtag represent.

According to Carly Yoost, founder and CEO of The Child Rescue Coalition, "hashtags allow predators to access regular photos that don't necessarily fit the criteria of child porn. But because the pics are public and easily searchable, they're of interest to those who are sexually attracted to kid"s" The use of hashtags has its own benefits and risk. Natalie Harmsen recognises the importance and ills of hashtags and states that "hashtags can be a great way to rack up likes and boost your social presence, but they can also make your kids vulnerable to child predators" (Harmsen, N. 2020).

CONCLUSION:-

Technology has proved itself to be a useful tool for both children and adults irrespective of where they are, so long as they are able to have two elements i.e. Internet access and a device.

More children are accessing Internet with very limited or no knowledge of some of the risk involved. Children's appétit to social media and network is doubling every day, followed by the creation of new social media apps, which acts as a vehicle for children to access online social content. However, the lockdown and the Internet access has made huge positive difference in the life and progress of some children, especially children with disabilities, as physical distance is not new to them. MARIA, 18, BULGARIA stated "To children and adolescents with disabilities like me, physical distancing isn't a new thing. The fact that we spend the majority of our time at home, makes us more prepared actually more resilient to the current lockdown."(UNICEF Europe C.Asia). Meanwhile some children found the lockdown as a positive aspect in their learning, because they experience that they had more time top read and explore other activities online. During lockdown schools in at least 130 countries, could not operate effectively, and about 80 percent of children worldwide could not access school directly unless via the Internet. While some children felt bored; lost and frustrated because of COVID – 19 pandemic, because they were not able to exercise and keep healthy, due to long hours in front of their screens, for some children the Internet has played an important role during lockdown in enabling them to continue to study and interact with others.

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