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Social and Educational Correlates of Internet Use among Boys in Senior Secondary Schools in Abuja Metropolis, Nigeria: Counselling Implications

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Abstract

The study was a descriptive survey designed to determine the social and educational effects of internet use among male students in senior secondary schools in Abuja Metropolis in Nigeria. The researcher used simple random sampling to select a sample of 350 male students from five randomly selected public secondary schools in Abuja Metropolis. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, and independent t-test was used for data analysis. Findings of the study included that compulsive internet users are more socially distant from their colleagues than optional internet users; compulsive internet users are less educationally focused than optional internet users. It is recommended that school authorities and parents collaboratively put mechanisms in place to counsel students in their internet use behaviour. Also, school counsellors should constantly organize guidance programmes and offer services to help students in appropriately using the internet so that it would benefit them socially and educationally.

Internet use has become a veritable means of getting into contact with the rest of the world in all areas of human existence. Among such areas are moral, social, psychological, educational, vocational, economic, physical and personal. For some people, information to be obtained from the internet is selective; for others, they go in for anything or they embrace whatever they stumble upon. There are people who use the internet only when they find it necessary. These are the optional internet users while with others, the internet has become an obsession. They seem to be addicted to its use. They use it excessively and continuously. These are the compulsive internet users.

A number of differences have been found to exist between those who use the internet in a healthy way and those who do not (Whang, Lee & Chang, 2011). While Al-Helaly and Al-Sakry (2009) in their study expressed their concern about the negative aspects of internet use, they nevertheless acknowledged the importance of this technology and call for its use in a way that would retain and preserve the respected socio-cultural values of a community.

Brown and Davis (2010) reported in their study that the internet provides students and other users with entertaining distractions such as e-mailing, chatting and access to games and videos. They further elaborated that as users are enjoying the applications and entries, users tend to forget or compromise their time management, educational focus and commitments. Some student internet users forget about lectures or lessons, assignments, group studies and other academic demands and consequently, perform abysmally or even drop out of school. School drop-out rate of freshmen in New York University increased dramatically with the increase in the investment and use of computers and internet access (Brown & Davis, 2010; Daniel, 2011). As the internet is often seen as helpful, interesting and entertaining, it is assumed to be a good distractor of students from academic work and it encourages procrastination if unhealthily used (Davis, Flett & Besser, 2010; Lavoie & Pychyl, 2011).

Joseph (2008) in a survey reported that though there are moral, social and educational gains in the use of the internet, there are as well dangers of students' excessive use of the Internet. They also asserted that these dangers can be summarized as online activities involving visiting pornographic sites, chatting with strangers far away, loading songs and music, gambling and joining internationally suspicious groups while sacrificing physical social life and educational or academic work.

Al-Maash (2008) stresses the negative side of globalization through in the use of the Internet. He contended that students' unguarded use of Internet weakens the relationship with their ethnic language, religious principles and other social set-ups.

This weakening of relationship and social set-ups can be inferred from the survey report by Maharan and Schumacher (2010). They stated that heavy or habitual student internet users get irritated and defensive when any physical friend intrudes on their online activities. Also, Brian and Peter (2010) reported that students' addiction to the internet has been found to lead to consequences of family and relationship problems. On the contrary, other authors such as Axel (2011) had argued that internet tools may become significant conduit for students' social life which may appear to have positive effects on the quality of their life. Sanders (2009) in a study found that optional or non-habitual internet users reported better relationship with their families and friends. Poor relationship may lead to unpleasant and unprofitable consequences. This

has been hinted at in Brian and Peter's (2010) report that Internet addiction has been shown to lead to consequences of family and other relationship problems.

Compulsive internet use distracts the user's attention from educationally or academically profitable activities for lack of time management, commitment and focus (Brown & Davis, 2010), and the resultant effect is school failure (Brian & Peter, 2010). In their compulsive use of the internet, students spend precious hours and are tempted to go into certain activities as visiting pornographic sites, chatting with strangers, loading songs and music and joining internationally suspicious groups (Joseph, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

The attitude of students in Nigeria especially males, toward school work and activities and education in general leaves much to be desired. Observations by teachers in senior secondary schools on students' attitudes to group work and group discussions, school social activities, submission of assignments, attendance to lessons and writing of class tests are not palatable. Knowing the date or time for a test or examination, some students only emerge from their hideouts to write the paper and in most cases, they do perform poorly. Among the many reasons that can be adduced for this is the students' use of the internet technology (Brian & Peter, 2010). This is because internet use can influence education and/or socialization either positively or negatively in the school setting and consequently, academic work (Young, 2011), depending upon the manner it is used.

In the school setting, students are engrossed with their mobile phones, palm-tops and lap-tops. Those who do not have these facilities go from one cyber-café to another, ostensibly to use the internet. One therefore wonders as to what extent the use of the internet affects these students' lives socially and educationally which eventually impacts on their academic work. It is in view of this that the study sought to determine how the use of the internet among male students in Abuja Metropolis influences them socially and educationally.

Purpose of the Study

The study was to determine the social and educational effects of internet use among male students in senior secondary schools in Abuja Metropolis in Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. Compulsive internet users will not be more socially alienated from their colleagues than optional internet users. Compulsive internet users will not be less educationally focused than optional internet users.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study because it involved data collection from a given population in an attempt to explore their opinions on existing conditions, practices, attitudes and trends that are developing.

Population and Sampling

The study population of approximately 6500 comprised all male students in the fourteen public senior secondary schools in Abuja Metropolis. Simple random sampling was used in selecting 70 students each from five randomly selected schools. In all, a sample of 350 respondents was used for the study. Out of this 188 and 162 respondents were identified as compulsive and optional internet users respectively. In obtaining this, the selected students from each school ticked their level of internet use of “Always/Excessively/For many hours” and “Occasionally/When necessary/Not for many hours”. These responses were categorized into “compulsive” and “optional” respectively.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used in this study namely; structured questionnaire and interview protocol. The structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. This consisted of 31 items. Item one elicited responses, by ticking one of the pairs, on the level of internet use: Always/Excessively/For many hours (for compulsive users) and Occasionally/When necessary/Not for many hours (for optional users). The remaining 30 items were on social and educational correlates of internet use. The items were in a 4-point Likert type scale of “Strongly Agree”, “Agree”, “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree”. The responses were converted into scores of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was pilot tested for reliability on 20 similar male students who were not part of the present study sample. The Cronbach Alpha yielded reliability co-efficient of .76.

Procedure

The 70 selected students from each school were given the questionnaire to respond to. The teachers helped to explain the items to them. The answered questionnaires were collected by the teachers after two days. This was to ensure that the items were responded to thoughtfully. The researcher later interviewed 10 respondents, two (one compulsive and one optional) purposively picked from each of the five schools. In doing this, the researcher interacted with the subjects and any first person identified as either compulsive or optional user was interviewed. The researcher did not involve any other interviewer in order to obtain original a first-hand and unadulterated qualitative data to validate the quantitative findings.

Data Analysis and Results

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using t-test for the two null hypotheses. Qualitative data from the interview were used to validate the quantitative findings.

H₀₁: Compulsive internet users will not be more socially alienated from their colleagues than optional internet users.

Table 1: Summary of Group Statistics

Level of Internet Use		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total internet users	Optional	162	32.22	3.66	.35
	Compulsive	188	33.05	3.82	.36

Table 1 shows the optional internet users (N = 162, M = 32.22, SD = 3.66) and compulsive internet users, (N = 188, M = 33.05, SD = 3.82).

Table 2: Results of t-Test of Significance of Scores between Compulsive Internet Users and Optional Internet Users on Their Social Life

		Levene's test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total Internet users	Equal variances assumed	2.912	.064	1.541	422	.038	.83	.46	.16	1.65
	Equal variances not assumed			1.561					.036	.83

The Intuition

A t-test revealed a statistically reliable difference, at Alpha level 0.05, between compulsive internet users and optional internet users on their social life ($p < 0.05$).

Consequently, the null hypothesis which states that compulsive internet users will not be more socially alienated from their colleagues than optional internet users is rejected.

This result is validated with quotes from the two categories of internet users. One compulsive user remarked: “As for me, when I go to the Net, even at home, I don’t want disturbance. My friends tell me I am only good at discussing Net and not book. As the Net is there I don’t need their company, for what?” Another compulsive user succinctly responded: “The Net is my better companion. It keeps me in my own world”. These quotes, by interpretation, suggest that compulsive users may be socially alienated from their peers.

On the other hand, an optional internet user said: “some people are married to the café. I’m not. I go there but I do more chats with my colleagues in school. I get more ideas from them”. Also another optional user had this to say: “The Net can keep you company alright, but what about discussions with mates? I value mates and their conversations”. These remarks suggest that optional users may not be socially alienated from their friends.

H₀2: Compulsive internet users will not be less educationally focused than optional internet users.

Table 3: Summary of Group Statistics

Level of Internet Use		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total internet users	Optional	162	33.29	4.82	.39
	Compulsive	188	34.13	5.16	.39

Data in Table 3 shows optional internet users ($N = 162$, $M = 33.29$, $SD = 4.82$) and compulsive internet users, ($N = 188$, $M = 34.13$, $SD = 5.16$).

Table 4: Results of t-Test of Significance of Scores between Compulsive Internet Users and Optional Internet Users on Their Educational Life

		Levene's test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total Internet users	Equal variances assumed	2.832	.071	1.416	426	.044	.84	.51	.19	1.84
	Equal Variances not assumed			1.488		.039	.84	.49	.17	1.82

A t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between compulsive internet users and optional internet users on their educational life ($p < 0.05$).

Consequently, the null hypothesis that compulsive internet users will not be less educationally focused than optional internet users is rejected.

This result is validated by quotes from the internet users. A compulsive internet user's response went thus: "I watch films for long. Face book. Ah, entertainment before any other thing. I wish I can go by my studies time-table. The Net is stronger". Another compulsive user had this to say: "I chat, play games on the Net. I can't check myself not to browse for long. In class, most times, I think of visiting Net for news, games, chat, face-book and all". The quotes suggest that compulsive internet users may be less educationally focused.

On the other hand, some examples of optional internet users' responses are: "I go to the Net when there is the need, especially, for information for my assignments. Though I do sometimes entertain myself on the Net, it is brief. I'm careful not to waste time and forget my studies" and "I visit the internet when absolutely necessary, and

when it will benefit me in my academic work in school”. These responses from the optional internet users suggest that they may be more educationally focused.

Discussion of Results

a) Internet use and Social Life

The finding of the first hypothesis is that compulsive internet users are socially alienated. This finding is in agreement with Kraut, Patterson and Landmark’s (2011) finding that habitual internet users seem to be alienated from normal social contact which tends to lead to loneliness and depression, and reduction of physical initiative for socialization. People learn much from one another. This result may be so because by getting so much engrossed with the internet to the extent of being alienated students who are compulsive internet users may be lacking the gains of discussions such as knowledge sharing and critical thinking with their colleagues. They spend great quality time with computers instead of their peers or colleagues with whom they may boost their social capital. The result also suggests that students who are optional internet users have better social relationship than their compulsive counterparts. With regards to students who are compulsive internet users, alienation might lead to the situation where colleagues would not be ready to offer them help be it academic, social and personal.

b) Internet use and Educational Life

The result of the second hypothesis is that compulsive internet users are less educationally focused than optional internet users. This suggests that the compulsive internet users may not attach much seriousness or promptness to academic activities or requirements such as writing and submission of assignments and project work. It supports the view of Brown and Davis (2010) that student compulsive internet users forget about assignments, group studies and other important academic activities. In their compulsive use of the internet, students spend precious hours and are tempted to go into certain activities as visiting pornographic sites, chatting with strangers, loading songs and music and joining internationally suspicious groups (Joseph, 2008). These activities by students, Joseph also opined, have educational dangers as they are done at the detriment of academic work.

Implications for Counselling

The findings of this study have implications that relate to vocational, academic and socio-personal counselling. For instance, student internet users need guidance on what educational sites to visit and how to manage their time and embrace good study habits. If they waste so much time on the internet, they may end up performing poorly in their studies. This will limit their later choice of courses and occupation. Careers often determine the type of later lifestyle one engages in. If at adolescence, students cannot share their time and views with their peers, it may also affect their adulthood relationship.

The findings of this study and the discussions point to the fact that while individuals become socially alienated, they would not engage in discussions and share educational ideas and experiences that may be useful to them as students, especially in today's competitive world. In view of this, internet use should be such that would not make the students become socially isolated and educationally unfocused.

There are many students who out of youthful exuberance, ignorance or otherwise do not know the repercussions of the activities they indulge in, such as the use of the internet. Most of the students in the senior secondary schools are adolescents and they are vulnerable to imbibe any material or information they come across on the internet. There is therefore the need for guidance and counselling intervention for these adolescents to be helped to make informed decisions as to the use of the internet for their ultimate personal development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The use of the internet has become habitual among many students. They do this at the detriment of their academic activities and considerations. It is hoped that non-compulsive use of the internet would offer students the chance to attend to social and educational activities in their lives.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i) The school and parents should collaboratively put mechanisms in place that would monitor and check the compulsive use of the internet by students both at school and at home.
- ii) Guidance and counselling programmes should be regularly organized to educate and sensitize students on the use of the internet as far as their social and educational lives are concerned.

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