RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF THE INTERNET AND ITS IMPACT UPON STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF PERVERSE ISSUES: LITERATURE REVIEW

Abdulkarim A. Al Saif

Abstract. There are a lot of studies that have dealt with the different facets of the use of the internet. Most studies have identified entertainment and amusement as the major motivation for internet use with seeking knowledge and making social relationships coming as distant second and third respectively . Varying lines of investigation have been taken in this regard by different researchers notable among which are the impact of internet use on cultural and religious values, national language, loyalty to the home country, family ties and relationships, psychological stability and well-being, attitudes towards learning, educational usages…etc. While few question the learning and educational benefits of internet use, many authors have voiced their concerns over the adverse effects on religion and the national culture. Fears have also been expressed of internet addiction and related problems which may negatively affect the social behavior of youthful people. However, the evidence on the impact of internet use remains somewhat mixed and more research –work is needed.

Key words: Internet use, motivation, impact, learning benefits

Motivations behind using the Internet

Several authors have studied the factors that motivate students to use the internet and the consequences thereof. For example Aziz (1999) shows that the use of the internet leads to innovation, creativity and self learning (p. 37). Tayaa (2000,) demonstrates that about 72.6 % of a sample of 5000 students from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait use the internet (pp. 33-68). The study reveals that the internet is primarily a source of information for internet users, accounting for about 91.5 % of internet usage, a source of amusement and whiling away the time. These two uses account for about 88.7%. Communicating through e-mail comes in the third rank with 59.3 %. The study concludes that there is no statistically significant difference between males and females in this respect.

Although the multi-country approach Tayaa adopts carries the risk of concealing some important inter-country differences, it nevertheless bears the advantage of allowing some useful and a meaningful generalizations.

Sherman et al. (2000) apparently agrees with Tayaa's account of the motives for using the internet, but takes exception to the latter's conclusion that there is no statistically significant difference between males and females in this respect the shows that there is a gap between males and females but that this gap is narrowing down with regard to the use of the internet (pp885-894).The study indicates that males are more familiar with and attracted to the internet than females, with differences between the two sexes in their behaviors with regard to the use of the internet still existing. Hadlek (2000) stresses the role of the internet in exchanging information between researchers, thus facilitating discussions in every field (pp. 14-17). It is easy now to contact the scientists at anywhere in the world. Al-Kandry and Al-Kashaan (2001) argue that there are significant differences between males and females in the average number of hours of using the internet in favor of males (pp. 1-45). Shaheen (2001) shows that there is no clear relationship between the increasing use of the internet and the gender of the user (p. 48). Mansour (2004) argues that the first motivation of using the internet is seeking knowledge and it is followed by amusement and making social relationships, and that there are no significant

differences between males and females. The study shows that about (85%) of internet users are satisfied with their results of using the internet (pp. 167-196).

These studies focus on the motivations of using the internet which can be summarized as the the following: seeking knowledge, amusement and making social relationships.

Impact of the internet on students

There are many studies that show that using the internet affects positively students' motivation, increases self-learning, and improves both communication and writing skills. These studies point to the necessity of using the internet in general education, colleges, institutes and universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Al-Helaly and Al-Sakry (1999), for instance, show both positive and negative sides of using the internet, and invite all internet users to share in establishing the national culture and living in harmony with the information technology revolution. The study concludes that in connecting to the internet people should take the teachings of our religion and the related social traditions into consideration. It expresses the dire need for more Arabic studies which deal with internet use ethics. While this study expresses concern over the negative aspects of internet use, it nevertheless acknowledges the importance of this technology and calls for using it in a way that retains and preserves the revered social values of the community.

Al-Sultan and Al-Fantoukh (1999) oppose using the internet within the classroom because it is an additional load on the teacher, with information illiteracy and the English language being gaps that can be obstacles to using the internet within the classroom. Gardner (2000) points to the physical problems that relate to addiction to the internet such as eye sight problems and neck and back problems.

El-Degany and Wahba (2000) point to the obstacles facing teachers in using the internet at schools such as lack of training programs and technical support. Moreover, they point to the dangers of using the internet for non-educational purposes since there are some passive attitudes towards using the internet related to the dangers of using it. According to El-Degany and Wahba, there is another problem facing teachers, which is the issue of too much knowledge on the internet, which may cause dispersal of information. Lack of English language control is another big problem that may face the users of the internet.

Salum (2002) claims that using TV and satellites has very dangerous effects on the young people because it weakens loyalty to their country and to the community, thus weakening family ties (pp.265-293). It may also raise and stimulate the criminal behaviors and the social diseases. But Al- Maaush (2002) stresses the negative side of globalization through using the internet as it may weaken the relationship with the Arabic language and the religious principles Despite the legitimate concerns raised by these and other authors who are wary about the negative effects of the internet, it must be noted that these authors do not consider the positive sides of internet use and how to encourage youthful people to make use of them and what precautionary measures might be taken to protect them from the pitfalls of the internet.

Abdel Ghany (2002) surveys a sample of 400 male and female student from Cairo, Al-Mansoura and Al –Azhar universities. This sample reveals that 74% of them think that there are moral dangers of using the internet, which affects the young negatively. These dangers can be summarized in the following points: visiting pornographic sites, chatting with strangers, loading songs and music, and joining internationally suspicious groups. The study shows that the main use of the internet is for entertainment purposes, followed by cultural and sporting interests (pp. 1219-67).

Mohammed (2000) argues in his experimental study that students have positive attitudes towards the internet even before studying through it. After studying through it, there is a remarkable improvement in students' skills, knowledge, and attitudes towards the internet (pp. 149-161). On the other hand, Davis (2002) claims that e-learning is very effective in learning process through educational freedom and the availability of the database and interacting with the e-learning systems (pp. 162-176). Abdul – Aziz (2003) argues for the importance of using the internet in learning. It depends on the necessity of planning and performing e-courses for Saudi Arabian curricula. The study suggests using the internet in learning, and argues for the importance of overcoming all the problems and the difficulties to

achieve this aim. Song et al. (2004) indicates that there are some factors that affect e-learning such as the quality of course design, time management, and the ability of performing homework and tasks at any time (pp. 59-70).

Al-Sofy (2004) stresses the bad effects of using the internet. It affects people' ethics, behaviors, culture, language and physical and psychological health. Moreover, addiction to the internet causes many social diseases. The study has suggested an educational model that can assist in protecting the young from the dangers of the internet. The model intends to do so through self-control, sexual education within the family and schools. Furthermore, the study suggests the necessity of facilitating marriage and controlling young people misuse of the internet, which requires the integration of the efforts of educational institutions.

Dogan et al. (1999) emphasize the positive attitude towards using the internet for educational usages. These usages are associated with visiting effective educational sites and exchanging information with friends. Dogan et al. argue that there are no significant differences between males and females in this connection.

Klein (2001) compares users' responses to internet information and information from traditional resources such as books, forums, and magazines. The study concludes that book information is more accurate and trustworthy as compared internet information. On the other hand, Li, Kirk and Hodgson (2001) compare two samples of female students, one from china and the other from Britain, to explore their attitudes towards using the internet. The study shows that British students are more experienced than their Chinese counterparts but the Chinese students have positive attitudes compared with their British peers (pp. 415-26). This seems to suggest that a big part of internet use by the youth is for entertainment purposes. Since western culture may be presumed to be richer in this respect, it may be understandable that British students have less positive attitudes towards the internet than their Chinese peers.

Morahan and Schumacher (date) surveyed 277 undergraduate Internet users, a population considered to be high-risk for pathological Internet use (PIU). Pathological use was determined by responses to 13 questions which assessed evidence that Internet use was causing academic, work or interpersonal problems, distress, tolerance symptoms, and mood-altering use of the Internet. Approximately one-quarter of the students (27.2%) reported no symptoms (NO) while 64.7% reported one to three symptoms (Limited Symptoms) and 8.1% reported four or more symptoms (PIU). Based on popular stereotypes as well as on previous research, it was predicted that pathological Internet users would more likely be males, technologically sophisticated, use real-time interactive activities such as online games and chat lines, and feel comfortable and competent online. Further, it was hypothesized that pathological users would be more likely to be lonely. Durndell and Haag (2002) argue that males are more interactive and less worried than females (pp. 521-35). This gender dimension seems to be a recurring theme in the literature, but no satisfactory explanation has given of its existence.

Meena (1997) argues that the use of the Internet is widespread in numerous fields and domains, carrying no doubt a great potential for educational use, specifically second and foreign language education. While the Internet and its various facets offer a great deal to the language learner, it is not without its problems. The nature of the Internet itself can be a disadvantage at times. When lines are busy due to many users, it may take time to access information. Lack of training and familiarity on the part of the teachers can make it difficult to implement the Internet in the language classroom. This requires school administrators to budget for training in this area. Foreign language teachers are especially anxiety prone to computers since they often have little experience with computers. Also, the Internet offers access to all types of issues and topics, some of which are unsuitable for children and result in various problems.

Kyunghee et al. (2006) examined the relationship of Internet addiction to depression and suicidal ideation among Korean adolescents. The participants were 1573 high-school students living in a city who completed the self-reported measures of the Internet Addiction Scale, the Korean version of the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children-Major Depression Disorder-Simple Questionnaire, and the Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire-Junior survey design. Among the samples, 1.6% was diagnosed as Internet addicts, while 38.0% was classified as possible Internet addicts. The prevalence of Internet

addiction did not vary with gender. The levels of depression and suicide ideation were highest in the Internet-addicts group (pp. 185-192).Despite the relatively strong association found here, these findings still leave open the question of whether depressionist and suicidal behavior causes students to get addicted to internet use or whether it is the latter which causes depression and suicidal tendencies among students? May be some joint efforts between education and psychology research will shed more light on the issue.

According to Brian and Peter (2005), computer and Internet use has become a staple of everyday life, which may lead to addiction through overuse. Research on Internet addiction has shown that users can become addicted to it. Addiction to the Internet shares some of the negative aspects of substance addiction, and has been shown to lead to consequences such as school failure and family and relationship problems (pp. 237-244).

Because of its rising importance, the addiction hypothesis was further investigated by other scholars. Thus the study by Kimberly (1998) indicated that some on-line users were becoming addicted to the Internet in much the same way that others became addicted to drugs or alcohol, which resulted in academic, social, and occupational impairment. However, research by sociologists, psychologists, or psychiatrists has not formally identified addictive use of the Internet as a problematic behavior. (pp. 237-244), not to mention the difficulties of defining "addictive use" of the internet. The nature of the work and occupations of some users dictate that they "overuse" the internet. Such "overuse" can not be appropriately characterized as " additive use"

Schumacher and Morahan (2001) ascertain that participation by females on the Internet is hampered by their attitudes towards computers, which in turn is reflective of their attitudes towards new technology. Research generally supports that females have less overall experience with computers and are more likely than males to have negative attitudes towards computers. Although limited, research on Internet experiences and attitudes has found parallel gender differences, with females reporting lower levels of experience and more negative attitudes (pp. 95-110). However such differences may be open to criticism on the grounds that they do not control for cultural differences. It appears that if intercultural differences are taken into account, they may account for the observed phenomenon of gender differences. Further research in this area appears to be in order.

Sanders (2000) investigated whether higher levels of Internet use are associated with depression and social isolation among adolescents. Eighty-nine high school seniors were administered a questionnaire that measured low (less than 1 hour per day), moderate (1-2 hours per day), and high (more than 2 hours per day) Internet use; relationships with mother, father, and peers; and depression. Low Internet users, as compared with high users, reported better relationships with their mothers and friends (pp. 237-242).

Eric (2001) examined the association between Robert Weiss's bimodal theory of loneliness and Internet use. The degree of social and emotional loneliness was assessed using the Social and Emotional Loneliness scale. This was compared with self-report measures of Internet use and the breadth of one's network of friends, both online and on a face-to-face basis. Low levels of social and emotional loneliness were both associated with high degrees of face-to-face networks of friends, while high levels of Internet use were associated with low levels of social loneliness and high levels of emotional loneliness. This supports recent research that has found that the Internet can decrease social well-being, even though it is often used as a communication tool (pp. 393-401).

Philip et al. (2001) show that for a growing cohort of Americans Internet tools have become a significant conduit of social life and work life (pp. 383-404). The surveys of the Pew Internet & American Life Project in 2000 show that more than 52 million Americans went online each day, and there are significant differences in use between men and women, young and old, those of different races and ethnic groups, and those of different socioeconomic status. A user typology can be built around two variables: the length of time a person has used the Internet and the frequency with which he or she logs on from home. The authors contend that use of e-mail helps people build their social networks by extending and maintaining friend and family relationships. These finding are clearly out of line with the frequently cited "depression" and "loneliness" these postulated by some of the other

researchers. Further investigations of these issues may need to probe more deeply into nature of the uses of the internet and how they lead to varying outcomes.

Axel (2001) argues that the Internet and its potential effects on society are receiving much attention in public discussions (pp. 427-430). Many discussants expect that the World Wide Web will enhance global trade of products and services and thus will increase economic wealth. However, social scientists are concerned with possible social side-effects of the Internet. Specifically, a recent experimental study by Kraut et al. (1998) found that greater use of the Internet decreases communication within the family, diminishes the size of the subjects' local social networks, and increases feelings of loneliness and depression. This study sheds doubt on the generality of these findings. Results from a survey of 15 842 Internet users and a control group of 1196 non-users conducted in Switzerland suggest that Internet use neither decreases respondents' network size nor the time spent with friends. The study also shows that electronic mail is widely used and has positive effects on people's social networks. The study uses many socio-demographic control variables and statistical methods to control for simultaneity

From the previous presentation, it seems that the evidence on internet use impacts students is mixed. On the one hand, it appears that there are lots of dangers associated with using the internet such as penetrating the national culture and adversely affecting the social values of the community and probably undermine the mother-tongue language. On the other hand , it has been shown by other researchers that internet tools may become a significant conduit of social life and work-life. Some internet uses, particularly the electronic mail appears to have positive effects on the quality of people's social life so the evidence is mixed and the jury may still be out on the issue.

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Author

Abdulkarim A. Al Saif, Qassim University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, e-mail: manahij@gmail.com