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Research Paper: The Effects Of The Social Network On The School Children
In A Contemporary World

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Research question: Which consequences can social network usage have on the mental development of the secondary school children? How to struggle with the existing situation?

THE EFFECTS OF THE SOCIAL NETWORK ON THE SCHOOL CHILDREN IN A CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Abstract

In recent years, social network has intensively been developed and spread in almost all parts of the world. While growing it become very popular among teenagers and especially, school children already addicted to the usage of social network due to different reasons such as entertainment and studying purposes. However, S.M.Kana and Katharine M. Donato indicate that spending a lot of time online can have some negative consequences, including not only physical disorders like vision or spine issues, but other health problems are also inevitable leading to dangerous outcomes in terms of development process of still mentally weak children (2005, p.1139). The goal of this paper is to demonstrate the impact of the usage of social network on the mental health of secondary school children. The paper also contains some data which consists of 11-12 questionnaire surveys given to parents of school children. The results of this paper can be used to take measures either by parents or network usage administration to prevent students from being "infected". The anticipated outcome of this study is the detection of negative sides of social network usage particularly on the mental health. The findings may be useful in the medical area related to the mental development procedure of teenagers and school age children.

1. Introduction

Social network has become a global phenomenon and an integral part of the daily lives of people including the teenagers and school age children as well. It is believed to play a considerable role in terms of making great ways to build connections among young people with related and similar interests. Along with the traditional methods of communication such as email, and instant messaging, there has been made so-called online communities like Facebook, Instagram etc., where people interact and express their opinions more freely and actively than ever before across the world (Ali Kara, 2013, p.21). Beside its benefits, the development and popularity of social network leads to some concerns for school delegation and parents about the consequences that children may face due to engagement in network to cover their social needs tending to choose online ways rather than verbal or face-to-face communication (S.Kucukemiroglu, 2015, p.7).

Till now the effects of social network has been extensively studied (T.Thompson-Colón, 2005, p.1139); however, less attention has been paid to the mental health consequences that can be an unexpected outcome of the social network usage among children. For example, a study conducted by Philip D. Parker and Joseph Ciarrochi, has shown that certain activities on social network might be linked with low self-esteem, especially for children and adolescents (2015,

p.643). Years later, R.Nakayama and A.Koyanagi indicated different impacts of the connection between social network and mental health problems, including depression, evaluation of self-esteem, and network addiction (2014, p.1169). Obviously, all of these previous investigations gave us beneficial information and background of the social network usage; but, we need more detailed data in the field of mental health of school children as the effects on it are still not completely understood.

The aim of this paper is to examine the relation between social network and its impact on the mental development of the secondary school children. Unfortunately, teenagers, the most active social network users, have a predominantly high risk for developing mental health issues (A. Strickland, 2014, p.1993). To find out the connection between these two notions, I have explored the works of several foreign authors of the corresponding topic that somehow revolve around the current problem. After being familiar with some of the situations, I will mainly focus on the mental health issue coming from the network usage to involve all the possible solutions to the existing problem.

2. Literature Review

Even though, social network is quickly evolving day by day, it has already become an indispensable part of the social culture of youth and adults in the contemporary society. Social network is organized for those who can connect an electronic internet network to engage in daily conversations and to post materials, including photos, videos and other things related to multimedia content (John E. Mendelson, 2014, p.6). What do we know about the social network except its obvious contact side? It can be said that only one variety of social network "contact with friends" is considerable in terms of mental health outcomes of a young population. This indicates that the correlation of social networks and mental health is quite complex so that the effects of different forms of social network are not equal because of the dependence either on the way social networks are defined, or the individual context in which the relationship is examined (R.Nakayama, 2014, p.618).

Some previous studies that explored the impacts of social network on personal welfare have demonstrated mixed results either negative (Rohall, Cotten, & Morgan, 2002) or positive relationships (Kraut et al., 2002). In connection with this argument, a study conducted by Kim, LaRose, and Peng (2009) pointed out that excessive usage of social network appear to have negative results such as depression and loneliness on psychological well-being because lonely individuals interact with others and even express themselves better online than they do offline. This leads to some concerns regarding personal and social difficulties in relating to people face-to-face,

which social network can compensate in some way. Obviously, this happens because children spend a lot of time online which brings them to feel more at home in a virtual environment. Therefore, "to live" in such a world, especially for children of school age can also be dangerous in terms of mental health due to different opinions of other people. For example, one can become an object of ridicule for the online "friends" due to the thinking manner which are called statuses in the social network, or even photos which can be mentioned as inappropriate to post and share with society. In a word, when they do not gain any respect from the online world to what they do and share, the self-esteem of children becomes very low being a cause for other serious challenges like frustration, anxiety and sadness. Moreover, if school children do not feel any support from the surroundings like in the previous example this can end with mental disappointments (A. Strickland, 2014, p.1997). However, there have been so many cases where children attempting to suicide made outcries on the social network websites which could alert parents that their child needs help or someone to talk to. So, this warns elder people to take into account that teenagers connect emotionally and define relationships through their digital devices and web platforms (T.Thompson-Colón, 2005, p.1139).

Furthermore, the neuroscientist Susan Greenfield, who has launched a new center at Oxford to investigate consciousness of school age children, says that the same brain circuits that are activated while eating chocolate and winning money are also activated when teenagers see large numbers of "likes" on their own photos or postings in a social network (J. Bohannon, 2005, p.963). Therefore, it means that the popular activities, including likes and comments on the social network, directly affect children's brains as well as hurt their self-esteem (S.M.Kana, 2005, p.1149). It is very crucial that we understand both the positive and negative sides of social network in terms of mental development, thereby putting online-bullying into context and appreciating its place among all of the advantages and opportunities that arise from such kinds of connections.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

22 parents of the secondary school children (18 women and 4 men) ranging in age from 38 to 56 years old, randomly chosen in my neighborhood, voluntarily participated in this experiment.

3.2. Materials

The distributed survey was in a form of questionnaire list printed in A4 format and consisted of 9 questions. The original sheet was in English, but the distributed ones were in Azerbaijani and Russian accordingly, so that the respondents could easily understand the questions. Moreover, in the beginning there were some fields to fill in the names or an option of answering anonymously

was also possible, then the fields for sex and age were in that line as well. Almost all of the questions were in the form of multiple choice, except one which has an alternative of writing your own version if none of the variants were suitable. All of the asked questions were based on the own experience that the parents had with their children. Example questions included the following: “Does your child have an internet connection at home?”, “How much time does he/she spend on the social network in a day?”, “How often do you use parental control to prevent your child from any inappropriate content?” etc. Therefore, while filling the surveys most of the parents had an opportunity to discuss the behavior of the children which they observe and desire to change.

3.3. Procedure

All of the participants were randomly assigned to take part in a survey. They were asked the questions individually, in a quiet room to achieve the precise results. Firstly, the respondents were given some information of the research paper and its aim in order to explain their role and contribution in an ongoing process. After being familiar with the situation, they were given the questionnaire list and were asked to answer the questions themselves without any help. Then, we discussed each question that was in the list and every participant gave his/her own opinion regarding some problems that their children encounter while using social network. I feel like the parents were really interested in the given topic as they asked different questions and even offered me to form a group for parents to discuss and find solutions for the problems related to the usage of the social network by their children. It was a great opportunity for me to have such a chance to talk to the parents and get their opinions about existing situation. Fortunately, I get all of the answers from the participants and even more, as they helped me a lot to go in a right way to achieve the stated goal.

4. Analysis and Discussion

As a result of the conducted survey, almost all the participants gave similar answers to the questions. For instance, all of the parents mentioned that they have an internet connection at home which is already an opportunity for the teenagers to use internet and accordingly, the social network sites. According to the given question “Why do you think children use social network in most of the cases?”, 20 out of 22 parents believe that their children use social network to be always connected with friends. Has it become so important to be online all the time that we can overlook the negative effects that the social network can have? Most of the parents think that if they do not allow their children to use social network, it will be very difficult to live without its usage as they already become addicted. Does not it make sense for all of us to take any measures in order to prevent

developing children from being addicted to the social network that somehow troubles their mental health so that they cannot imagine their lives without existence of the social network? Furthermore, only 3 out of 22 participants responded that they use parental control to prevent their children from any inappropriate content. Remaining members do not have ideas about improper content for the underage that may change the way in which children use social network. However, it was also found out that the majority of the parents were not aware of the mental development problems due to the usage of social network. The respondents said that they knew only about physical disorders like vision or spine issues which may appear after a long usage of the social network, but they did not know anything about mental consequences that can come out. So, it means that it could be better if to open some classes or even a couple of lessons during the Informatics classes to inform students about the outcome of the social network usage that can have negative effects on their mental development. Also, as some of the parents recommended the school delegations can form some groups for the parents to let them know about the inevitable results after using of social network. All points examined, it is now obvious that the hypothesis that I made in the beginning of making a survey were justified and proved with the parents' help because of their opinions about the current problem and explanations of their solutions were sufficient to speed up the research process and made it successful.

5. Conclusion

All in all, I can surely say that the research totally obtained its goal and explored both the causes and effects of the social network on the mental development of the school children. If to go over the results that were obtained from the survey, it can be said that most of the respondents were not aware of the possible outcomes that can appear after over usage of the social network which push me to the idea of distribution and making known the current situation at schools. If both the students and parents follow the simple rules like spending the acceptable amount of time on the social network or if parents regularly control their children while they use it, these principles can somehow interfere with the existing problem. To conclude, it is possible that the results of this paper can be used to take measures either by parents or network usage administration to prevent students from being "infected". The anticipated outcome of this study, the detection of the negative sides of social network usage particularly on mental health was successfully investigated. The findings may be useful in the medical area related to the mental development procedure of teenagers and school age children.

6. References:

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7. Appendix:

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Topic: Which consequences can social network usage have on the mental development of secondary school children?

Name: **Anonymous:** **Age:** **Gender:**

- How old is your child?

a) 10-12

b) 12-14

c) 14-16

d) Your variant

- Does he/she have an internet connection at home?

a) Yes

b) No

c) My child buys and uses mobile internet

- How much time does he/she spend on the social network in a day?

a) 1-2 hours

b) 4-8 hours

c) almost all the day

d) he/she does not use social network

- Which of the following consequences can the usage of social network have on the thinking manner of the child?

a) only positive

b) only negative

c) both positive and negative

d) it cannot have any consequences on the thinking manner of a child

- Why do you think children use social network in most of the cases?

a) gain any knowledge

b) have fun

c) waste time

d) to be always connected with friends

e) none of the above

- How many of the virtual friends have your child met in person?

a) all of them

b) most of them

c) a few of them

d) none of them

- How often do you use any parental control to prevent your child from any inappropriate content?

a) every time my child uses social network

b) once a week

c) once a month

d) never

- What do you think will happen if you do not allow your child to use social network?

a) he/she will continue his/her normal life

c) it will be difficult to live without social network as he/she become addicted

d) he/she cannot live without social network at all

e) none of them

- Do you have solutions to the problem of being addicted to the usage of social network? Please write in detail if you have any idea of overcoming such a situation.