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Identity Development and Internet Misuse

Final Project

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The twenty first century is characterized by the development and appearance of new technologies used to help people, facilitate and make their life easier. The most common used technology among people, and especially young ones or more precisely adolescents, is the internet. It has recently been known and introduced to Morocco but has widely been propagated throughout many people homes and schools. It is no more reserved to a certain social class but used by everyone without considering their age and maturity. Nowadays, in Morocco, internet is not yet accessed in all homes but this is not an obstacle. Some adolescents, pushed by their curiosity and looking for all what is new, look for cyber-cafés. Others, also look for spaces in order to be online even if they have access to internet in their homes, because some parents are aware of the serious effects of this new technology and the complications that their children might have in their relationships or academic achievement. Internet is in process of expansion which explains that not many people have an obvious idea about its uses. They consider it as a technology full of enjoyment and entertainment wanting to know more about it forgetting its dangers and severe effects either socially, personally or academically.

Adolescence is considered as a turbulent time where adolescents are building their identity and personality and searching for a sense to their lives. It is a critical phase where a great attention should be paid to them and try to show them the convenient way far from any drawbacks that can lead to confusions and identity crisis. All what is new is considered as having negative side effects on teenagers since no guidance is offered to them. One of those dangerous difficulties is internet.

Internet is considered as the most widely used tool for information seeking but was designed to be uncontrollable. Accessing it can be open to misuse by adolescents like inappropriate and sexist approaches, especially when there is no guidance. It is a powerful environment for enhancing the transfer of social and emotional skill development. It is used

by everyone at any age either for academic purposes or for self-fulfillment. "There is an extensive access to the world because of the initiation of the World Wide Web". The greatest part of people who use the internet, and who are more likely to be addicted with, concerns adolescents because of their actual sensitive stage of life and the search for their sense of life. The problem is that they are prone to the misuse of internet which may contribute in facing complications at the stage of identity formation.

Kimberly (1996, p273-244) stated that "adolescents viewed the internet as being a useful resource tool for business and personal communication. It is a medium for socializing and creating an increased circle of new friends among different cultures". There are many indicators that began to appear showing that adolescents, at this critical age, might use the internet for "anonymous identity experimentation". They are more exposed to violence, racism, sexual content and receiving some "deleterious messages" because adolescents "do not apply the learned critical thinking skills while surfing on the net". Those virtual activities distract them from their studies and any sense of responsibility and respect since there is no direct human contact. Additionally, another serious problem might emerge. Since internet connects many different people throughout the world who belong to different cultures, adolescents could be influenced by each other. Therefore, adolescents could be linked to those foreign cultures and behave in the way their online friends behave. The problem is that those behaviors could be seen as being strange and do not conform to their actual culture restrictions and traditions. This confusing situation might be a direct source of having identity confusion since teenagers do not know to what behaviors they should conform to.

Many teenagers reported that they are aware of their internet misuse and immoderate use since they remarked many effects. They experienced significant and serious academic problems such as the incapability of completing their homework assignments, difficulties in preparing for their exams as well as the lack of sleep. Berson (2000, p159) reported that

"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". After the excessive use of internet, adolescents could not do any other activity except being always attached to their computers and surfing on that virtual world. Some of them find a "refuge from their problems and daily life complications". They could not take control of themselves and this may be related to internet addiction.

On the other hand, Berson, and after conducting a research, stated that "the fact of being on-line allows adolescents to explore aspects of their personalities that are hidden in their interactions". Consequently, adolescents will develop their sense of moral judgment as well as their personality. Teenagers also added that they have both on-line personalities and real life ones to feel free to say whatever they want without any restrictions from anyone with more comfortable and "less stressful surroundings". This could help them strengthen their character development by showing the different sides of their personality they always wanted to show. Another main point teenagers pointed to is the fact that, in daily life, "people judge them based on their looks and actions, whereas on line, all what matters is their personality and attitude". On the other hand, hiding one's identity and dealing with a false one may affect one's identity development. Adolescents, at this phase, are more likely to know their real identity and try to develop it not to hide it. Doing so explains that they are escaping the truth and reality and seeking the way that leads to the pretend world. Hiding always one's personality and dealing only with a virtual one leads to many drawbacks related to building a weak identity and personality.

"Adolescents are more confronted to difficulties expressing themselves in public and tolerating others as well as their incapability of taking part of many conversations with people in the real world". Additionally, adolescents while being online, do not have a direct

interaction with their friends. When being in the real world, they will face difficulties talking to people face to face. They will always attempt to escape conversations. Also, Kimberly added that "adolescents consider the internet as a common place to make new friends or girlfriends and boyfriends. It is an uncontrollable environment. They have become addicted to the internet just like any usage of drugs and alcohols which negatively influences their social behavior and academic achievement".

Another reason adolescents use the internet for is the seek of intimacy. Teenagers, while building their personality and looking for their identity, deal with the other gender seeking love and getting rid of loneliness and friendship they always used to have with the same gender. According to Erikson (1996, p52), "adolescents want to have some intimate relationships with the other gender because this enables them to view their behaviors. Also, they want to show their emotions in close relationships". It can be seen that those adolescents are looking for people who can validate their behaviors but pass over the fact that they are "developing a false self and building a masked view of themselves". Researches reported that many teenagers will accept to go on a date with the unknown friends to places nobody else knows about them. They viewed those "relationships as being highly intimate" and reduce their loneliness in their real life. The reasons some adolescents gave about choosing to make on-line friends rather than real life relationships were "the preference of anonymous communication, the ease in revealing personal information" as well as the peer relationship problems they face in their daily life like peer rejection and lack of close friends which might be a sign of negative self-view. It can be deduced that adolescents are escaping real life problems and seeking the way to the virtual world where nobody judges them, so nobody can know their real intentions or how to deal with them face to face.

After being addicted to internet, adolescents become aware of the excessive misuse of this valuable source of information. Kimberly reported that this resulted in personal, familial

and academic serious problems. "They became engaged in alcoholism as well as gambling and having serious eating disorders". An additional serious difficulty that many adolescents face is the permanent problems they have with their parents. Adolescents at this age get more away from their parents and try to get closer to their peers. They consider the age differences and want to be with people who can validate their behaviors and feel comfortable with. They consider their parents as being a source of orientation and compelling them to follow their directions. According to Erikson, they want to show them that they are independent and can do something that distinguishes them from others.

Moreover, it was reported that the "over-involvement in on-line activities resulted in higher levels of social anxiety and less mature identity statuses" especially for males, who spend more time surfing the web and looking for games more than girls. This could be a serious problem for males. There is a risk of being addicted by video games. While playing, they are looking just to win and considering the other players as enemies, especially in adventure games. This might have a bad effect in their daily life. They will consider everybody around them who wants to give them advice or wants their benefit as enemy. Here raises the aggressive and antisocial behavior.

As an illustration, while being attached all the time to the computer, adolescents are used to find answers to all their questions in a short and even in a short period of time, but when dealing with people in daily life face to face, they behave in the same way as if they were connected to their computers and always wait for instant answers. They build a sense of impatience and egocentrism as well as nervousness.

Sanders (2000, p237-242) and his colleagues conducted a research in order to show the relationship of excessive internet use to social isolation among adolescents. Results showed that "low internet users had better relationships with their parents as well as their peers".

According to the Internet Safety Group, internet use differs according to gender. Concerning girls, there are many risks they are taking and strange behaviors they are encountering while using the internet. After conducting the research, it was stated that "most girls use the internet for a long time during the day without being monitored by any adult". This uncontrollable use offers them the opportunity to use the internet for any "anonymous experimentation. Most girls have had personal face to face meeting with someone they met on the net and had the opportunity to exchange pictures and to give out personal information". They find internet as being the easiest way for entertainment and offers opportunities for dating because, girls at this phase, look for intimacy and ways to show their emotions to a closet person. It can be said, that in some cases, those girls did not find the convenient person they are looking for in the real world and they are looking for people in the virtual one. When finding this person, for sure they have hidden many truths and declared only good things about themselves. There is a construction of a false, hidden and weak personality.

Also, "adolescents choose to use the internet when they feel a sense of social discomfort or detachment", but the problem is that they get disconnected from their daily life. "Information seeking and online activities were seen as having a great impact on psychological well-being and addiction tendencies".

According to Gross (2004, p77), "internet use was rooted according to gender differences". Researches have shown that boys spend more time in front of their computers than girls do. Boys are more likely to spend their time alone playing on-line video games whereas girls look for social interaction. Males declared that they are "more skilled than females in terms of surfing on the web. Spending all the time playing online video games raises males' aggressive and antisocial behavior". Those teens also stated that they prefer talking to their friends on-line rather than face-to-face conversations. The reason they gave for that is when being online, they can talk to their friends and do other things in the same time

which is know as "multitasking", oppositely when being with them because it is considered as being rude when someone is talking to you and you are distracted. As Erikson stated, the "critical developmental task of adolescence is to explore their identity, but internet is considered as an anonymous identity playground".

Because of the excessive use of the internet, "adolescents face the risk of exposure to material that is pornographic, violent and offensive and encourages them to do illegal activities". Since "teenagers are the most enthusiastic and adept to the digital world changes, they reported that internet is not a safe environment and that they developed a sense of mistrust because of the internet loss of privacy". All in all, internet is an anti-social tool that inhibits the interaction with people and leads people to be aggressive since they become used to virtual world.

On the other hand, internet is considered as an essential tool for the academic achievement and has many learning benefits. According to Hart (2004, p10), "internet is viewed as a powerful resource for applying independent learning methods and research skills as well as collaborating with new people to improve communicating skills and help have access to a wide range of resources".

"Internet is a prominent learning skill which enables to develop the ability of looking for relevant and reliable information and develop information skills". As adolescents develop their identity, they need to distinguish all what is good and bad and look for accuracy. Internet is a tool for developing that sense. "Teenagers can explore objectivity and subjectivity by identifying bias in the sources" and adopt particular ways of getting rid of all the sites that can come up with irrelevant or illegal issues. This offers adolescents the opportunity to construct their own personality and identity based on their findings and things they learn by their own. Moreover, "adolescents learn collaboration through exchanging email messages and enhancing their communication skills through chat rooms". This enables them to go through a

designed process of identity development by being aware of all what is happening around them throughout understanding the restrictions of their society toward what they are doing. This can be seen from the broadened knowledge they adhere by all the information they get and communication technologies.

Additionally, internet enables adolescents to have close and meaningful interactions with peers which results in a positively self-esteem and well-being, whereas lack of friends contributes in negative self-views and depression.

Because internet is considered as a "troublesome technology", this may help adolescents build a strong personality. This can be true by taking into consideration the skills and successful training needed for extracting relevant and reliable information and getting rid of all "spam and deleterious information". This can ensure a good learning by observing skill.

However, after doing some research, it was found that adolescents who did not use the internet and spent time participating in sports and doing other activities showed a better achievement in their grades.

All in all, internet is a widely used information technology in the twenty first century. It is a prominent tool for information seeking nowadays. After doing many researches and having many psychologists and philosophers points of view, it can be understood that internet had many positive as well as negative connotations and impacts on adolescents at this critical and fragile phase, distinguished by identity development and personality building. On one hand, it can be a facilitator in their academic achievement. It can help them acquire a sense of critical and analytical thinking. Also, it can help teenagers develop by their own the required skills for looking for relevant and reliable information among a wide range of anonymous data. Besides, they can develop their sense of tolerance and respectful behavior throughout the conversations they take part of with different people who have different mentalities all over the world. This constitutes an important way of developing interpersonal skills and

broadening one's knowledge. On the other hand, internet could have bad or even severe effects on adolescents' academic, familial and personal lives." Since teenagers are at the phase of constructing their identity and building their personality, they are more fragile and are not ready for any failure". Since internet is considered as an "uncontrollable environment", it is viewed as distracting them from doing many important activities. Adolescents suffer from the incapability of doing their homework assignments as well as the lack of sleep and social isolation. Because of being all the time attached to their computers and surfing on that virtual world, they find many difficulties proving their presence in the real world. Also, when being aware that they fail their courses and encounter difficulties in their studies, adolescents feel that they are brainless and that others are better than they are which may be a source of loosing self-esteem and this affects their sense of self-worth. At this stage, these may have long term negative side effects since adolescents are fragile and are not ready for any failure. Additionally, there is a great risk of being exposed to illegal and irrelevant issues. Furthermore, adolescents can take part in many anonymous conversations and easily give information about them to people they have never seen and they can even go in a date with them. It can be deduced that internet constitutes a prominent helpful tool in one's life but it represents in the same a dangerous means because of its widely propagated and uncontrollable environment, especially in the phase where adolescents build their personality and seek their identity.

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