Parental Mediation of Adolescents' Internet Use

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Abstract

Introduction: Parental mediation of adolescents' internet use is a descriptive study to understand the level of parental control over internet usage of adolescents in the state of Kerala in India. It also aims to understand the relationship of various adolescent and parental demographic factors with parental mediation.

Method: A descriptive correlation study was conducted among the parents of 388 students between the age of 13years and 18 years old, selected from different (government, aided and private) schools through stratified sampling method. Data were collected through a survey conducted using Parental Mediation Questionnaire prepared by the investigator.

Result: The descriptive analysis revealed that active mediation was the predominant mediation strategy used by parents than co-viewing mediation and restrictive mediation. Analysis of the adolescent demographic factors revealed that a difference exists in parental mediation over internet usage of boys and girls. A difference was also found in the mediation of parents of adolescents studying in government, aided and private schools. The study also revealed that younger parents in Kerala mediated the internet usage of adolescents' more than older parents. Other demographic factors related to parents including their education, employment status or annual family income had no significant relation to their parental mediation.

Conclusion: The study pinpoints the need to sensitize the parent community and provide them with ample support for parental mediation over internet usage of adolescents.

Keywords: Internet Use, Parental Mediation

Introduction

Internet has become, universally, an indispensable part of human culture which serves different purposes in the various facets of life. It has opened opportunities to interact, communicate, entertain, market and educate on the spur of a moment. In the same way it has nurtured the world, so it poses a few threats on it as well, especially the younger generation. There has been an immense growth in the use of Internet worldwide in the most recent years. India is not far behind. According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and the Indian Market Research Bureau (IMRB) there are around 566 million internet users in India as of December 2018 [1]. Yadav et al. [2] investigated the Internet addiction among Indian school students and found that 11.8% of the sample had internet addiction, which was measured by time spent online, use of long-range social networking sites and chat rooms and furthermore from the signs of anxiety and stress. A study by Pashei et al. [3] found that extensive internet usage pulls the adolescence into segregation and loneliness and therefore it is necessary to monitor the usage of these technology.

Regarding the online issues faced by the younger generation, it is necessary that there are efficient ways to promote responsible internet use of the adolescents. Though parents are very much aware of the excessive internet usage of adolescents and the negative influences, little do they know about how to control it effectively [4]. Apart from protecting children and adolescents from such threats, it is equally important to help them receive the

best out of these new age media through educational online activities and positive online socialization.

According to the definition given by Warren [5], parental mediation include 'strategy that parents use to control, supervise or interpret (media) content'. In earlier days, research on parental mediation was related to the television media usage, which then shifted to the mediation of video games. Nowadays, the focus of research in parental mediation is related to the internet usage of children and adolescents. Throughout these years, different researchers came up with different variations of parental mediation strategies in their studies. Nathanson [6,7] and Valkenberg [8] conducted their research on parental mediation of television by classifying the mediation strategies into three: active mediation, co – viewing mediation and restrictive mediation. This three – dimensional model was found to be the basic as well as the most commonly used classification in research related to parental mediation. In their research on parental mediation over internet usage Liau et al. [9] classified the mediation strategies as parental supervision, parental communication and parental tracking. While Livingstone and Helsper [10] came up with a four-dimensional classification as: active co-use, interaction restriction, technical restriction and monitoring. Nathalie et al. [11] classified the strategies into active safety mediation, restrictive content mediation, restrictive technical mediation and monitoring. However, from the extensive review of literature, it can be observed that all the variations of the parental mediation strategies discussed above can be identified with the basic three – dimensional classification of active, restrictive and co- viewing mediation.

a) Co – viewing Mediation: Being present with the child while he / she uses the internet and continuously monitoring their online activities without critical discussion related to the content.

b) Active Mediation: Discussions about online activities, useful websites, possible threats and precautions to be taken while using the internet.

c) Restrictive Mediation: Setting rules (regarding the time of internet usage, contents to be followed etc.) as well as technical restrictions (like parental control software).

Parents use different strategies with the adolescents in mediating their internet usage. The impacts of these strategies have been studied by different researchers. Co – viewing mediation along with active mediation was found to improve the frequency of educational online activities [12] and the co – use was also found to reduce risks related to online communication and the likelihood of being cyberbullied. [13]. Researchers found that active mediation is an effective mediation strategy in promoting critical thinking skills in children and adolescents [14, 15] as parents discuss and evaluate various issues in the internet which their children may come across. Lee and Chae [12] found that active mediation promotes involvement in educational activities and positive socialization through internet. It was also found to be helpful in protecting children and adolescents from negative media effects [15]. Lee [16] found that self-

regulation and self – management of online opportunities and risks by children themselves was possible through parent – child interaction or active mediation. Among the three parental mediation strategies, restrictive mediation was found to be most effective in reducing risk and online consequences related to online threats and issues such as watching inappropriate sexual or violent content [10, 17], cyberbullying [13], information disclosure [18], negative behavioral effects [19] and privacy invasion [20]. Restrictive mediation also helped in reducing the amount of time spent online by adolescents [21].

Several studies tried to find out the factors influencing parental mediation. Many among them found that demographic factors related to both parents and adolescents influenced the mediation among parents. The used mediation strategies differ in accordance to the parents' gender, educational level and age [11, 22, 23]. Parental mediation is also determined by factors such as parent's accessibility to children, parent- child involvement and interaction, and shared activities [24, 25]. Parents' attitude towards internet usage [11, 25], their perception of negative influences of internet [16] and their technical knowledge or computer skills [16, 23] also affects their mediation strategies.

There are several parental mediation studies which have analyzed the different strategies used by parents to regulate the internet usage of adolescents. However, there are not enough studies regarding the parental mediation strategies used by Indian parents over the internet usage of children. Based on the extensive review, the researchers have found three important set of parental mediation strategies. From among these strategies, the present study has aimed to discover the predominant parental mediation strategy used by parents in Kerala.

Method

A survey study was conducted among 388 parents of adolescents, between the ages 13 years and 18 years, in the Ernakulam district to study the parental mediation strategies used by them. The sample of the study was selected using stratified random sampling method. From the total number of schools in Ernakulam educational district, approximately three percent of schools were selected from each stratum (government schools, government - aided schools and private schools) which made a total of 8 schools. Students were randomly selected from each school and their parents were sent letters requesting participation along with a consent form. Out of the 400 parents who were invited to participate in the study, 388 parents responded with an informed consent.

The dependent variable of the study is parental mediation and the various demographic characteristics of the population are considered as independent variables. These include parents' age, education and annual family income. The employment status of mothers was also considered in the present study, as studies have proved that the parental mediation is associated with the parents' accessibility to children (23, 26). The gender of the

adolescents and the type of school in which they study are also considered as independent variables of the study.

The used tools in this study were as follows:

Parental Mediation Questionnaire

The Parental Mediation Questionnaire was prepared by the researchers. In addition to the demographic profile, the questionnaire contained a parental mediation scale that assessed various strategies used by parents to manage adolescents' internet usage on a 5- point Likert scale (1=never to 5=always). The parental mediation scale contained 15 items divided into three subscales of five items each: co-viewing mediation, active mediation and restrictive mediation. The questionnaire was validated by computing the Content Validity Index (CVI) using ratings of item relevance by six experts in the field. The SC-CVI/AVE score for the questionnaire was 0.86.

After receiving permission from the concerned authorities, the questionnaires were distributed among the selected parents through their wards at school. The questionnaires were duly collected back from the schools.

The data collected from the survey were compiled and analyzed using statistical software such as R statistical analysis software and SPSS Statistics 20. At first, the descriptive analyses of the items were examined. Pearson's correlation test was used to find out the relation between parental mediation and the age of parents. The t-test was used to test the statistically significant difference in parental mediation based on demographic factors like parents' education, mother's employment status and gender of adolescents while ANOVA was used to find the significant differences of parental mediation based on family income level as well as the type of school the adolescents were studying.

Results

Out of the 388 adolescents whose parents participated in the survey, 68 percent were girls and 32 percent were boys. Among the parents who took part in the study, nearly 90 percent of the fathers were between 40 – 55 years of age and 89 percent of mothers were in the age group of 36 – 50 years. The demographic data also revealed that 53 percent and 56 percent of mothers were qualified with a college degree, while 47 percent of fathers and 40 percent of mothers completed only school education. Among the parents, 97 percent of fathers and 52 percent of mothers were employed. The data also revealed that, annual family income of 44 percent of respondents were between rupees one and five lakhs, while that of 34 percent respondents were below one lakh rupees. At the same time, 22 percent received an annual family income of above rupees five lakhs.

Parents use different strategies at varying levels to mediate the internet usage of adolescents. The mediation strategies used by parents under this study included co-viewing mediation, active mediation and restrictive mediation to control the internet usage of adolescents.

Table 1 describes the parental mediation strategies used by parents in regulating the internet usage of adolescents.

The descriptive analysis of the three different mediation reveals that, although parents use various strategies to control the internet usage of their adolescents, the primary strategy used by more number of parents was found to be active mediation (M = 17.25, SD = 6.0) followed by co-viewing mediation(M = 15.28, SD = 5.6) and finally restrictive mediation (M = 13.78, SD = 5.3).

The correlation between the parental mediation and the age of parents were measured using Pearson's Correlation Test. This is while the difference in parental mediation based on other demographic factors including education and employment status of the mother was analyzed using t – test. The difference in parental mediation based on family income was tested using one – way ANOVA. The results are summarized in Table 2.

After analyzing the influence of various demographic factors on the parental mediation, it was found that both father's age (r= -0.106, p = 0.04) and mother's age (r= -0.19, p = 0.00) had a significant negative correlation with the parental mediation. The study found no significant difference in parental mediation based on other parental demographic factors including education, the employment status of mothers and family income.

Table 1: Parental Mediation Strategies

Parental Mediation Strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation
Co-viewing Mediation	15.28	5.6
Active Mediation	17.25	6.0
Restrictive Mediation	13.78	5.3

Table 2. Demographic Factors of Parents and Parental Mediation

Demographic Factors	Grouping Variables (N)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Parental Mediation (p value)**
Father's Age	-	46.17	9.2	0.04**
Mother's Age	-	46.3	14.4	0.001**
Father's Education	School Education (159)	1.6	0.14	0.93
	College Education (229)	1.6	0.11	
Mother's education	School Education (130)	1.6	0.13	0.07
	College Education (258)	1.7	0.11	
Mother's Employment	Employed (183)	1.66	0.12	0.42
	Unemployed (205)	1.65	0.12	
Family Income Level	Below 1 Lakh (133)	1.65	0.14	0.18
	1 – 5 Lakhs (170)	1.67	0.10	
	Above 5 Lakhs (85)	1.65	0.12	

** Significant at 0.05 level

The t – test was used to find the difference in parental mediation based on adolescents' gender and the difference in parental mediation based on the type of schools attended was analyzed using one – way ANOVA. The results are given under Table 3. The influence of the gender of the adolescent on parental mediation was studied using t-test. Results revealed that there is a gender difference in parental mediation over internet usage (p value = 0.0001). The online activities of boys (M = 1.7, SD = 0.10) were more mediated than that of girls (M = 1.6, SD = 0.12). There is a statistically significant difference in parental mediation based on the types of school adolescents go to. It was found that students in government schools (M = 1.61, SD = 0.18) were least mediated over their internet usage compared to students in government - aided schools (M = 1.68, SD = 0.17) and private schools (M = 1.66, SD = 0.19).

Table 3. Gender and Type of School of Adolescents and Parental Mediation

Demographic Factors	Grouping Variables (N)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Parental Mediation (p value) **
Gender of the student	Male	1.7	0.10	0.0001**
	Female	1.64	0.12	
Type of School the Adolescent goes to	Government	1.61	0.18	0.005**
	Government – aided	1.68	0.17	
	Private	1.66	0.19	

** Significant at 0.05 level

Discussion

From the study it can be inferred that, parents of adolescents in Kerala are practicing various mediation strategies over the internet usage of adolescents and among them the most dominant method was found to be the active mediation, followed by the co-viewing mediation and restrictive mediation. This may be because parents want their children to develop the ability to regulate and manage the internet usage and consequent risks on their own and thus become a responsible individual.

Analysis of the demographic factors related to parents like their education, employment status and annual family income show no significant relation to the parental mediation, while their age has a significant relation. The result shows that younger parents mediate the internet usage of their adolescent's more than older parents. This may be due to the fact that younger parents are more aware of the advances in the digital world and are conscious about various online threats as well. According to Jimmoyiannis and Gravani [27], a digital division exists in individual societies and the older people are invariably disadvantaged with this divide. A study by Ahmadi et al. [28] pointed out that it is important to sensitize parents with regards to the internet usage of adolescence especially in monitoring them.

Another important finding from the present study is different parental mediation over internet usage in boys and girls. The study found that internet usage of boys was mediated more than that of girls. This is consistent with the findings of Kirwil et al. [29] who studied parental mediation of internet and online content risk in 18 European countries and stated that boys were more mediated than girls. The possible reason behind this would be that parents perceive that boys are more active internet users than girls and therefore it is more important to mediate their internet activities than that of girls.

A statistically significant difference was found in the parental mediation by parents on adolescents studying in government, government – aided and private schools. The result shows that adolescents studying in government schools were least mediated by their parents than adolescents studying in government - aided school and private schools. The reason behind this may be possibly explained by the findings of Raphael and Paul [30]. They studied the school -wise differences in parental educational involvement among schools in Kerala. They found that the attitude of school towards parental involvement in educational aspects and policy making is significantly different for government, government - aided and private schools. Government schools did not promote much of parental partnership in matters regarding students.

Conclusion

The results of the present study highlight the fact that active mediation is the predominant strategy used by the parents in Kerala in-order to regulate the internet usage of their adolescents. The study also points out to the need to reduce the digital divide that exist among the parents and the adolescents. The study suggests that promoting the active participation of parents in schooling would help to empower them in better parenting and schools can be utilized as a platform to sensitize parents regarding the need and ways to promote responsible internet usage in children and adolescents.

The present study has been limited to describe only the mediation strategies used by parents, in the state of Kerala in India, and the relation of various demographic factors on the parental mediation. It has not measured the impact of these mediation strategies on the internet usage among adolescents. The topic of the study is of global relevance as parents of adolescents across the world are seriously concerned about the internet usage of adolescents and the problems they face online. More studies need to be conducted in order to find out how far these parental mediation strategies would help to control the online issues faced by adolescents and to promote responsible internet use among them. This will further help in policy making and in building a social support system for parents to effectively monitor the use of internet by adolescents.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no Conflict of Interest

Ethical Approval

The authors conducted the study by collecting informed consent from selected parents after receiving permission from the concerned school authorities. The authors have maintained the Ethical Standards for Research with Children set by the SRCD Governing Council in March 2007 in planning conducting and reporting the study.

Acknowledgement

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