Internet Use and Academic Performance of Youth

Anna-Lisa Simoes

University of Ontario Institute of Technology

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In the twenty first century society lives in the “information age” where information and findings are endless. Now we can access information and be more involved in our world (Tepperman, Curtis & Kwan, 2007). Information that society possesses comes in a variety of forms but is no longer just bound to books.

Humanity has simplified the way in which to save, communicate and further educate information to the public. In order to do this, there needed to be a way to make this information secure, safe and accessible. The internet came out of this need. Not only does the internet offer an endless array of educational articles, research, papers and findings, but also interactive encyclopedias and online libraries. The possibilities are endless and so is the internet. Information about the world is a click away, making the internet extremely useful to humanity.

Unfortunately along with its usefulness and endless information, come issues with how to access this information and to know what makes information legitimate and true from what is misinterpreted and false. Relevant and irrelevant information coexist on the internet. Helpful, educational and viable sources can be accessed to further our own knowledge about our world. But vile, disturbing and inappropriate sources can also be sought from the internet. How can the internet be so useful yet have improper uses?

This paper will discuss the positive and negative effects internet use has on the academic performance of youth, while exploring the importance of internet within society from a functionalist’s perspective. The relationship between internet use and academic performance has often been misunderstood; therefore the thesis for this paper will prove that: An increase or decrease in a youth’s academic performance is directly affected by their use for the internet and the amount of time allocated to it.

In order to yield information about the topic of internet and academic performance, several search engines where used. Through the UOIT library website, information was easily accessed by searching a subject guide. In this paper, sociology was deemed the appropriate subject seeing as the information was directed toward the social sciences.

From the sociology subject guide, the selected articles came from EBSCOhost and Scholarsportal. Common search terms that yielded significant articles from EBSCOhost included: internet (and) academic performance and internet (and) academic performance of youth. While using Scholarsportal search terms that yielded significant articles included: internet use (and) grades, students (or) youth (and) internet use and finally internet users (and) academic performance. Online books were also yielded using the same search terms.

In this information age youth have many different reasons for utilizing the internet. Most youth enjoy the internet because they feel that it gives them a sense of freedom to seek a different identity (Tepperman et al, 2007). They use the internet to create social networks, share photos, make memories, talk gossip, and keep up with news, watch movies, TV shows and much more. Youth struggle to use the internet in a productive way because they are socialized to think that the internet is purely a social tool. Youth see the internet for only part of what it really is: part social and part educational (Tepperman et al, 2007).

Education is an important part of a child’s life. Recently school curriculums have instructed teachers to incorporate assignments that require the internet. This curriculums goal is to accomplish two things: it furthers the child’s knowledge about how to use a computer and teaches them how to use the internet to search for information (Wainer et al., 2008) to apply to assignments. An addition to curriculum such as this one has good intensions. But gives youth the impression that all assignments require internet and that information can just be taken from the internet without being properly cited. These curriculums also push youth to use whatever sources they can find, not ensuring that the source is credible or academic. This tells the youth that they do not need to practice discretion when researching. Having these assignments also may drive unintentional plagiarism, which would cause a spike in their grades. This would create a false sense of academic superiority which would end when that student was tested and could no longer cheat. Therefore resulting in a drop of their grade (Wainer et al., 2008). Youth are brought up educationally ignorant to the fact that academic claims require academic sources.

Younger youth aged 8-14 are less likely to reap the positive academic benefits the internet can have. This is because the amount of work they produce does not require outstanding academic proof if any at all (Wainer et al., 2008). Older youth aged 15-25 appreciate and utilize the internet in a more productive manner. The reason for this being their work requires immediate academic proof to justify claims. The first positive correlation between internet and academic performance depends on the age of the youth (Wainer et al., 2008). The older the youth are the more experience those youth have gained in understanding the use of the internet, most importantly they have learned to be academically critical of the information stored there. With this realization youth can take what they have learned and apply it to their school work therefore increasing their academic performance (Wainer et al., 2008). The first negative correlation between internet and academic performance is that youth may never be questioned about the academic strength of their reference, if this precedes into high school or even post secondary education that child will inevitably become quickly acquainted with the term plagiarism and expulsion both of which lead to decreased academic performance or complete banishment thereof (Wainer et al., 2008).

The amount of time in which a youth spends on the internet directly affects their academic performance as well. By spending copious amounts of time on the internet, youth are taking away from time that could be devoted to studying, reading and completing other assignments (Ferro, 2009 ). This will result in a lower academic performance than if that student dedicated more time to school work and less time to the internet. The longer a youth in online the more off track they become. Social networks such as Facebook regularly have member’s statuses that confess procrastination, laziness or boredom. Music downloading is also another internet use that diverts the attention of the youth from the task at hand. In many cases pointless internet surfing focuses on social inputs and satisfaction (Ferro, 2009 ). There is so much on the internet that keeps youth off track. Some youth maintain composure and use it sparingly, while others become sidetracked and unfortunately suffer academically. Prolonged use of internet will also affect a youth’s time devoted to sleep therefore decreasing the attention paid to school or lecture (Chen & Peng, 2008). The second positive correlation between internet and academic performance is that when used sparingly and for appropriate reasons school work can be done properly and on time, resulting in increased academic performance. The negative correlation would be that overly ‘surfing’ the internet will cause procrastination of school work, leading to a decreased academic performance due to poorly done assignments or lack thereof.

What youth are doing online also can have a positive or negative impact on academic performance. Some internet sites can help a youth further develop their reading and writing skills (Jackson et al., 2007). Youth spending the majority of their online time with search engines such as yahoo and Google for school related subjects as well as informative websites and organization webpage’s all positively increase academic performance. Youth spending copious amounts of time with online gaming, chat rooms, MSN, social networking sites and pornography negatively decreased their academic performance by either not presenting satisfactory work or not doing school work at all (Jackson et al., 2007). The third positive correlation to internet use and academic performance entails that appropriate use of the internet will increase understanding of content. If the information learned through the internet replicates or further supports lessons learned in school, youth will in turn apply that information to school related work. Internet increases their academic performance on tests, evaluations, projects and individual work. A negative correlation between the internet and academic performance states that inappropriate use of internet websites that have no direct relationship with school work, take the student farther away from learning anything. These websites provide irrelevant information and consume youth’s time, therefore taking away from productive time that could have been dedicated to school work (Jackson et al., 2007).

Internet can evoke a sense of control to youth. This is sought after by youth who are trying to find out who they are and becoming independent. These youth feel that they are in control of their own lives and therefore are in control of what they do, when they do it and for how long (Kubey, Lavin & Barrows, 2001). Long periods of internet usage may not have been tolerated by the youth’s parents. Therefore when this youth is no longer bound by the control of their parent, they may take control of their life and defy rules once placed on them. Constant internet surfing and chatting distracts youth from doing research for school work or other related school activities (Kubey et al., 2001). Another positive correlation between internet and academic performance is that internet gives youth a sense of control in which if used appropriately can benefit in them taking control of their independence and projecting their efforts into their school work. The same sense on control can make youth use internet inappropriately and quickly take control over a youth’s time. This would result in a negative correlation of their academic performance for compromised study time, poorly done assignments and loss of self control (Kubey et al., 2001).

The way in which youth can prevent internet from taking over their school work or most importantly their lives is to distant themselves from unnecessary “surfing”. Youth should not be spending hours looking through Facebook photos, playing games or chatting on the internet. It is crucial that parents instill a sense of urgency and responsibility for education in their children. So when faced with procrastination or laziness that youth will be able to effectively overcome it. The less a youth uses the internet the better. Parents should endorse internet for educational purposes primarily and then slowly allow small intervals of internet for social purposes, this way the child learns how to set priorities and control themselves. As noted throughout this paper, youth are by far the most at risk for internet misuse. They are the most easily influenced of the population other than small children. It is important that values are instilled within these youth to help them detect, deliver and deal with issues such as internet use. Without these skills youth may ever be able to control themselves, resulting in a failed academic career and possibly a challenging life.

Internet has a purpose within society or else it would not exist. The internet has been seen as a dysfunction to society, by preventing youth from achieving an education or performing at their expected academic level (Kendall, 2008). Society may have conflicting views as to what the true purpose of the internet is. This could be caused by the different cultures that make up a Canadian society. It is important to remember that when it comes to internet, consensus must be reached for how to deal with internet and its effect on academic performance. Cultures must not undermine each other on methods of how to deal with this country wide issue. Without consensus society cannot work together to prevent the effects of internet from worsening (Kendall, 2008). Fortunately internet gives society a sense of stability in which, we can talk to others, inform ourselves about issues and educate ourselves through technology. Internet can be accessed from music devices like an iPod or a cell phone such as a black berry. Internet may in some ways be hurtful to members of society. But the bigger picture here is that without the internet there would be a void within society. Information could not be accessed instantly, leaving society in the dark. Without this we would lose communication to those close to us. Scholarly advancements would go unknown to the general public and university students would not be able to access academic articles, journals, ancient texts etc (Kendall, 2008).

Without access to information we cannot better ourselves. In theory society would compromise survival in several parts of our lives including the business world, academic advances and most importantly everyday life. A prime example of how the internet has helped society educate themselves on a concern would be the H1N1 flu. Many people do not know symptoms or are unable to talk to a doctor personally. Internet has helped keep society up to date on medical breakthroughs and other information pertaining to the sickness. Internet use has both positive and negative purposes. In order to diminish dysfunction within society we must reach consensus about how to use it properly. Until then the internet will continue to effect youth negatively in their academic performance.

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