Access and Utilization of Information Services through Internet among High School Students: An Empirical Study of Parental Perception

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Introduction

The advent of new information and communication technologies has translated the global village concept of Marshall McLuhan into a reality. New media have created 'information society' and brought about the globalization of information resources and services. With the exponential growth in the emergent media technology including the Internet, the print, broadcast, telecommunications, and computer communication have formed the new domains in order to create the converged media world in general and global consumption of goods and services in particular. The new media are technology oriented channels of communication which facilitate user to user interactivity in modern society. The emergence of Internet replaced the one to many model of traditional mass communication with the possibility of many to many web of communication. Internet is also one of the more important tools of interactive communication in modern society. Interactivity has become a key term for number of new media use options evolving from the rapid dissemination of Internet access point, the digitalization of the media and media convergence. Many scholars have studied the role of Internet in modern society which has brought about connectedness. The present study evaluates the access and utility of Internet among high school students in Chennai and Bangalore cities from the point of view of parents.

Three Ages of Internet Research

Internet emerged as a prominent medium of communication during the last decade of 20th century. It brought about a new age of globalization of communication and generated lot of interest among the researchers. The Internet research has assumed significance since researchers sought to fathom the multi dimensional parameters of Internet as an influential medium of communication. The focus of Internet research has changed over a period of time. Wellman (2004:18) identifies the three ages of Internet research namely ten, five and zero years ago. According to him, the first age of Internet studies saw Internet as a bright light shining above everyday concerns of people.

The scholars considered the emergence of Internet as a technological marvel of the 20th century which surpassed all communication related innovations. But the researchers succumbed to modernism and parochialism since they wrongly perceived that the world has started anew with the Internet. They also looked at the online phenomenon in isolation. The analyses were also often utopian, extolling the Internet as egalitarian and globe-spanning and ignoring how differences in power and status might affect interactions on and offline. The social and demographic variables were not systematically analyzed by them.

The second age of systematic documentation of the uses and gratifications of Internet began around 1998 when the realization dawned about the need for systematic accounts of the Internet which was based on objective description of the characteristics, capabilities and limitations. The documentation of the proliferation of Internet users and uses was based primarily on large-scale surveys, initially done by marketing firms (and with some bias towards hyping use) and later by governments, academics, and long-term enterprises such as the Pew Internet and American Life Study. Chen and Wellman (2003:07) consider that these studies were basically quantitative since the researchers compared demographic differences and learned certain basic advantages people derived from the use of Internet.

The third age of Internet research reflected the transition from documentation to analysis of the uses and gratifications of Internet. The third stage of Internet research was carried out in the new millennium which demonstrated the more focused, theoretically driven and operationally relevant in letter and spirit. In a developing country like India, Internet research is in its infancy. There is a great need to examine the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats of Internet with due respect to the ground realities. The uses and gratifications of Internet research need to be documented and analyzed on the basis of well defined parameters and tested techniques of scientific communication evaluation.

Review of Literature

Karnataka and Tamil Nadu States are well known in the country for overall development including the information science and technological progress. Information resources are expended in these states with a fond hope of creating enlightened citizenry in this age of competitiveness. Few researchers have assessed the growth, development, role, problems and prospects of Internet based information resources and services in India and abroad. However, quite a few studies are distantly related with the main theme of the present study are briefly presented in this chapter. Prominent among them include – Varalakshmi (1993:17), Wilson (1994:20), Kim (1997:12), Bowden et.al. (2001:05), Bhat (2001:04), Gustavo (2001:10), Mesch (2001:14), Gross et.al. (2002:09), Ajayi (2004:01), Bryant (2004:06), Doreswamy (2004:08), Balasubramanian (2004:03), Kumar and Kaur (2006:13), Seymour (2007:15), Allen (2007:02), Hanson-Baldauf et.al (2009:11), Sridevi (2010:16) and Wilson (2012:19). The review of literature clearly reveals that there is not even a single study conducted by any researcher in Chennai and Bangalore cities on the perception of parents about the access and utility of Internet based information resources and services among high school students.

Significance of the Study

Many scholars in various fields, such as education, psychology and sociology, have studied the impact of the Internet on people and society and reported the advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet. The children, adolescents, women and other sections of the society are affected by the Internet both positively and negatively in modern society. According to the latest Internet survey, about 900 million people worldwide were online. The studies have also revealed that all educational institutions in the world have Internet access regardless of level, region, or poverty concentration. As Internet use among the users is dramatically

rising, the scholars need to know what impact the Internet has on the community of users in modern society.

Students' access to Internet is encouraged by schools and teachers. One may even wonder, looking at the varied nature of the content, whether it is right to encourage students to spend more time on Internet. Nevertheless it is on the rise. For effective learning, Internet browsing should be guided in the right manner. Internet could be misused dangerously if its power is manipulated otherwise. Internet is a live medium. The power of convergence of various information technologies is realized through Internet. More research is needed in this field to get positive impact of this powerful tool in the hands of students.

The crucial importance of information access and acquisition among the high school students and other users becomes highly relevant in the present times since the world moves towards the knowledge-based society. In developing countries, the emphasis is on inclusive development through active participation of all sections of society in the mainstream of development. There is growing recognition in educational institutions, training centers, research organizations and development institutions of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu States on the crucial role of Internet which is required to provide a solid basis for education and to enhance quality of life of the students in schools, colleges and universities by providing information resources via ICT based tools. A perusal of available literature on the impact of Internet on users clearly reveals that not even a single investigation is conducted on the access and utility of Internet to the high school students in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka states. Hence the problem 'Access and utilization of information services through Internet among high school students' was chosen for the present study.

Statement of the Problem
The Internet provides all time and all round access to information resources and services to the mankind regardless of space and time. Scholars have emphasized the true nature of Internet as means of information sharing in the electronic form, with an electronic Internet network which provides access to, and delivery from, external worldwide information and knowledge sources. Karnataka and Tamil Nadu States have achieved commendable progress in the field of information management in the present times.

There is growing recognition in these two states about the crucial role of Internet in modern society. A synthesis of the available literature suggests that the impact of Internet on the lives of the people including the high school students suffers from series of limitations. Therefore, the primary tasks of the present study were concerned with identifying reasonably representative sample of parents and students who are directly associated with the Internet so as to assess their views on the access, utility and impact on the students.

The access and utilization of information services through Internet among high school students of Chennai and Bangalore cities was primarily considered in the study because:

a. In this age of information explosion, command over information is an unmistakable index of power and development.
b. Information acquisition among the users becomes highly relevant since the world moves to worlds knowledge – based society.
c. The Internet occupies an enviable status in the processes of individual development and collective development in modern society.
d. The high school students are becoming more connected to the virtual world through Internet in these two cities.
e. The Internet exposure among the high school students becomes higher and the students find limited face to face communication opportunities.

f. The increasing Internet exposure among the young generation of users including the high school students has brought about series of positive and negative changes in the lives.
g. A constant and continued research on the role of Internet in the lives of the young generation of users including the high school students in modern society is imperative in the developing states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Research Methodology
The present study approached the problem through a systematic survey method which is very popular in the fields of communication, journalism, development psychology, social science and so on. A structured and pre-tested interview schedule was administered to the high school students and their parents in Chennai and Bangalore cities in order to gather primary data on the access and utility of information services available in the Internet. Primary data were gathered through questionnaire tool by the researcher. The questionnaire was designed to explore the understanding of the respondents have about the utility of Internet from students' welfare and development points of view in modern society. The questionnaire consisted of five segments for the students and three segments for the parents which focused the attention of the respondents on the dependent variables of the study such as cultivation of students' media habits, Internet exposure of students, preference of information services of the students, frequency of utilizing the information services by the students and utility of information services by the students in the Internet. The attitude of parents towards Internet and influence of Internet on parents were also analyzed by the researcher. Primary data were gathered from about 180 parents and 600 students from Chennai and Bangalore cities.

Statistical Analysis
The primary data were analyzed on the basis of certain standardized statistical tests which include – percentage analysis, graphical representation, Chi-square test and cross tabulation. All the statistical methods were carried out through the SPSS for Windows (version 16.0).

Limitations of the Study
It was not practically possible for the researcher to enjoy the benefit of accessibility of data to all the educational institutions located in Chennai and Bangalore cities. It was also not possible to study the perception of all the stakeholders on the utility of Internet from the point of view of the progress of the high school students in Chennai and Bangalore cities due to lack of time. The usual limitations of the survey method such as time, human inadequacies, resource constraints, recollection and communication were experienced by the researcher. It was not possible to contact all the high school students, their parents, policy makers and activists associated with students' welfare in these two cities mainly due to large numbers, lack of time and other constraints. Stratified sampling method was followed in selecting the respondents. Though much care has been taken to collect the primary data, the memory bias on the part of the respondents cannot be completely ruled out.

Findings of the Study
Attitude of Parents towards Internet Browsing
The parents have perceived that: Internet is a medium of instruction for students (100%), parental restriction of children's Internet browsing is necessary (100%), Internet brings about benefit of exposure (91.11%), Internet browsing is a positive academic activity (66.67%), Internet exposure improves the cognitive performance of students (80.0%), Internet enhances socialization among students (73.33%), Internet improves betterment of academic discipline of students (88.89%), parental monitoring of Internet browsing among students prevents certain harmful effects (88.89%), Internet browsing among students in the presence of parents is a healthy activity (86.67%), parental guidance for Internet browsing of students promotes academic status of students (92.22%) and

parental restriction of Internet browsing safeguards the interest of students (100%).

Influence of Internet on Parents

The parents have stated that Internet exposure encouraged the parents to get actively involved in the education of students (65.56%), adopt right techniques and mold the academic career of students (66.67%), assume managerial role for socio-emotional development of students (71.11%), regulate students' opportunities for better social network development and human relations (86.67%), initiate contact between students and various stakeholders of academic progress (77.78%), monitor the progress of high school students in terms of social settings, associates and activities (84.44%), develop interaction with high school students in order to make them grow into socially mature and beneficial individuals (84.44%), facilitate meaningful advancement of competitive spirit in the high school students (82.22%), facilitate personality development in the high school students (87.78%), adopt healthy parenting as high school students (91.11%), become more knowledgeable about the integrated development of the high school students (70.0%), learn the art of adolescents' care (71.11%), treat the adolescents positively (75.56%), provide stimulating environment to the adolescents (82.22%), cultivate healthy human relations with the adolescents and other members of the family (77.78%), adopt mentoring programs which improve the achievement of the high school students who were adolescents (80.0%), understand the issues of personal and academic development of high school students (80.0%), develop the craft of nurturing the high school students (86.67%), understand the importance of parenting in adolescents' development (80.0%) and provide necessary facilities, resources and opportunities for the development of high school students (86.67%).

Testing of Hypotheses

H1. The parents in Chennai and Bangalore cities have not developed a right perspective about the role of Internet in the lives of the high school students.

The data clearly reveal that the parents in Chennai and Bangalore cities are aware of the role of Internet in modern society and developed a right perspective about the role of Internet in the lives of high school students in particular. Hence, the above hypothesis stands disproved according to the data analysis.

H2. The Internet exposure has not created new awareness among the parents about their role in the overall development of high school students

The data clearly indicate that internet exposure has brought about new awareness among the parents in the study areas about their role in the overall development of high school students who passed through the critical stage of adolescence. Hence, the above hypothesis stands disproved according to the analysis of data.

Implications of the Study

The implications of the findings of the study with reference to the access and utility of information services through internet with reference to high school students of Chennai and Bangalore cities in general terms are given below.

· The present investigation reveals that it is imperative to formulate a national policy on students' welfare and development at this juncture.
· The Government of India are required to formulate a National Policy on New Media and constitute an advisory body for evolving a need based national policy.
· The state governments and local-self government bodies in India should increase the budgetary allocations for the implementation of new media expansion, decentralization and democratization programs at various levels.
· The mass media should also sensitize the various stakeholders of new media management and students welfare in India. The media should launch series of campaigns in order to educate and sensitize the policy makers, bureaucrats, scientists, technocrats and other stakeholders of new media management and popularize the beneficial effects of new media resources and services in the age of communication technological revolution.
· The educational institutions should also carry out research activities, extension programs and publication programs which would benefit the students in several ways.
· These institutions should also organize seminars and conferences which highlight the methods of judicious application of new media for various developmental endeavors in India.
· The non-government organizations constitute the third force which is responsible for accelerating the progress of nation in general and students' welfare in particular.

Suggestions for Future Research

New media intervention for students' welfare and development is a vast area of research. Personality development of students is also another vital area of research in modern society. Research on students' Internet exposure is usually directed at examining the standard of contents of Internet from students' development point of view. There is a need for establishment of linkage between new media institutions and educational institutions in a developing country like India. Future studies should clearly establish how new media contents, services and resources affect the progress of students in general.

Conclusion

The new media services are not designed and implemented by the specialists in the present times. However, the current new media resources and services have certain short comings and drawbacks from human resources development point of view. These new media are required to put forth best efforts to protect the interest of the students who are the future nation builders by policing the contents and improving the quality of Internet services in India and other countries. The future agenda for new media professionals must deal with the processes of corporate social responsibility, professional ethics, social accountability, human resources development, students' welfare and integrating the constituent publics which can facilitate greater inclusive development of all sections of mankind through meaningful new media intervention packages. The policy makers and professionals should understand the needs of students in specific age groups and deliver students –specific information services in order to promote healthy personality in students.

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