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Internet abuse among the adolescents: a study on the locale factor

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Abstract

Adolescence is the stage of transition. Though the Internet is a useful source of information and channel for speedy communication, its abuse among the adolescents is of much concern. The rural and urban communities differ in many respects including the accessibility and use of the Internet. The present study focuses on the locale factor in the abuse of the Internet by the adolescents. The study is conducted on a sample of 150 adolescents in Kerala State in India using a structured questionnaire. The results show that as compared to the urban adolescents, the Internet abuse is more among the rural adolescents. This may be because of their ignorance about the seriousness of the matter.

Keywords

Internet; Cyberspace; Blogosphere; Plagiarism

Introduction

The world of paper and print is giving way to a digital world where everything has digital form whether text, graphics or sound. The digitized world being fast and current, the younger generation is moving fast towards the digital way. Cyberspace and blogosphere are the new worlds of the young generation who exploit and experiment all possibilities of the digital environment.

The rapid growth of electronic media with all their potential to change the pattern one gathers and communicates information have brought about positive and negative possibilities of using and misusing the media. On the positive side, the electronic media like the Internet provide facility to communicate faster, retrieve and handle information in a more easy way and copying and distributing in innumerable number. On the negative side, it causes concern about the possibility of accessing and distribution of unwanted information, plagiarism, security threat, etc. These concerns can be worsened by parents'

relative lack of the Internet sophistication compared to their children's. The combination of the rapid growth of the Internet, not knowing the effects of Internet use, and concerns about the negative consequences of Internet use has created a climate where bad news can become magnified ([Morahan-Martin, 2001](#)).

Adolescents

Adolescence is the stage of transition in which boys and girls start transforming mentally and physically into adulthood. Though males and females differ in their psychological and emotional problems at this stage, they all have the confusion and curiosity of growing.

It is the period of emotional excitement and stress caused by different physical and psychological changes and development of sexual feelings. It is a stage when most of the boys and girls think of independence and personal identity. Hence, clash in the outlook and opinion of parents and children is common at this stage of the boys and girls. The real 'generation gap' and the 'digital divide' between parents and children may become apparent at this stage.

The Internet and Adolescents

The younger generation views the Internet as a useful source of information and channel for speedy communication. It is also an effective medium of socialization. Using a couple of keywords and clicks on the mouse, students have sufficient material to cobble together an assignment. The speed of the cut-and-paste process serves to reduce the opportunities to reflect, leading to carelessness in thought, carelessness in citing material and ultimately to plagiarism ([Ellery, 2008](#)).

However, there is every possibility that the adolescents might use the Internet for experimentation. They may be interested in information relating to violence, sexual content, adventures etc. The experimentation may sometimes lead to cybercrimes including the intrusion to others' data, plagiarism, using and spreading pornographic material and sending anonymous messages. This is because of the lack of proper awareness on the part of the adolescents about the seriousness of the matter. The excessive use of the Internet may also cause distraction from their studies.

Though the Internet has the advantage of providing a platform for socialization, interaction of the adolescents with people with different culture may cause accepting the culture of other societies which may be taboo to the society in which he/she lives. This will create identity confusion among the youngsters.

Adolescents, while being online, are whole new, worse like in a pretend world. These experiences can influence their emotional wellbeing as well as their safety. There is no guarantee of avoiding the exchange of verbally harassing or sexually aggressive chat ([Laidi, 2006](#)). Many children go to cybercafes even when they have the Internet connection at their homes because some parents are aware of the serious effects of over dependence on the Internet and the possibility of its abuse.

Adolescents with the Internet addiction exhibit more impulsivity than controls and have various comorbid psychiatric disorders, which could be associated with the psychopathology of the Internet addiction ([Cao et al., 2007](#)).

Experts say that net nerds are sick people. Those who serve the Internet for more than four hours a day are clinically ill and need medical treatment, the Internet addicts will be regarded the same way as alcoholics and gamblers ([Yunus & Khayel, 2000](#)).

Rural and Urban Adolescents and the Internet Abuse

The rural and urban communities differ in many respects including the accessibility of electronic information. Urban adolescents may have more tendencies to use the Internet. The level of education and awareness about the abuse of the Internet may also be high among parents in urban areas. Most of the rural parents in the Kerala State are not much exposed to the Internet and their awareness about its misuse may be limited. The rural adolescents with their rustic curiosity may explore and experiment the possibilities of the Internet when they are exposed to such modern technology for the first time. The urban adolescents have the opportunity of getting more information about the possibilities of use as well as abuse of the Internet. Hence, the pattern of abuse of the rural and urban adolescents will differ in various aspects. The present study therefore focuses on the urban-rural disparity in the abuse of the Internet.

Methodology

The study is conducted on a sample of 150 adolescents in the Kerala State of India (Rural=75 and Urban=75) out of which 145 responded positively (Rural=72 and Urban=73). A structured questionnaire, specially drafted for the purpose is used for collecting the data.

Objectives

The main objective of the study is to find out the difference in abuse of the Internet among rural and urban adolescents. Different areas of abuse of the Internet among both these groups are studied.

Analysis

The responses collected from the adolescents are analysed using percentage method. The result thus obtained is presented here.

Habit of Changing/Manipulating Information on the Internet

The adolescents were asked whether they have the habit of changing/manipulating the content of information on the Internet. The response received from them is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Habit of Changing / Manipulating Information on the Internet

Response	Rural	Urban	Total
Yes	16 (22.22)	14 (19.18)	30 (20.69)
No	56 (77.78)	59 (80.82)	115 (79.31)
Total	72 (100.00)	73 (100.00)	145 (100)

* The figures in brackets show the respective percentages.

It can be observed from Table 1 that though the majority of the adolescents in rural and urban areas have no habit of changing/manipulating the information content in the Internet, a considerable percent (22.22 percent among the rural adolescents and 19.18 percent among the urban adolescents) have this habit. The percentages reveal a comparative high level of such habit among the adolescents in the rural areas.

Opinion about Giving False Information on the Internet

To know the awareness of the adolescents in rural and urban areas, they were asked to express their opinion about giving false information on the Internet. The response thus received is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Opinion about Giving False Information on the Internet

Opinion	Rural	Urban	Total
Fun	27 (37.50)	14 (19.18)	41 (28.28)
Unethical	13 (18.06)	15 (20.55)	28 (19.31)
Criminal offence	32 (44.44)	44 (60.27)	76 (52.41)
Total	72 (100)	73 (100)	145 (100)

* The figures in brackets show the respective percentages.

It can be seen that as compared to rural adolescents more urban adolescents feel giving false information on the Internet as unethical and as compared to the urban adolescents more rural adolescents find such activity as fun. The majority of the urban adolescents (60.27 percent) find giving false information on the Internet as a criminal offence. However, among the rural adolescents such awareness is not as high as that among the urban adolescents.

Habit of Downloading Vulgar Pictures/ Pornographic Items

The habit of downloading vulgar pictures and pornographic items among the adolescents is part of their curiosity and the outcome of their sexual interest developed at this stage. The response of the adolescents to the question whether they have the habit of downloading vulgar pictures/pornographic items is presented in Table 3 and their opinion about such activity is presented in Table 4.

Table 3: Habit of Downloading Vulgar Pictures/ Pornographic Items

Response	Rural	Urban	Total
Yes	28 (38.89)	12 (16.44)	40 (27.59)
No	44 (61.11)	61 (83.56)	105 (72.41)
Total	72 (100)	73 (100)	145 (100)

* The figures in brackets show the respective percentages.

Table 3 shows that the habit of downloading vulgar pictures/pornographic items from the Internet is more among the adolescents in rural areas (38.89 percent) as compared to the adolescents in urban areas (16.44 percent).

Table 4: Opinion about Downloading Vulgar Pictures/ Pornographic Items

Opinion	Rural	Urban	Total
Wrong	60 (83.33)	59 (80.82)	119 (82.07)

Not wrong	12 (16.67)	14 (19.18)	26 (17.93)
Total	72 (100)	73 (100)	145 (100)

* The figures in brackets show the respective percentages.

It can be seen from Table 4 that the majority of the rural and urban adolescents have the opinion that downloading vulgar pictures/ pornographic items from the Internet is wrong. However, the rural adolescents are more in this opinion.

Plagiarism

To find out the level of plagiarism, the adolescents were asked the method of their using information on the Internet for writing assignments. The response is presented in Table 5. They were also asked to express their opinion about copying and pasting the Internet information for assignment writing. Table 6 shows their response to this question.

Table 5: Method of Using Information on the Internet for Writing Assignments

Method	Rural	Urban	Total
Copy and paste method	44 (61.11)	33 (45.21)	77 (53.10)
Reading the matter and extract the items	26 (36.11)	34 (46.57)	60 (41.38)
Writing the matter as such	2 (2.78)	6 (8.22)	8 (5.52)
Total	72 (100)	73 (100)	145 (100)

* The figures in brackets show the respective percentages.

From the result, it can be seen that plagiarism is more common among the rural adolescents (61.11 percent). It can be clearly seen from Figure 1.

Figure 1: Method of Using Information on the Internet for Writing Assignments

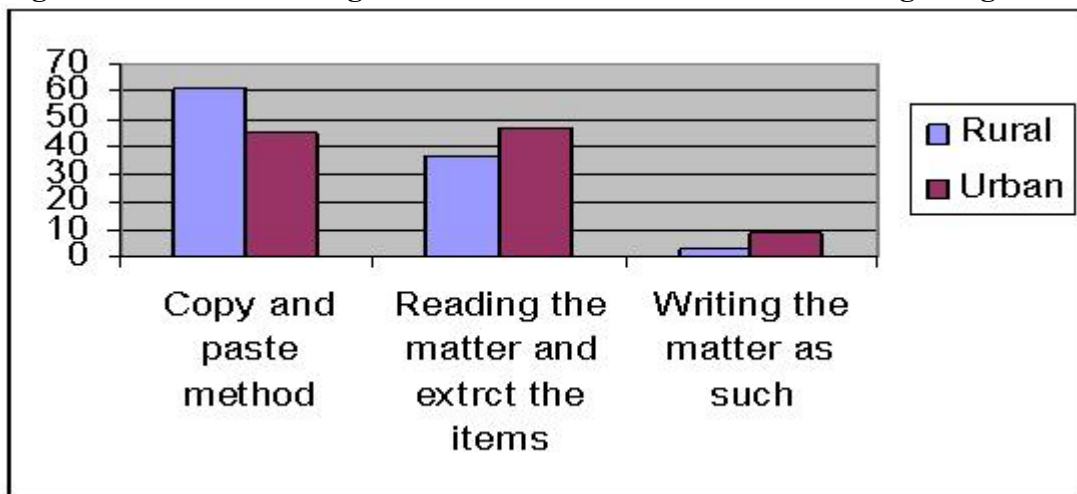


Table 6. Opinion about Copying and Pasting Information from the Internet for Preparing Assignments

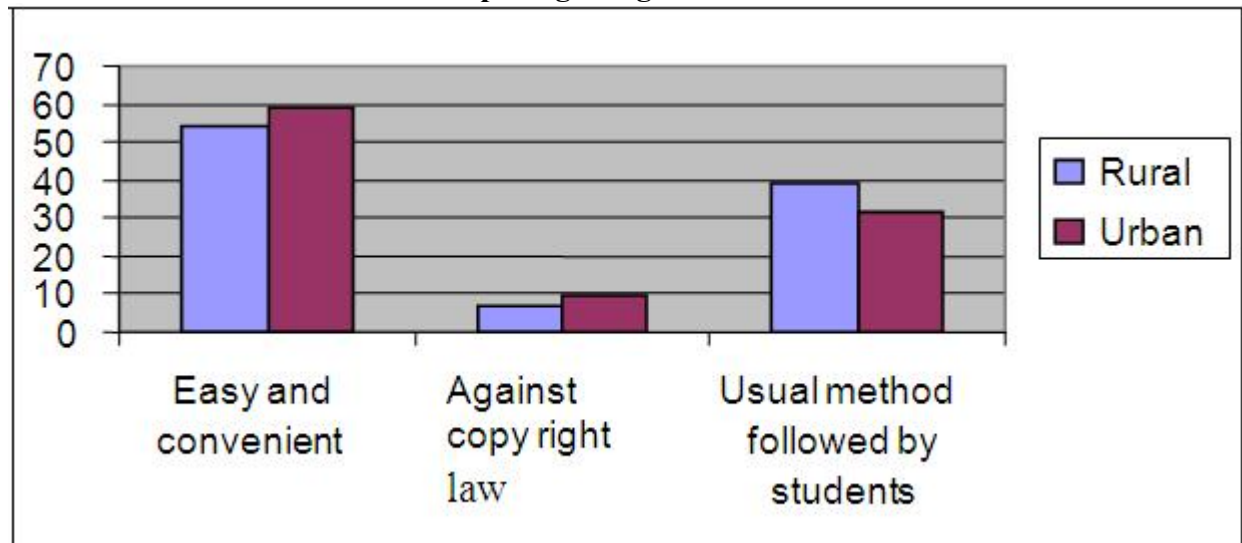
Opinion	Rural	Urban	Total

Easy and convenient	39 (54.17)	43 (58.90)	82 (56.55)
Against copy right law	5 (6.94)	7 (9.59)	12 (8.28)
Usual method followed by students	28 (38.89)	23 (31.51)	51 (35.17)
Total	72 (100)	73 (100)	145 (100)

* The figures in brackets show the respective percentages.

It can be seen that the majority of the rural and urban adolescents feel that copying and pasting information from the Internet for writing assignment is easy and convenient. However, most of them are not aware that it is against copyright law. The awareness however is comparatively more among the urban adolescents (9.59 percent). Figure 2 also shows this.

Figure 2: Opinion about Copying and Pasting Information from the Internet for Preparing Assignments



Tendency of Sending Unwanted Messages

Adolescents were asked to express whether they have the tendency of sending unwanted messages through the Internet. Their opinion about this activity also was sought. The responses thus received are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7: Tendency of Sending Unwanted Messages

Sending	Rural	Urban	Total
Yes	12 (16.67)	10 (13.70)	22 (15.17)
No	60 (83.33)	63 (86.30)	123 (84.83)
Total	72 (100)	73 (100)	145 (100)

* The figures in brackets show the respective percentages.

It can be seen from Table 7 that the majority of the rural and urban adolescents have no tendency of sending unwanted messages through the Internet. However, among those who have such tendency more belong to the rural community (16.67 percent) as compared to the urban adolescents (13.70 percent).

Table 8: Opinion about Sending Unwanted Messages

Opinion	Rural	Urban	Total
Fun	15 (20.83)	7 (9.59)	22 (15.17)
Not Good	44 (61.11)	51 (69.86)	95 (65.52)
Crime	13 (18.06)	15 (20.55)	28 (19.31)
Total	72 (100)	73 (100)	145 (100)

* The figures in brackets show the respective percentages.

Table 8 shows that the majority of the rural and urban adolescents think that sending unwanted messages through the Internet is not good. However, some feel it as fun and in this attitude the rural adolescents are more (20.83 percent) as compared to the urban adolescents (9.59 percent). More urban adolescents (20.55 percent) as compared to rural adolescents (18.06 percent) find it a crime.

Result and Discussions

The analysis reveals that the habit of changing/manipulating information on the Internet, habit of downloading vulgar pictures/pornographic items, plagiarism and tendency of sending unwanted messages are comparatively high among the adolescents in rural areas. Comparatively higher percent of the adolescents in rural areas find giving false information on the Internet as fun. The rural adolescents are behind the urban adolescents in the understanding that giving false information on the Internet is unethical and a criminal offence. Even though the rural adolescents are more in downloading vulgar pictures/pornographic items; they are more aware as compared to urban adolescents that it is wrong. In the case of plagiarism, adolescents feel that it is easy and convenient and it is the usual method followed by the students. As compared to urban adolescents, more rural adolescents find sending unwanted messages as fun. The rural adolescents are poor in understanding it as not good and a crime as compared to the urban adolescents.

Conclusion

As compared to the urban adolescents, the Internet abuse is more among the rural adolescents. This may be because of their ignorance about the seriousness of the matter. With the rustic innocence they find it a fun. They are not much serious about the criminal aspect of such activities. Though the rural adolescents are involving in such activities due to their innocence and ignorance, abuse of the Internet is a serious matter and this calls for proper education and awareness programmes to the adolescents especially in rural areas. The parents' involvement in guiding the young generation is also important.

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