

Parental Concern Towards Internet use by Their Teenage Children in Nepal

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Abstract:- Traditionally education was centered on sources such as schools, teachers and print media. Different is the case now. Internet has emerged as the huge source of knowledge and information which has become prominent among new generation. A small-scaled study was conducted among ten parents of different districts of Nepal to examine the parental concern to the rocketing use of new media technology, especially the Internet, brought up a digital generation, which both excites and worries the parents. The results indicate that parents' worries and concerns vary, in certain aspects, according to age and gender of the child and parents' own Internet literacy. Positive attitudes parents had were with educational and informational usage, a window opening to the whole world where as negative were related to health issues, social isolation and addiction but completely unknown about Cyber Law. Hence, this study suggests the parents to consider the legal issues of internet use increasing computer and internet literacy.

Keywords: Parental attitudes – Parental Concern– Children – Internet use – Teenage

INTRODUCTION

Nepal does not possess very long history in the development of internet. It was 1993 when internet was first introduced into Nepal in a venture of the Royal Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (RONAST) and a private company, Mercantile Office Systems (MOS) and was customary one year later. (Montgomery 2002). Slow paced expansion continued for about fifteen years. Within the 25 years history of internet in Nepal, the users in last decade increased tremendously. Although only 9% of total population used internet in 2011, it increased rapidly and reached 63% in 2017, 68% in 2018, 70% in 2019 and 72% in mid 2020 (Giri 2020 and NTC 2019) . According to the survey of Nepal Telecom 75% of total internet users use it in their mobile. This rocketing pace of internet use has resulted several positive and negative consequences especially to teenaged children.

The Internet has immense potential to improve the quality of education and wide range of resources to support the learning. According to Dryli and Kinnaman (1996), as cited by Dogrur, Menevis and Eyyam. (2011), the Internet enables students to find as well as allowing them to think critically and creatively, to become collaborative and cooperative workers and to solve problems. Proper use of internet opens doorways to a wealth of information, knowledge and educational resources, increasing opportunities for learning in and beyond the classroom (Souter 2017). However, lack of awareness can cause children to encounter serious danger and become victims of Internet criminals. Although the internet is a beneficial tool for youth, some children and adolescents are at high risk of being victimized online (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). As a result of the intensification of internet, the vulnerability of children has also increased substantially resulting into a raised prospect of crime against them. Remarkable variation is observed in the concern and attitude of people about internet and its consequences. People from different generations exhibit fundamental variation in attitudes and values (Bolzan, 2003; Halyal & Mallappa, 1985 as cited by Razu, 2017). Students have more positive attitudes about online resources in comparison to traditional methods of learning. Use of internet in learning is still limited. Students like to use but teachers and parents do not encourage them (Golnaz & Azizeh 2014). New generation tends have higher computer and internet literacy allowing them trick their parents and keep their work in internet secret. Although, technologies also pose some risks that parents need to identify and guard against, controlling over computer and internet use is complex task for parents. In most of the cases there is substantial gap between what children do online and what their parents know.

Children often have a sense of anonymity and safety when sitting behind a computer. A child's natural curiosity and innocence can quickly lead to entangle them in a wrong place in digital society. Since a large number of people, especially children use the internet in Nepal for entertainment purposes, they don't keep care of their privacy in the cyber space which can result to encounter a lot of issues like frauds, cyber bullying, identity theft, phishing, encounter inappropriate content, addiction and several illegal, health and socio-cultural hazards. Internet use without being guided and supervised by parents and teachers makes children susceptible to the negative effects of the Internet. Parents' involvement in monitoring their child's behavior and relationships and ensuring a safer use of the Internet is very important. Barkatullah, Q., and et all (2014).

However, the Parental concern towards internet use by their teenage children has already been investigated specially in European countries; few researches were conducted in Asian cultural background as well. Concern and attitude towards internet is dynamic since its growth is rocketing. As the results of COVID-19 has increased internet dependency for learning among the teenage children in Nepal, this research investigating concern of parents in present context is very significant one. According to the database of Nepal Police, the number of Information Communication Technology related criminal cases registered at the

Metropolitan Police Range, Kathmandu has an increasing trend (ECPAT Luxembourg, 2019). This research especially focused on legal awareness of parents about internet safety.

METHODOLOGY

This study used purposive sampling in participant selection and interview for data collection From August 15 to 22, 2020. The research I developed was to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How parents express their perception and concerns towards the internet use by their teenage children?
2. What are the issues in internet that parents worry about their children?

In order to explore these issues, I carried out a small-scaled study in a sample of ten parents with teenage children at least one. I conducted telephone interviews with eight of them first and followed few in second round interview. Remaining two, I met physically keeping social distance as it was the period of lockdown due to COVID- 19.

Table 1: Research participants

S.N.	Name	Age	Sex	Address	No. of teenaged Children		Internet Literacy	Formal Education	Occupation
					M	F			
1.	Radha	41	F	Rupandehi	1	1	beginner	Bachelor degree	Housewife
2.	Narayan	45	M	Rupandehi		1	Advance	Bachelor	Technician
3.	Pampha	37	F	Rupandehi	1	1	Beginner	Basic level	Housewife
4.	Gunakhar	45	M	Gulmi	1	1	Beginner	Secondary	Shopkeeper
5.	Udaya	47	M	Argakhanchi	1		Beginner	Basic level	Farmer
6.	Dhana	43	F	Palpa		1	Basic	Bachelor	Teacher
7.	Damodar	42	M	Rupandehi	1		Basic	Secondary	H.M
8.	Min	38	M	Rupandehi	1		Basic	Bachelor	Teacher
9.	Ajay	39	M	Nawalparasi	1	1	Basic	secondary	Politics
10.	Aarati	36	F	Rupandehi	1		Beginner	Secondary	Housewife

Among ten parents six were fathers, four mothers and five had two teenage children, rest of other had only one child of the age group. Four respondents were of aged 35 to 39, one of 40-44 and five of 45-49 years. Eight parents had at least secondary school education and one of the respondents had advance internet literacy, four had basic knowledge and five were beginners.

Considering that using the Internet involves higher degrees of intellectual and physical maturity, the target population for the study was parents with ‘teenage’ children aged between 13-19 years (WHO). Regardless of whether additional children were out of this age range, responses were included as long as a child fell within the specified range.

The open-ended interview questions were developed based upon previous research, as well as through consultation with the senior researchers. The draft interview questions were pre-tested with two parents (not involved in sampling) and the wordings were revised and some questions were added later to fit the context. Although parents are primarily responsible for their children’s Internet use, the Internet is too large and complex for families to manage without assistance.

RESULTS

Inductive analysis of tabulated data gave results under two broad themes related to the research questions, i.e. ‘attitude’ and ‘concern’. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used.

Parents’ Attitude

Overall, parents have understood about positive and negative impacts of internet in the life of people especially teenage children based on their knowledge and experience. Most of the respondents reported that their attitude towards internet use was highly been influenced by the impact COVID- 19. Pampha from Butwal reported that her attitude was negative before and changed into positive then. She said, “Before I used to think it’s only to connect people in Facebook and games which ultimately lead to harm, but now I have totally different attitude that it’s the largest source of knowledge and information”. She felt amazing when she found her children interacting with their teachers in online classes. Gunakhar from Gulmi expressed his happiness to see his daughter attending online class from her home only run by a college in Butwal. This was more highlighted by Dhan, a primary school teacher from Palpa with one teenaged son, who questioned “since listening to the teacher and friends, viewing their video, asking questions, discussing, doing homework and classwork is possible through online, why is it necessary to go to school?”

Furthermore, some of the respondents noted the importance of internet for personality development and search for knowledge. Pampha believes that internet is the source to verify the knowledge and information. According to her internet makes the children independent in learning. She said, “Even me, when want to know something new, ask them to see in internet and tell me”. Narayan from Butwal who is also software engineer, having a teenaged daughter, assumed that internet provided children a huge source for personality development and to develop wider network. He added, “Keeping this fact in mind, I have provided internet, mobile and laptop to my daughter for unlimited time”.

Parents’ Concern

Many parents feel uncertain about the actions and experiences their teenage children have on the internet, thus causing worry and concern (Emma 2012). Although most of the parents showed positive attitude towards internet use, their concern to its

consequences was found very poor. As the research was to explore the concern of parents in two issues, 'health' and 'legal', data are analyzed in these two different areas.

HEALTH ISSUE:

Health related issue of internet use by teenage children is found one of the highly concerned issues by parents. Most of the respondents in this research showed due concern on eyesight related problem. Pampha found news of a boy being mentally isolated due to over exposure in online game PUBG which was quite alarming for her. She articulated, "My mind alarmed having reading the news, immediately shared the news with my children and warned them". She further added, "If there is one thing which bothers me about internet use is its health hazard specially eyesight and mental disorder". Beside eyesight very few respondents were also found conscious about psychological disorder and social isolation. Aarati from Rupandehi was more worried about psychological disorder and emotional insecurity in children. She noted her own experience that her son showed mysterious behavior when she snatched his mobile for a week last year. Min emphasized his own role and told that he had prepared time table for internet use for his fifteen years old son. He believed the timetable would help to reduce health hazards related to internet use. Damodar noted that he was more conscious about psychology and social interaction and he believed that frequent internet use had had been linked to anxiety, addiction and social isolation.

"Some of my neighbors complain me about their children being affected by frequent use of internet. The complain is really major one and made me surprise to listen. Complains were related to social isolation, anxiety and unaware about surrounding."

LEGAL ISSUE:

When I asked whether they were conscious about legal issues of internet use, most of the respondents reported that they never took the legal issue into consideration, neither worried about. It is because of lack of knowledge and ignorance. Aarati said. She had heard about 'Cyber Crime' but had no more idea about it. Gunakhar believed his children that they would never go wrong in internet and no longer thought about its legal issues. When I told about some possible unpleasant result of illegal internet use, he was alarmed. He was totally unaware about "pornography" "pirate files", "copyright problems" and "gambling", neither most of other were.

However, Narayan and Ajay were found quite conscious regarding legal issues of internet use. Narayan who had a computer and laptop repair center was not only aware, also experienced on its legal consequences. He said, "My elder son troubled in this regard as he once ordered goods in online, all together cost around ten thousand from one of my costumers mobile through E-sewa". Furthermore, He was called by his son's college authority several times for publishing memes of his college teachers in Facebook page. He also noted the moment when he had to visit police station due to the same reason once. Similarly, Ajay, politician who had a son and a daughter was quite known about legal issues. He told. "I have seen many internet related crimes in our society and I always make my children aware about them". He outlined several possible consequences where internet had benefited the teenagers to get involved in illegal activities.

The parents were more concerned that daughters, in contrast to sons, would meet dangerous people on the Internet and come into contact with stressful information. Radha From Rupandehi said, "I don't worry about son but I afraid with daughter that they can easily be miss leaded if encountered bad people in online." Similarly, Dhan hardly let his daughter remain online beside online classes. Pampha never checked his son's mobile but she frequently checked her daughter's mobile. She told that she had snatched her mobile several times suddenly from her hand and sometimes looked at night after she slept.

Similarly, Computer and Internet literacy played a vital role in shaping parental attitudes and concern. The current study found that the more knowledge of computer and the Internet that the parents held, the more concern in legal issues of internet use like copyright and online gambling. This finding indicates that parents who are more knowledgeable in the use of the Internet and computers would also be most aware legal issues of Internet use. Narayan, software engineer had most positive attitude towards internet and was more conscious regarding its misuse and legal issues, where as Radha who had very less internet literacy was completely unknown about legal issues and so was the case with Udaya, a farmer from Arghakanchi who had one teenaged son.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the parental insight and concern towards expeditiously escalating use of internet by their teenaged children. Although, most of the parents demonstrated positive view point towards internet use, destitute concern to its legal consequences was striking, led the way to significant gap between what children do in internet and what parents know. The result of COVID-19 made the learning depending on internet; tendency of internet exposure among teenaged children was increased. Simultaneously, there was higher possibility vulnerability.

Parent's frame of mind on importance of internet were; provided their children with huge source for personality development, exploit wider network, made their children self-governing, provided a tool for the verification of obtainable knowledge and facts. Overall, they revealed internet as one of the important assets of assembling knowledge.

However, the research shows that many parents feel uncertain about the actions and experience their teenage children have on the internet and they are found to have very less aware about its consequences in the aspects of health, mind, psychology and society. The results indicate that parents' worries and concerns vary, in certain aspects, according to age and gender of the child. Furthermore, parents' own Internet skills, experience of using the Internet, and attitudes toward the Internet are related to the type and nature of their worries and concerns. Overall, the results indicate that parents have poor internet and computer literacy which results uncertainty about the possible harm.

This study suggests the parents to consider the legal issues of internet use increasing computer and internet literacy. It also proposes stakeholders, educators and policymakers to enhance internet literacy to parents as well allowing them supervise against possible vulnerable actions on internet not through restrictions rather mediation for better academic performance.

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