Case Study in North Macedonia: Social Media Usage in Youth

Ljubica Topuzoska*

Teacher, PhD, Head of the Department for International Collaboration University of Information Science and Technology St. Paul the Apostle

Volgogradska 12, 1000 Skopje, North Macedonia

Email: ljubica.topuzoska@uist.edu.mk

Abstract

This study aims at showing the positive and negative impacts of social media usage in youth. Social websites have achieved a phenomenal global growth over the last decade. Using social media web sites is the most common activity of today's children and adolescents. Researchers have explored the consequences of such an overuse and impact on daily activities, such as learning, mutual communication as well as their ethical behaviour. The research was conducted among more than 500 scholars aging from 10 to 16, provides an insight of the social networking influence on the behaviour and the lifestyle of the youngsters in North Macedonia. The findings show that the majority of the youngsters use social media on a large scale, mainly for communication purposes. Beside the positive effects, like faster and easier communication, the results of the research show that there are several negative impacts. Namely, many young people place too much emphasis on the virtual interaction and ignore the real world. Moreover, the findings show that most of the young people are not aware that the social media usage can diminish their privacy and thus make them vulnerable to various negative virtual impacts. The results show that habitual social media use is the single biggest predictor of individual victimization in such influence. Thus, this paper suggests that frequent social media use among young people shall be monitored by the adults in order to avoid negative impacts like cyber bullying, "social media depression" and exposure to inappropriate content.

*Keywords***:** social media; youngsters; influence; behaviour; moral development.

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* Corresponding author.

1.Introduction

Social networking has become part of the daily life experiences of large number of people. Social network sites, such as Instagram, TikTok and Twitter are becoming extremely popular among all generations, specifically among young people and scholars. Given the fact that most of the young people are taking part in the social networking, the question that arises is how these daily activities influence on their daily life, specifically on their learning process, communication with others as well as on their moral behaviour? Whether the positive effects prevail over the negative effects? Since such specific research has not been done in North Macedonia, this article examines the social networking influence on three specific aspects: learning, communication and moral behaviour of the young people. Moreover, a comparative research has been done in terms of social media influence on the young people living in urban and rural areas of the country. According to the recent Eurobarometar report on cyber security (Special Eurobarometer 423), a substantial minority of EU citizens (24%) do not access the Internet at all (this includes 18% who never access the Internet and 6% who do not have any Internet access). 63% of EU citizens use the Internet every day (or almost every day), while a smaller proportion (13%) uses the Internet less often. North Macedonia, as a candidate country in EU, was not included in the Eurobarometar survey. The available statistics illustrates that 71% of the North Macedonian population were using internet in 2019, which is significant increase comparing to 2,5% of internet users in the country in 2010. Although the internet is popular among all generations in the country, the focus on this research was given to the young population, who mostly uses social networking sites. According to the available data, social media networking in North Macedonia is primarily used for personal communications as well as a tool for disseminating news. The most used social networks, according to the same source, are: Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn.

2.Literature Review

Global technological development, with its own unique characteristics requires detailed study. Its consequences have already caused significant changes in psychology, world views, values, and society. One of the most striking phenomena of the digital age is the formation of online culture and media-culture. Although, the concept e-culture is still developing, already it is evident it cannot be compared with anything that has ever existed. E-culture, digital or online culture is a new sphere of human activity, associated with the creation of the electronic versions of spiritual and material objects as well as the creative work of virtual objects of science, communication and art. The most important characteristics of e-culture is transparency, global nature and availability for every user. Everyone can become both an user and a creator of online phenomena, enjoying creative freedom and few limitations. [26]. Social network sites include a variety of web-based tools and services that are designed to promote community development through collaboration and information sharing [18]. Besides social networking, young people are familiar with other virtual communication tools, for instance blogs, wikis, instant messaging, chat rooms, or combination of these [20]. in order to share online ideas, documents, photos and videos. The rapid acceptance of social networking sites by young people raises important questions: Why do young people gather to these sites and what do they articulate? Do those changes in communication affect the global changes and how it influences their daily life? Youngsters face enormous pressure to look perfect online not just happy, but blissful, ecstatic and successful. Unable to achieve this

impossible standard, they are anxious about letting the less than perfect parts of themselves become public. Far from wanting to share everything, they are very selective when it comes to curating their personal profiles, and worry obsessively that they might unwittingly post something that could come back to haunt them later in life [28]. Social networking is defined as a set of people and the relationships between them [24]. The digital world is here to stay, but the families are losing close, significant interactions with the adults in their lives [7]. Young people have become much more informed than any other generation before and there are exposed to much more uncontrolled information [19]. Social media shows how most of us communicate; but no one more than teenagers and young adults. They spend on average 2-3 hours a day connected to social media sites. Online social networking provides young people with a range of positive opportunities to maintain social connections and share emotional support, learning and an almost infinite array of interests. However, social media use can also have negative impacts, such as excessive use, social isolation, loss of privacy, cyberbullying, anxiety and self-esteem pressures [13]. The addictive reliance upon social media and its influencers is having a demonstrable impact on thinking, feeling and perceiving everything around us and even how we react to stimuli [3]. There is a fine line between a healthy dose and an overdose in social media usage [5]. 52% of teens feel less confident because of feeling inadequate when comparing their social media profiles with other people's [21].

Definition that is found today in the social networking services that promote the development of online communities of people and describe how relationships and a network is developed among members as they work together to identify issues and solve problems through negotiation and collaboration. Relationships are developed based on the use of tools, not on the psychical presence of face-to face groups. Most of the children involved in the survey stated that social media has become their lifestyle and it makes their lives easier and efficient. Among other advantages of social networking, they mentioned that this type of communication helps them to stay updated with the daily events. Furthermore, they stated that the social networking helps them to stay connected and interact with each other, regardless if they communicate on short distance or they are many kilometres apart.

3.Methodology

The research was conducted in the period of September 2019 to December 2019 among over 500 North Macedonian scholars in four primary schools (out of which 2 from urban areas and 2 from rural areas near the capital) and two secondary schools (one from Skopje, the capital and one near the capital). The young people who were asked to response to the questionnaire were at age 10-16. In the same period, semi structure interviews were carried out with 168 adults (parents, teachers, psychologists and others relevant factors) in order to provide their opinion on the social media influence among youth. The daily experience of working with scholars and adolescents as well as the opportunity to observe their daily activities and lifestyle was of a great support to conduct this research. The interviewees provided insights that could be useful when considering social media impact towards the above mentioned aspects.

For the purpose of the research, the survey was conducted among 522 scholars, 98 parents, 37 teachers and 33 relevant professionals.

Table 1: Number of respondents, sex and age.

Categories	Sex	*N*	Total number	Percentage (%)
Children age 10-16	Female	234	522	33%
	Male	288		42%
Parents	Female	52	98	7%
	Male	46		7%
Teachers	Female	25	37	4%
	Male	12		2%
Relevant Professionals	Female	15	33	2%
	Male	18		3%
Total		690	690	100%

4.Results

4.1 Children

Most of the children (more than 90%) answered that they use social media every day. TikTok is their most popular site, as well as Instagram, although more than half of the respondents stated that they use Facebook as a popular social tool. Twitter is slowly becoming popular between the pre-adolescents, although most of the children answered that they usually do not tweet, but rather follow interesting twitter users or read jokes. However, the research has shown that most of the children from both rural and urban areas (91,9%) answered that they use social media every day.

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Author [10] notices that the community status does not have particular role in the usage of the social media sites. Similar results have been obtained from this survey.

It was observed that there is no particular difference between the time spent on social networks between children living in urban and children living in rural areas of North Macedonia. This is due to the fact that the internet access is affordable and accessible to people in many sectors of the North Macedonian society (specifically in schools, as a learning tool). Moreover, the survey results showed that the gender doesn't have an impact in the use of social media sites.

Table 2: Social networking among scholars.

Respondents (age 10-16)					
	Yes, always	Yes, often	Occasionally	Rare	Never
Do you use social media?	496	15	11	0	0
	TikTok	Instagram	Facebook	You Tube	Twitter
Which social media do you use?	96,2%	93,1%	55,6%	92,3%	10,4%

4.2 Adults

As a main outcome of the interviews conducted with adults is their opinion that the social media usage has enormous influence on learning, communication and moral behaviour of the children (100% of the answers). Most of the interviewees (60, 83%) have the opinion that the social media usage has much more negative rather than positive impact towards children. Although many parents today use technology incredibly well and follow the social media activities of their children, some of them may find it difficult to understand the new forms of socialization. Some of them lack the basic understanding of the new technology, which leads to lack of parental control and negative virtual impacts toward children.

Table 3: Adult`s opinion about the influence of the social networking towards scholars.

	A lot	Occasionally	Rare
Usage of social media between youth (your opinion)	168	0	0
	Strong	Week	No opinion
Influence of the social media on youth	141	7	20
	Positive	Negative	No opinion
Kind of influence of the social media on youth	58	98	12

Table 4: Influence of the social networking towards learning process.

Respondents (adults)					
Influence of the social networking towards learning					
Positive experiences	Fast and easy access to information (92%)	Prompt exchange of information and learning material (89%)	Better interaction and share of ideas (80%)	On line teaching (76%)	Improved cooperation between teachers and parents (72%)	Other (53%)
Negative experiences	Lack of concentration (57%)	Absence of personal opinion (79%)	Deficiency of criteria for false and non-relevant information (85%)	Lack of literature expression (67%)	Deprived grammar skills (64%)	Other (35%)

5.The influence of social media networking (Overview of the Results)

Regarding limited capacity for self-regulation, children are at risk as they navigate and experiment with social media without proper parental control. Recent research indicates that there are frequent online expressions of offline behaviours, which leads to problems such as cyber bullying and privacy issues. Other problems that merit awareness include internet addiction, which reflects on the learning process, mutual communication and moral behaviour among pre-adolescents. However, the conducted research showed that beside the negative prevalence, the social media sites usage has some positive impacts. To illustrate this author [11] stated that users

"make use of these networked tools and services to establish new relationships and to construct extended social networks to support their own educational process". The conducted research by the authors as well as their daily observance of the way the children interact and learn while they are in school, demonstrated that there are several educational advantages. Namely, using social media can be beneficial in multiple ways: fast and easy access to information, learning how to collaborate, prompt exchange of information and learning material, better interaction and share of ideas, online teaching and courses, educational applications, technology in classroom, as well as improved cooperation between the teachers and the parents. Authors [16] conclude that social media usage enhances peer interactions, which can bridge diversity in the classroom and establish open lines of communication between children and teachers. Another learning advantage from the social networking is that these interactive tools facilitate discussion and knowledge transfer between the children, "creating a deeper sense of understanding of the course material" [1, 4, 12]. Consequently, overall learning process among children can be amplified in terms of the dynamics of learning and access to information. However, the results of the survey conducted by the authors showed that the daily social media usage results with several negative implications towards the learning process, like lack of concentration, absence of personal opinion, deficiency of criteria for non-relevant and false information. Moreover, the observance of the daily school activities showed that pre-adolescent and adolescent children have lack of literature expression as well as deprived grammar skills. Many positive and negative effects can be identified also as regards to the social networking influence on the mutual communication between the children. The social networks have provided a platform whereby the youngsters can create groups, pages and build connections by initiating various topics to discuss. Authors [24] describe how relationships and a network is developed among members as they work together to identify issues and solve problems through negotiation and collaboration. Relationships are developed based on the use of tools, not on the psychical presence of face-to face groups. Most of the children involved in the survey stated that social media has become their lifestyle and it makes their lives easier and efficient. Among other advantages of social networking, they mentioned that this type of communication helps them to stay updated with the daily events. Furthermore, they stated that the social networking helps them to stay connected and interact with each other, regardless if they communicate on short distance or they are many kilometres apart.

However, although the research has shown that the social media provide faster and easier communication as well as networking anytime and anyplace, many negative effects have been identified, like: false sense of connection which leads to isolation, diminishing the privacy, lack of age-limitations in communication as well as exposure to false identities. As the school children tend to spend many hours on these sites, they rarely have face-to-face interaction (mostly while they are in school). According various studies, this can lead to social isolation as well as emotional and psychological problems. The indicating number that came out as a result of the survey is that most of the respondents consider social media info relevant (78%) and never verify the info published on the social networks (46.6%), which make them vulnerable on the negative virtual impacts.

According to the ASA compliance survey (2013) "Compliance survey on children and advertising on social media websites", over 80% of children aged between 11 and 15 have lied about their age when using social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram. This means that under aged children are viewing unsuitable adverts, including ones for gambling, slimming aids, alcohol, and sexually explicit dating websites, because, in most of the cases, they have claimed to be older than they are. This is also confirmed with the survey conducted in the

North Macedonian schools. An alerting number of respondents in the survey (32%) answered that they had negative experience on the social media sites. Beside the exposure on an inappropriate content (85 respondents), some of the children testified that they had an attempted contact by unknown person, requesting private information (25 respondents). 18 respondents said that they managed to access sexually explicit dating websites.

Regarding the social networking influence towards the moral behaviour of the children, it is very important to provide appropriate guidance in order the children can develop their moral properly. At the very beginning, they do not have their own moral values, so they follow the moral values of the people in their immediate vicinity (family, teachers and friends). According to Piaget [14] this is a period of moral heteronomy. For proper moral development, it is crucial to guide the child in order to gain the next phase- phase of moral autonomy which means to create a person with high moral principles. Author [10] defines the behavioural ethics as "subject to or judged according to generally accepted moral norms of behaviour". Rest and Barnett [15] defined an ethical situation as: "one where the consequence of an individual decision affects the interests, welfare, or expectations of others". Because this definition takes "others "into account, Brass claim that it is likely that relationships and social networks are involved in behavioural ethics. The authors of this paper intended to explore how the social networks influence the moral behaviour of the school children in North Macedonia. The results of the survey in the North Macedonian schools showed that social networks are capable of influencing moral cognition and thus ethical behaviour of the scholars. The main advantage in this sense is that social media can be basis for sharing positive experiences and realising the negative occurrences by the children. However, since in early age the children are in the egocentric stadium of development, they are not aware of the needs of others and they are directed towards themselves, which does not leave enough capacity for them to form their own objective opinion. Therefore, the negative influence to the moral behaviour of the children prevail the positive one. The fact that children spend too much time in the virtual world without parental control leads to several negative occurrences, like ignoring the real world (which often leads to an aggressive attitude). Furthermore, the parents and the teachers testify that many of the school children are obsessed with virtual idols, which affect their individuality and leads to distortion of their values.

Table 5: Influence of the social networking towards moral behaviour of the scholars.

Respondents (adults)					
Influence of the social networking towards moral behaviour of the scholars					
Positive experiences	Sharing positive experiences (64%)	Realising negative occurrences (35%)			Other
Negative experiences	Ignoring the real world (77%)	Aggressive attitude (43%)	Obsession with idols (81%)	Distorted values (12%)	Other

6.Conclusion

This study offers an assessment of the implications of the social network usage among pre-adolescent and adolescent children in North Macedonia. Social networking influence is an interesting platform for research, since the technology has become an integral part of children`s life. The key questions that have been initiated were how the social networking influences the emotional, social, and cognitive effects of the scholars.

More specifically, this research focused on the implications of the social networking on their learning process, communication and moral behaviour.

Given the popularity of the social networking sites, the parents and the teachers in North Macedonia that took part in the survey expressed great concerns about the implications of this kind of communication between the school children. The concerns range from privacy of the scholars, their safety, psychological well-being, social and moral development as well as learning process. The research shows that social networking clearly portrays both positive and negative effects. Namely, most of the young people are not aware that the social media usage can diminish their privacy and thus make them vulnerable to various negative virtual impacts. While there is evidence that social networking enhances scholar learning [10, 21], future research needs to build on this findings, specifically addressing assessments of social media usage in particular classrooms (i.e. science, math, and language arts).

Regarding the prevention of negative effects of the social networking, it needs to be stressed that the introduction and implementation of safety precautions, like obligatory parental monitoring and high level privacy settings is very important precaution measure. This includes limited access to social media at school or at home (by filtering the sites). Moreover, the cyber bullying should be part of the education process in the schools in order scholars to recognize the content that does not correspond to their age.

However, it should be taken into consideration that the adolescents bring already existing social, psychological, and emotional characteristics into the online community. These human factors interact with the respective social networks in order to influence how individuals network and communicate. From the ethical point of view, this research clearly shows that the habitual social networking impacts the moral behaviour of the scholars. Therefore, the parents should be aware of the importance of the permanent moral and ethical education while the child is in the period of "heteronomy" moral (following the other's values), which would then lead to the period of moral autonomy (creating own values and proper and effective norms).

Future causal studies shall attempt to model these interactions to develop finer theories of communication and youth development in social network site environments.

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