

PARENTS' CONTEXTUALIZATION ON THEIR CHILDREN'S USE OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

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ABSTRACT: Screen time amongst children is now, more than ever pronounced, and needs to be given attention to. An increase in demand towards access to technology, and use of gadgets is observed as children are staying home during the COVID19 pandemic. Using qualitative research design, the researcher interviewed 20 pairs of parents with children between the ages of 12 to 18, of different genders to present and discuss the information communication technology practices of children; enumerate the uses of information communication technologies amongst children, and explain children's gratification and motivation in their use of information communication technologies. Results show that information communication technology practices of children includes the use of mobile phones; children, at the age of 10, own a gadget; family households allot part of their income in data service subscriptions; children are online for more than 5 hours a day; children use their gadgets 7 days a week; children's gadgets do not have turned-on parental controls; children often access social media sites; they manage their own social media accounts; and they cannot last a day without using their gadgets. Further, children use online media for self-expression, learning information source, games, entertainment, and to communicate. Lastly, the gratifications and motivations of children in the use of online media includes happiness in being connected with others, a need for affirmation as they express self-identity; excitement in learning; and the thrilling experience in leisure and entertainment. Recommendations center on family education, role of the academe, and strengthening value-laden initiatives.

Keywords: Communication studies, COVID19, Social Media

1. INTRODUCTION

Screen time amongst children is now, more than ever pronounced, and needs to be given attention to. An increase in demand for access to technology, and use of gadgets is observed as children are staying home during this time. As countries around the world mitigate the spread of the novel coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19, countries had to place lockdown measures, and quarantine protocols. This brought about a change in our ways of living and doing – thus, the term ‘new normal. As defined in [1] new normal is a current situation or social custom, that is different from what has been experienced or done before but is expected to become usual or typical. So, with new normal ways of living and adapting to routines, children are staying at home to keep them safe from the virus, and remain healthy. Children are thus creating new routines and activities to keep them busy and entertained while they are home. Also, with fewer and limited physical social interactions due to the set quarantine protocols, children may likely develop a technological dependency because they are now prone to using computers in almost all aspects of their day-to-day routine. Because of increased screen time, may tend to lessen their personal interpersonal communications. The study of [2] forwards that longer use of the Internet was associated with a decline in people's communication with family members in the household, a decline in the size of their social circle, and increased chances of developing depression, and loneliness. These activities may be perceived as ‘normal’, however, with prolonged set negative motivations within these activities, the construct and development of social interactions, and sustained relationships may be affected. Even before the pandemic, the use of technology has become an integral part of our daily lives [3]. And a growing body of literature is associating excessive, and addictive use of digital media with physical, psychological,

social, and neurological adverse consequences [4]. As we become increasingly more reliant and absorbed in technology, it is no surprise that today's children have become avid users as well [3]. Laptops are being developed for children as young as five, while smart phones are now in the hands of children as young as ten.

Children turn to screens because they say they have no alternative activities or entertainment, and their gadgets is where they ‘hang out with friends and ‘go to school’. On July 21, 2020, the Department of Education released DM-CI-2020-00162, or the Suggested Strategies in Implementing Distance Learning Delivery Modalities (DLDM) for School Year 2020-2021 [5].

What concerns researchers, at a minimum, is that the use of devices is a poor substitute for activities known to be central to health, social, and physical development, including physical play and other interactions that help children learn how to confront challenging social situations [6]. Other studies also forward negative effects of prolonged screen time; excessive use of screens can hurt children, from sleep problems and difficulties with communication to socialization and brain development.

This study shall be situated in the semiotics tradition of communication. Semiotics is the study of signs, and a sign is anything that can stand for something else; a high body temperature is a sign of infection; birds flying south signal the coming of winter; or an arrow designates which direction to go (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2019)[7]. In this tradition, communication is theorized as intersubjective mediation by signs and symbols (Apuke, 2018). Because meanings are in people, gaps between subjective realities are bridged through a shared language or sign system (Ibid.). Using the semiotics lens, the perceived online communication preference of children shall be interpreted from the parents' points of view. Specifically, the study shall use the uses and gratification theory in explaining the

motivations of children's online activities, and behaviors.

The Uses and Gratification theory attempts to make sense of the fact that people consume a dazzling array of media messages for all sorts of reasons, and that the effect of a given message is unlikely to be the same for everyone (Griffin, 2013). The driving mechanism of the theory is need gratification; by understanding the particular needs of media consumers, the reasons for media consumption become clear (Ibid.). This theory forwards five key assumptions; first, the study of how media affect people must take account of the fact that people deliberately use media for particular purposes; second, the theory assumes people have needs that they seek to gratify through media use; third, media compete for our attention and time; fourth, media effect people differently; and, lastly, people can accurately report their media use and motivation (p. 347-350). Gratification is reflected on the sense of satisfaction, fulfillment or pleasure. While motivation stems from the reason for acting or behaving in a particular way. Seeing through the parents' point of view of how their children use media types; specifically, computers and gadgets, the theory presented the uses of these media, and gratifications derived from the user based on the parents' observations of how their children behave and form attitudes in their online experiences. Furthermore, as the theory forwards five key assumptions, these shall be used as a basis in formulating the researcher's interview guide in answering the research objectives.

2. METHODS

The researcher situates the study in a qualitative research design. Specifically, it shall use a thematic and descriptive approach. The study will gather data from 20 pairs of parents with children between the ages of 12 to 18, of different genders. A total of twenty (40) participants; twenty (20) from Ilocos Sur and twenty (20) from Ilocos Norte, are to be the subject of the study. The researcher shall prepare an online interview form for the parents to fill out prior to the live online interview. The online form aims to collect the online profile of the children, their uses of media, and their motivations for these activities. The researcher shall also prepare an interview guide based on Katz's Uses and Gratifications assumptions [7], to be used in the interviews to further gather relevant and supportive data on children's online behavior based on the respondents' answers and narration. Online application software shall be used in conducting the interviews such as Google Meet and Zoom, as the face-to-face interview is not possible. The researcher shall perform convenient sampling in selecting the respondents. Following the recommendation of [8] that interviews be made with up to 10 people in phenomenological (qualitative) research. Also, an informed consent form shall be given and explained to the respondents. After securing the consent, an interview schedule shall be followed to accommodate all 40 respondents. The duration of each interview took 40 to 55 minutes long. Through the interview, the researcher interacts with the respondents and encourages them to express their

opinions. ideas, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. The researcher shall use coding to be reflected in a coding sheet to analyze the data gathered from the interviews. Coding enables the researcher to look for emerging themes, and begin to attach meaning to answer the questions under study. Ethical considerations included applying for a Research Ethics Certificate with Approval Number A-21-079. This was secured by submitting a research proposal, the informed consent form and the resume of the researcher to the University Ethics Review Board of the University of Northern Philippines, in Brgy. Tamag, Vigan City, Ilocos Sur. The researcher also respected the confidentiality of the respondents' identities such as their names, and addresses, in relation to all the answers they shared. The study is aimed only in good faith.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were 20 pairs of parents who participated in the study; 10 females and 10 males. A total of 24 children served as a basis for the parent respondents' evaluation of children's use of information communication technologies (ICTs). The gender of the children is distributed as follows: 10 females, 10 males 2 gays, and 2 lesbians.

Summary of the gathered data from the informant

Gadget Used to Connect Online

Based on the data collected, the majority of the children are using mobile phones to connect to the world wide web. Furthermore, some of the children use laptop computers, tablet computers, desktop computers, game consoles, and iPad. The majority of the parents said that their children have been using these gadgets as early as when they were 2 years old. Thus, they grew up having access to these. Some of the parents also said that mobile phones are handy for their children as they are able to call each other immediately. They also affirmed that all their children are using smartphones. It was also noted that male children were drawn to using desktop computers. Some of the parents explained that their children prefer to use a desktop than a laptop computer because desktop computers may be upgraded to fit the specifications needed in online gaming. It serves dual purposes; learning and gaming, for the family.

Gadget Ownership

Most children own a gadget, and most of them use their parents' gadgets. Parent respondents forwarded that they let their children have their own gadgets as early as 10 years old. Some of the children also received their gadgets from relatives as gifts. The respondents explained that they sometimes confiscate gadgets when their children are 'too obsessed' with using them, as they cannot properly function in their homes. The children were observed to be in a hurry to get things done, impatient, and restless when they do not have their gadgets with them. The results imply that most children below 18 years old have their own gadgets already. Children tend to become too engrossed in their gadgets which leads them to act careless and impatient with non-

technology tasks. The study of [9] presented that all the children in their study owns digital devices and this influences them mostly in a positive way, in the opinion of their parents and teachers. However, technology can also influence them in a negative way, but only if used so much that it becomes an addiction, affecting the child's attention in school, as well as their daily activities. Thus, technology, when used inappropriately or excessively tend to have negative effects.

Average Number of Hours Online

Majority of the children are connected online for more than 10 hours a day (42%), and 92% of them are online for more than 5 hours a day. All the respondents said that they have broadband and Wi-Fi subscriptions in their homes, thus, their children are able to stay connected online. Some also said that their children would usually lock themselves in their rooms and just go out when they are hungry. They would often sit for hours playing games, chatting with their friends, and watching videos online. The results imply that children, on average, spend more than 7 hours per day connected to the Internet. They would often use their Internet connection for leisure, communication, and entertainment purposes. The study of [10] forwards that children spend an average of 22 hours/month on the computer, with a jump to 87 hours/month for adolescents. The study of [11] suggests that there is a strong association between spending prolonged hours on the computer or TV, fast food eating, poor lifestyle habits, and low vision of children.

Gadget Usage per Days of the Week

A total of 75% (18) of the children use their gadgets for 7 days a week, and 25% (6) are allowed to use it only during Fridays and the weekend. Most parents also said that their children are too dependent in their online connection, and this becomes a center of discussion at times in the household. Some parents also said that some of their children even changed their Wi-Fi password just so other siblings could not use the Internet, especially, as the connection gets slow when users are simultaneously accessing games, and videos. Connecting online is perceived as an owned necessity which justifies children's greed in keeping for themselves the access. The study of [12] found that youth well-being, social connectedness, and personality traits, such as empathy and narcissism, are at the crux of concerns often raised about the impacts of digital life. They found that a complex interplay of individual factors, type of digital media engagement, and experiences in media contexts informs outcomes related to well-being, social connectedness, empathy, and narcissism. These may explain the need to be connected by children, and in the process of doing so, exemplify negative behaviors.

Use of Parental Controls

Thirty parents confirmed that they do not use parental controls in their children's gadgets, and 10 use parental controls. This translates to 75% of children using gadgets without parental control, and 17% using gadgets with parental control. The parents explained that since most of their children own their gadget, the parental control function is already useless. Further, 82% of the parents weren't aware of parental controls. Parents mentioned that parental controls are often used for younger children, and they defined it as the

setting of passwords and number codes/patterns over their devices. Their children also know these passwords and number codes/patterns; thus, they are able to open devices without difficulty. Meanwhile [13] reported on the failure of parental controls to reduce online risks. They also forward that computer literacy, the perceived mediation needs of parents, and an in-depth understanding of how parents use these tools, rather than whether parents use them, should be examined.

Websites Often Accessed

Most children access social media sites such as Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. They like to watch Dhar Man videos on YouTube. They are also often observed to access online gaming applications such as Minecraft, PUBG, Mobile Legends, and Solar Smash. Some access Spotify and Netflix using their gadgets. Children are interested in entertainment and social media websites. This suggests that children are actively communicating in the online setting. They are comfortable in using computers and have an interactive mindset when using gadgets. The study of [14] assessed social anxiety in teens, and revealed that there is a positive relationship between social anxiety; not being comfortable talking with others face-to-face, and talking with others online as well as talking with others via text messaging. In contrast, there was a positive relationship between the lack of social anxiety; feeling "comfortable" talking with others, and making friends online.

Social Media Account Ownership

Eighty-three percent (20) of the children have their own social media accounts. While 17% (4), do not have their own. The parents said that their children were able to set-up their own social media account by themselves, without asking for their help. Children were perceived to be friendly, talkative, expressive, and interested in communicating more through their use of social media. They use social media as a means to express themselves; however, some parents noted that children were observed to use social media for instigating fights, posting and commenting innuendos, and as a platform for bullying, and hate speech. Although their children were noted to have high technological know-how, they were perceived to use technology irresponsibly. The results imply that children are more courageous in online communication. The irresponsible use of social media leads to negativity, hate, and instigating fights.

Social Media Accounts Used

All the children have Facebook social media accounts, 96% are using TikTok, 92% have Instagram, 63% have YouTube accounts, and 38% have Twitter. The parents said that their children have Facebook as their common and most used social media. The majority of their children also use Facebook Messenger as a communication tool. Most of their children have TikTok accounts as this is the latest trend. Some parents cannot figure out some of these social media sites, but their children were observed to display a great level of familiarity in using the applications.

Gadget Day Survival

Lastly, 85% of the parents forward that their children cannot last a day without the use of a gadget, and 15% said their children could. The majority of the parents said that their

children will exhibit tantrums, and irritable behavior when they cannot use their gadgets.

Uses of online media amongst children

Self-expression

Parents perceive that social media is a voice-enabling platform their children use to express themselves, to be heard, to create and share ideas, to learn the trends of the time. When using online communication, children were observed to be 'talkative' and are able to express themselves in an open, and frank way.

Information source Learning

Children were also observed to learn faster through online media. Parents of children who held gadgets as early as 2 years old forwarded that their children learned their first words because their children were using a cellular phone. Learning is now embedded in the use of the World Wide Web. Children are drawn to connecting online and prefer to source information on their own. Children were observed by the parents to be independent workers as they exemplify familiarity in their use of information communication technologies. Also, some of the parents said their children use learning websites such as Study.com and YouTube to supplement their teacher's lecture videos. The results imply that the use of gadgets has positive learning implications for children. They are able to absorb learning through their use of gadgets. The study of [15] forwards that observations of interactions with the Internet of Toys or IoToys (written and video), multimedia messages (digital images, videos), short written reflections, and consultations with the children show that IoToys offers a platform for interactions to become multidirectional, multidimensional and multimodal. Their study further called for pedagogy involving IoToys to provide a platform for children's rich symbiotic explorations, creativity, collaboration and problem-solving.

Games and Entertainment

Children connect online to engage in gaming activities. These games range from learning letters and numbers; puzzles and simple mind games; to simulation and highly active games of tactics, and war.

Communication - connection

Children use their gadgets for communication to be connected online (technology), and with others (people). They use social media to be connected in the online universe. They also use chat features like Facebook messenger and Viber to connect with one another. They like to be online at all times. Communication is also done through call and text features. They are able to maximize the features of their mobile phone as they maintain in constant communication with one another.

Gratifications and motivations in children's use of online communication

Parents observed their children to be in a good mood, relaxed, to be smiling, and to be in merry disposition when using information communication technologies. Gratification emanates from the feeling of joy and happiness among children when using ICTs. While children's motivation stems from the need to be heard, and to be connected with one another. Further, the need for educational initiatives which target cyberbullying can partly be seen in the growing

amount of abuse to be found on the Internet and this is especially relevant to children and young people [16]

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Information communication technology practices of children includes the use of mobile phones when connecting online; children, at the age of 10, has usually their own gadget; family households allot part of their income in data service subscriptions; children are online for more than 5 hours a day; children use their gadgets 7 days a week; children's gadgets do not have parental controls; children often access social media sites when online; they manage their own social media accounts, and they cannot last a day without using their gadgets. Children use online media for self-expression, learning information sources, games, entertainment, and to communication. The gratifications and motivations of children in the use of online media include happiness in being connected with others, a need for affirmation as they express self-identity, excitement in learning, and the thrilling experience of leisure and entertainment.

Furthermore, parents should educate themselves with media and information literacy. In doing so, they may be acquainted with gadget features to ensure their children are accessing safe and age-appropriate online content. Educational institutions could provide media and information literacy to both parents and children. This may provide relevant information that could help gain understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of responsible ICT use. Cyberbullying, hate speech, and other harmful occurrences happening online should be filtered, if not, eradicated. The academe, church, and local government units may integrate values formation in their activities to promote morally and socially-engaged individuals. Future researchers may study the impact of social media influences amongst children. There is also a need to study the current parents' media and information literacy skills to identify what specific needs should be addressed. compared according to age and educational qualification, it was concluded that it does not matter in the context of this study, which might be due to the fact that the majority of the participants are in their 50s and are college graduates. There might be a different scenario if the age distribution were even. Overall, their computer and internet skills were comparable before and after the training. Researchers may study the impact of social media influences amongst children. There is also a need to study the current parents' media and information literacy skills to identify what specific needs should be addressed.

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