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Research Paper

Is this Risky? Accessing Digital Literacy Level among Young Adult's in TRNC

Muhammad Bello Nawaila
College Of Education Azare, Nigeria
mbnawaila@gmail.com

Sezer Kanbul
Near East University, Cyprus
sezer.kanbul@neu.edu.tr

Saleh Waziri Mustapha
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi, Nigeria
wsmustapha@atbu.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT

Young adulthood is an important development time period for humans where majority of them spend most of their time with technology. Which constitute all the millennials of whom are digital natives. Most of the people in this category pride themselves as tech-savvy and are so immersed in technology to the extent that drawing a boundary between offline and online is difficult if not impossible. This overconfidence most often than not leads this young people into committing risky behaviors online. Global research institute interested with children are now paying a very close attention when it comes to children's right in the digital world. Whereas Internet policy was design to suit adult internet users, leaving the young adult vulnerable. This research work explores the digital world of this young adults by conducting a mixed method research where open-ended questionnaires were given to 512 randomly selected undergraduate students of Near East University of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and an interview was conducted to 50 randomly selected students among the 512 for the purpose of data collection. With the aim of associate evidence with the continued global discourse regarding rights and wellbeing of people in the digital world with special focus on internet access, level of digital literacy, technological usage and applications, risk, vulnerabilities, mediation and other online habits. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS software version 20. The questionnaire shows high reliability with Cronbach alpha at 0.89. The result shows that young adults of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus are conscious of their online behavior although majority confessed to not undergoing digital literacy classes. It was also noted that majority of the young adults accept friendship requests from everyone but will really agree to meet social media friends in real life. Majority of the respondents say they are conscious of what they share online and the data they gave but a significant number of them confess to vulgar chats.

Keywords: *Digital Literacy, Digital Right, Internet Risk, Internet Security, Young Adult*

INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood (span from ages 18 - 25) (Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche, & Young, 2015; Bonnie, Stroud, & Breiner, 2014; United Nations Fund for Population Activities, 2013) is a pivotal and significant time in human life. It has often been characterized by transitions, for instance young men and women at this stage develop relationship and start working (Henderson & Robertson, 2000; Arnett, 2000).

Despite the fact that biological and physiological development of young adults is still the same till date, same cannot be said about the world young adults lived in, they now a days live in a networked and more global world, marked by advanced information and communication technology quick information transfer and increase ease to access unregulated information (Bonnie et al., 2014).

The world as of 2017 was estimated to be around 7.5 billion and was also estimated to hit around 9.5 billion by 2050 with majority of the increments coming from the developing and underdeveloped countries (Kaneda & Duduis, 2017). As at 2013, there exist over 1.8 billion young adults all over the world of which 90 percent are in the global south (Hoy & Milne, 2013).

The dynamic nature of the modern world means that young adults found themselves in situations that were unimaginable by their parents. According to Kaiser Family Foundation, (2010) young adults spend an average of 11 hours daily on technology, with over 90 percent of young adults uses ICT and are on social

Correspondence to**:** *Muhammad Bello Nawaila, College Of Education Azare, Nigeria,* ***Email:****mbnawaila@gmail.com*

media (Aaron & Anderson, 2018; Perrin, 2015), which is displaying their special affinity with social media (Xenos & Foot, 2008).

To most young adults, technology is part of their daily lives (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011) where it serves as an important source of information, news and entertainment and other forms of socialization.

Taking into account the high technological utilization among young adults Nawaila, Kanbul, & Ozdamli, (2018) recommend research being done on the influence of these technologies, and young adults' participation, protection and provision of these technologies being them the first digital natives.
This research was design to perceived the level of involvement of young adults when it comes to digital rights where special consideration will be given to risks, mediation, vulnerabilities and other online habits.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the internet usage habits among the young adults of Turkish Republic of North Cyprus?
2. Do the young adults of Turkish Republic of North Cyprus engage in risky activities online?
3. How do the young adult of Turkish Republic of North Cyprus protect themselves online?
4. Do the young adults of Turkish Republic of North Cyprus have access to digital literacy?

Problem Description

Young adulthood (span from ages 18 - 25) is a pivotal and significant time in human life. During this time, young men and women develop relationship and start working (Bonnie et al., 2014). This makes paying attention to young adult of paramount importance since it is at this age that they acquire an increased sense of self as a social actor (Ling, 2002).

Young adults spend most of their time with media and technology than any other activity daily (Mitchell et al 2014; Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard, 2013) with social interactions facilitated by social media as their preferred medium. According to Pew Research center, as at January 2017, 86% of American young adults are on social media. But the percentage decrease with an increase in age (Cohen, 2017). As technology progressively claim an integral part of young adult lives, it becomes more important to access the influence of these technologies in young adults' lives.

To reach out to these category government mostly uses technology to communication as can be seen with reducing teen pregnancy through evidence-based model (78 USWH) (Adams et al., 2009).

Young adulthood is a unique period in the life of human that present both challenges and opportunities (Adams et al., 2009). The needs and challenges faced by this category of humans receives only a paucity of attention from both researchers and policy designers (Bonnie, Stroud, & Breiner, 2014; Adams et al., 2009). Another issue is that relatively little is known about young adults and digital rights.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Young adults are human beings aged between 18 to 25. Although opinions and definitions vary. For instance, Erik Erickson's stage of human development defines it as human between the age of 20 to 39 where he characterizes the stage with love (Isolation version Intimacy) (Erikson, 1975). Whereas, others like Levenson (1986) whom although believe there is a no clear-cut dividing line still believe it falls from 17 to 34 years old it is characterized by great energy and abundance as well as stress and contradiction. It is where dreams are made, life goals are set which provide enthusiasm and motivation for the future (Birch, 1997). According to online Publishers Association (OPA) 75% of all young adults are online which is the highest percentage among all age categories. For instance, young adults constitute 24% of the US population but account for 40 percent of the pages viewed as well as 38% of online time. Unlike the normal internet users whom are most likely to go online either from school, work or home. Young adults use all the conventional methods of going online as well as non-conventional methods like library, via mobile phone and friends/relatives house. Young adults have a never ending need to stay online always. They expect to go online wherever and whenever they feel like. With 82% report being comfortable with new technologies. The young adults are more likely to own a number of digital devices than an average internet user.
No significant gender gap was noticed with regards to internet utilization among genders of young adults. Although difference was found while analyzing visitation data, where females are more likely to visit retails categories whereas males focused on the non-retail categories (Lipsman, 2004). It is no news that these young adults spent huge time online and are tech savvy. They do almost everything online to the extent of buying things just because of online advert (Sun, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

Settings

This study is a mixed method research were questionnaire as well as interview where used on randomly selected undergraduate students of Near East University Cyprus. This method was chosen because the researchers are trying to measure user experience.

Participant

512 randomly selected undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25 from Near East University of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus serve as the source of primary data to this study among which are 270 males and 243 females.

Instrument

The researchers adopt the Global Kids Online (G.K.O) questionnaire (Livingstone & Bulger, 2012) (A reliable and valid questionnaire that has been tested in 5 different countries) but was customized to suit the culture and people of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as suggested by (Livingstone, 2013). The questionnaire consists of two sections; the general information section contains 9 questions and the item section containing 38 questions. Respondents are required to answer using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree), to quantify how they agree with the scenario presented. The questionnaire has show consistent high reliability raging from .80 to .92(Livingstone, 2016).

RESULTS

General Information

The sample of the study constituted 512 young adults from Near East University, of which 242 (47.3%) were females and 270 (52.7%) were males. A majority of the young adults 217 (42.4%) were level 3 followed by 185 (36.1%) in class 4. furthermore, 90 (17.6%) were level 5 and 20 (3.9%) were in class 2. The average family income (monthly) was between 3,500TL – 4,500TL. Although 78 (15.2%) of the total respondents did not respond to this question, 434 of the 512 that did respond (39.5%) reported high family income (Above 4,500TL) as compared to 115 (22.5%) with a monthly income of below 2,500TL. 89 (17.4%) has no siblings, whereas 332 (64.8%) of the respondents had just one sibling, 69 (13.5%) had 2 siblings, and only 22 (4.5%) had 3 or more siblings. The mean age of first phone ownership was 14 years and 3 months. 6 (1.2%) started accessing social media at a young age of 8 and 5 (1%) started at the age of 9. 149 (29.1%) of the respondents started accessing social media at the age of 14, which represents the highest percentage. Only 25 respondents stated that they started accessing social media at the age of 18 or above.

With regard to social media accounts, the respondents had registered for an average of 4 social media accounts. 451 (88.1%) of the respondents stated they are active on Facebook and 459 (89.6%) are on Instagram, which makes Facebook the highest registered social network site among the respondents. YouTube has 405 (79.1%) memberships among the respondent, whereas Twitter has 217 (42.4%) memberships. moreover, the combination of instant messengers, game sites and so on has 264 (51.6%) memberships among the respondents.

With regard to the device the children use to access the internet, as expected, smartphones have the highest usage among the respondents with 501 (97.9%), followed by tablets and pads with 418 (81.6%) using them. Laptop computers are accessible to 327 (63.9%) of the respondents, whereas others like PlayStations, Xboxes and so on, have the patronage of 156 (30.5%) of the respondents. The average number of devices accessible to a respondent was found to be at least three.

Internet and Device moderation

While trying to access the level of mediation, it was noted that young adult in the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus have access to low levels of mediation judging by the fact that only 35.55% of the respondents were moderated by their parents on which device to use and only 41.31% have rules regulating their internet use, as can be seen in Figure 1 below.

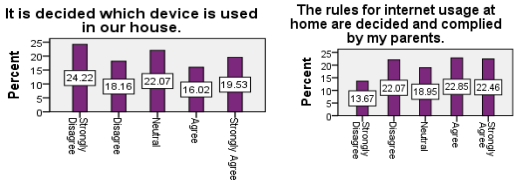


Figure 1. Internet and Device moderation

Cyberbullying and Sexting

While analysing some of the unwanted behaviours young adults indulge in risky activities online, like cyberbullying and sexting, it was found that almost 42.77% of the respondents have encountered hate speeches and visual online bullying. Whereas 49.41% of the respondents partake in cyberbullying and sexting, which concurs with Mishna, Saini,and Solomon, (2009) and Ong, (2015). 49.60% are being bullied online. A detailed illustration can be seen in Figure 2 below.

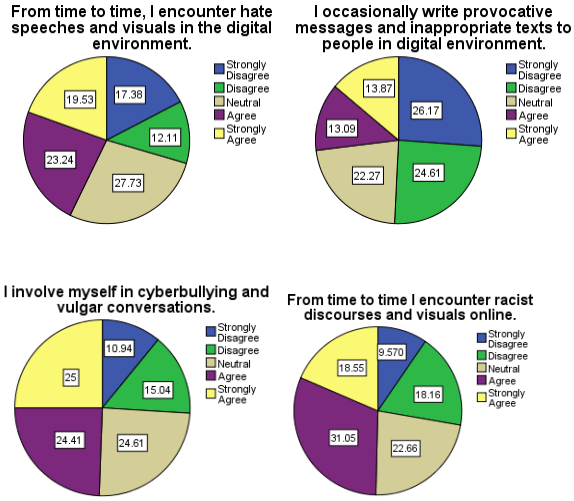


Figure 2. Accessing children's engagement in cyberbullying

Digital Literacy

Only 60.8 percent can freely use their devices in their school, which has been attributed to the school not allowing the students based on the student's capacity to handle the device with caution. Only 26.2% of the respondents stated that their schools organized activities with regard to safe internet usage, which is a very small number considering the digital nature of the children of TRNC (where students on average possess just over 3 devices, which is above the world average (Statista.com, 2019) and each child has an average of 4 social media accounts which corresponds to the world average (Nawaila, Kanbul, & Uzunboylu, 2018). Another issue worth noting is the fact that the respondents possess no informal digital literacy as their parents allow them to navigate the web blindly, with 33.4 percent stating that their family did not speak to them about what to do online and who they should interact with even though some of the respondents had been active online since the age of 4 (Table 1).

Information Sharing

Judging by Figure 3, 59.76% confessed to sharing what happened to them online with friends, despite knowing that the friend may have no solution. Furthermore, 51.17% will share it with their mothers but only 31.83% will share with their fathers whereas only 17.38% will share what happened to them online with their teachers which conform with Livingstone (2016).

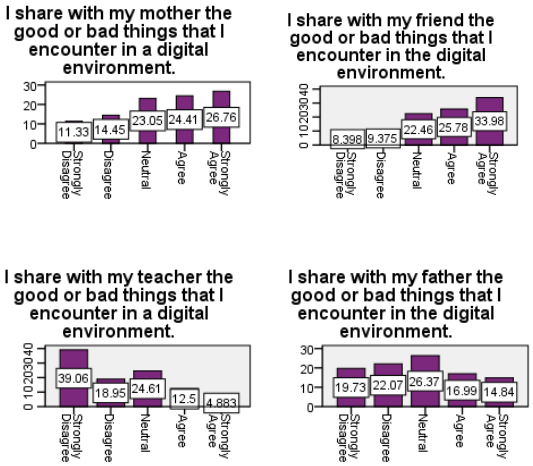


Figure 3. Information Sharing

Table 1. Showing the level of digital literacy

ITEM	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
I can freely use the digital tools in our school and can express myself freely through these tools	196	38.3	115	22.5	133	26	39	7.6	29	5.7
I know what copyright means	170	33.2	129	25.2	111	21.7	40	7.8	62	12.1
I use appropriate aliases in the digital environment.	264	51.6	126	24.6	76	14.8	20	3.9	26	5.1
My family constantly warns me about sharing appropriate photos.	122	23.8	96	18.8	112	21.9	94	18.4	88	17.2
My family speaks to me about what to do online and I should interact with online	85	16.6	86	16.8	132	25.8	113	22.1	96	18.8
In our school, activities related to safe internet use are organized.	63	12.3	71	13.9	166	32.4	76	14.8	136	26.6
My family speaks to me about what to do online and who I should be interacting with online.	179	35	137	26.8	97	18.9	52	10.2	47	9.2

Security and Risk

A total of 31.21% agreed that their personal safety is ensured online, with 23 percent thinking their personal safety is not ensured online, with no significant difference between the genders which contradicts the findings of Livingstone & Bulger, (2014). More than 60% of the participants used filtering restriction, control software and antivirus for online protection. 58.98% only accept friendship requests from people they know, whereas over 60 percent agreed to visiting only age-appropriate websites (although on the majority joined Facebook at the age of 10, despite Facebook targeting those 13 years and above) and also used complex passwords to prevent hacking.

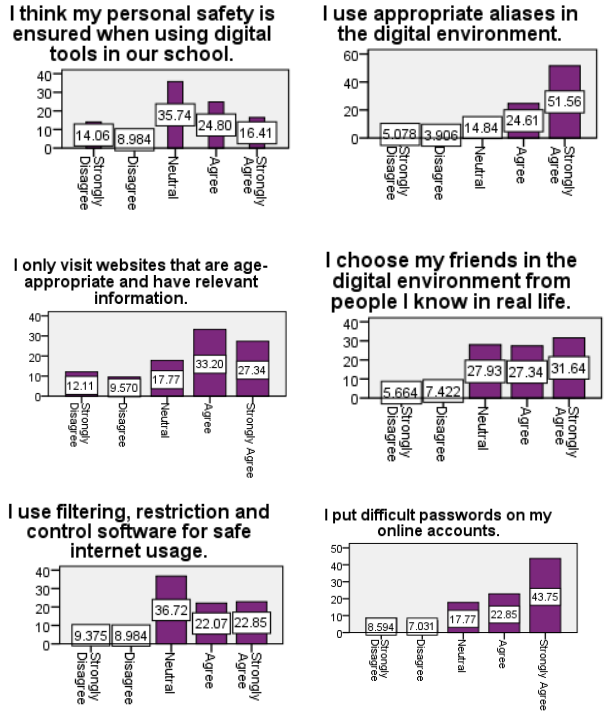


Figure 4. Showing the risk and security

Gender Issues

To test gender difference with regard to parental mediation, cyberbullying and sexting, protection of digital literacy, device and internet access, and number of social media accounts, an independent sample t-test was conducted.

A statistically significant difference was noted between the genders with regard to age when the young adults receives a phone, the age when they sign up for their first social media account, freedom of using digital devices, gender equality online, content and image sharing, cyberbullying and sexting and rules for internet usage at home with t(504) = -3.17 p = .002, t(501) = 3.31 p = .001, t(504) = -3.32 p = .001, t(493) = -3.43 p = .001, t(493) = -3.43 p = .001, t(510) = 3.01 p = .003, t(509) = -3.08 p = .002 and t(508) = -5.02 p = .000 respectively.

No statically significant difference was noted with regard to the number of social media accounts, means of internet access, number of digital devices and knowledge digital rights with t(504) = 1.37 p = .173, t(509) = 0.66 p = .511, t(510) = -2.65 p = .008 and t(510) = -2.38 p = .018, respectively.

There is a minor positive correlation between the respondents' age and both the age the respondent own their first phone and the age at which he/she registers their first social media account. A minor negative correlation was traced between students' level and internet access, with young adults in lower levels having more means to access the internet compared to their counterparts in higher levels. Another mild negative correlation was found between family income and the number of social media accounts, where the higher the income in the family, the lower the number of social media accounts registered, which was linked to parental mediation associated with higher income families. However, there was a minor positive correlation between the number of devices per child and family income.

A significant positive correlation was found between the age at which a respondent own's a smartphone and the age at which the respondent registers his first social media account. In other words, the longer it takes a child to own a smartphone, the longer it takes him/her to also register for his/her first social media account. Similarly, a significant negative correlation was traced between the age at which a respondent owns his/her first phone and the total number of social media accounts, the total number of means of accessing the internet and the total number of devices owned by the child.

It was also noted that young adults who registered for a social media account at a younger age have lower number of social media accounts, digital devices as well as means of internet access. However, the higher the number of social media accounts per child, the more his/her means of accessing the internet and the number of digital devices.

DISCUSSION

The utilization of digital devices and technologies is an integral part of young adult's daily lives. Despite the multiple opportunities associated with the online environment, such as communication, entertainment and education, it has also been associated with various risks like cyberbullying. It is therefore important to access the level of risk, mediation and digital literacy among young adults, as they form an under-present and

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under-research part of the society (Bonnie, Stroud, & Breiner, 2014), this makes conducting this research even more important.

Based on the result there is very limited mediation from both parents and schools. However, since parental mediation has been linked to more online risks (van Schalkwyk et al., 2017), and online restrictions (adhered by policy makers) this leads to a significantly minor reduction in young adults risk exposure (Duerager & Livingstone, 2012).

A total of 47% of the young adults confessed to engaging in cyberbullying, which is a significant number considering that multiple research studies have been conducted to access the debilitating effects of cyberbullying, with the results associating those bullied with psychological distress, low self-esteem, depression and even suicide (Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012; Nielsen, Hetland, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2012; Cénat et al., 2014).

Another disturbing issue is that of sexting. Sexting is the transfer of nude pictures between individuals. Sexts gone wrong have in some cases led to cyberbullying and ridicule and has recently attract media attention with multiple girls said to have committed suicide in order to avoid harassment, ridicule and shame after the sexts they sent were made public (Döring, 2014). Nevertheless, young adults are downplaying the severity of the issue. Almost 47% percent of the young adult surveyed have sent sexts, which is a serious number and may be attributed to the lack of digital literacy or the fact that sexts gone wrong does not frequently occur in North Cyprus.

Multiple skills have been deemed digital literacy by creating a border between the internet and users' everyday activities clearer (Simsek & Simsek, 2013; Choi, Glassman, & Cristol, 2017). Despite the vital role that digital literacy plays in the life of internet users, 60% of the respondents confessed to not acquired any formal digital literacy from school or at home.

Young adults would rather share what happens to them online with their friends with almost 60% of the young adults agreeing, which conforms with the finding of Byrne, Kardefelt-Winther, Livingstone, and Stoilova, (2016) has been attributed to the fear of parents. Young adults generally take this course of knowledge even though they know that it is likely that the friend will not be able to do anything.

Risks and opportunities in the online environment are mostly synonymous; for instance spending more time online increases technical skills (Müller, Pfetsch, & Ittel, 2014) but at the same time can increase the possibility of cybervictimization and cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

It was also noted that young adult engaged in less risky behaviours online and when they do, it is mostly because of high risk personality traits, peer pressure or just thoughtlessness. This requires urgent prevention, which can be achieved by providing better digital literacy in regard to the possible negative results of their actions and by educating children that being more tech-savvy than those who are victims does not totally exonerate them from risks.

When it comes to income versus the internet usage, it was noted that young adults from higher income families acquire devices at a younger age compared to counterparts from families with less income, which agrees with the findings of Odgers (2018). However, no significant difference was observed when it comes to moderation, which contrast with Odgers (2018).

Other factors worth noting, include the fact that the more the level, the older the child will be when they acquire their first phone and since the first phone has a positive correlation with the first social media account, it therefore implies that the older the student is when opening his/her first social media account and the fewer number of source he/she has for accessing to internet.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Young adulthood is a critical period of human development that bridge between adulthood and adolescence, often characterized as a time where individuals faces more challenges and assume new obligations and responsibilities (Bonnie et al., 2014). Failure or success which exploring these ways can set young adults on a direction that may seriously hamper their adult lives.

Despite the fact that biological and physiological development of young adults is still the same till date, same cannot be said about the world young adults lived in, they now a days live in a networked and more global world, marked by advanced information and communication technology quick information transfer and increase ease to access unregulated information (Bonnie et al., 2014).

According to Zimbalist, the ongoing deliberation regarding the shift in media utilization among young adults requires a more profound investigate this critical age groups. "Since this age group symbolize the maiden 'generation' Digital Natives, their behavior pattern will set standards for future media utilization of the populace.

This research work presents a compelling case for the need to strengthen programs, practices and policies on digital rights of both children and young adults and also lay a foundation and avenue for advancing policy agendas on young adults.

There is the need for local state federal as well as organization funding researches to view young adult as a separate distinct age group not mixed with adults or adolescents when conducting researches and presenting reports .

While the researchers are confident the research has achieved it aim, notwithstanding it has the following limitation; the sample comprised of young adults from a single tertiary institute in TRNC, result may differ when young adults from other regions or different educational level we used.

The researchers will therefore recommend conducting similar research on marginalized young adults such as those that are parents, those with disability, those aging in foster care or from low income immigrant families
The researchers suggest that the level and type of risk encountered online based on gender among young adults need investigating.

Young adults are rarely treated as a distinct population when it comes to research program design and policy there are often merged with adolescents or adults (Bonnie, Stroud, & Breiner, 2014).

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