

**EMOTIONAL MATURITY OF INTERNET USER ADOLESCENTS**

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Abstract

The present investigation was attempted to find out the influence of locale, gender, academic stream, frequency of internet access and their various interactions on emotional maturity of internet user adolescents. The sample comprised of 496 internet user adolescents randomly drawn from metropolitan area (Delhi) and sub-urban area (Bahadurgarh). Data were analyzed by using $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3$ factorial design. Results showed a significant influence of locale on emotional maturity of internet user adolescents. A significant interactive influence of academic stream and frequency of internet access, locale and academic stream on emotional maturity of internet user adolescent was also observed. Further, results reflect a significant interactive influence of locale, gender and frequency of internet access on emotional maturity of internet user adolescents. The findings of the study show that internet user adolescents whether they are male or female and of any locale and academic stream, have equal opportunity to access the internet according to their convenience without any differentiations and boundaries. These findings have vital implications to educational policy-makers, teachers, parents, psychologists, counsellors and researchers to understand the pattern of internet usage and its influence on adolescents.

Key Words: Emotional Maturity, Internet and Adolescents.



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Emotional Maturity of Internet User Adolescents

Emotion is a basic aspect of human functioning. It is one of the dimensions of personal experience that arise from a complex interplay among physiological, cognitive and situational variables (Singaravelu, 2008). The success of a person solely depends on the art of managing emotions which includes practical skills and the ability to handle people (Goleman, 1995). An emotionally mature person is one whose emotional life is well under control (Chamberlain, 1960). Emotional maturity is probably the most important contribution of modern psychology (Sivakumar and Visvanthan, 2010). Emotional maturity is a process in which the personality is

continuously striving for greater sense of emotional health, both intra-physically and intra-personally (Smitson, 1974). Emotional maturity is always relative and develops throughout life. Emotional maturity is not a state in which all problems are solved, but an emotionally mature adolescent deals adolescent problem effectively and integrates feelings, thinking and behaviour in an appropriate manner.

Internet has consolidated itself as a very powerful tool for information, communication and entertainment that has modified the human behaviour by entering in its life. In present digital era, easy and continuous access to internet provides tremendous opportunities to adolescents for education and entertainment, allowing them to connect with their peers as well as with complete strangers from across the world. Adolescents use a variety of internet applications such as instant messaging, bulletin boards, chat rooms, and blogs to connect with their peers (Boneva, Quinn, Kraut, Kiesler, and Shklovski, 2006; Gross, 2004) and to explore typical adolescent issues such as sexuality, identity, and partner selection (Subrahmanyam, Smahel, and Greenfield, 2006).

The 2002 Gallup survey (Whitlock, Powers, and Eckenrode, 2006) reported that internet is preferred by many adolescents to the other media, including telephone, TV and radio. Louge (2006) found that free and sometimes anonymous communication through chat rooms, blogs and instant messages pose risks to teens and leads to emotional disturbance. Beebe, Asche, Harrison, and Quinlan (2004) showed that for boys and girls, use of internet chat rooms was associated with psychological distress, a difficult living environment and a higher likelihood of risky behaviours. Gould, Munfakh, Lubell, Kleinman, and Parker (2002) concluded that nearly one fifth of the adolescents sought help on the internet for emotional problems. The proportion of male and female adolescents seeking help on the internet did not significantly differ. More than 20% of internet help-seekers were dissatisfied with the help they received and only 14% thought it had helped them very much.

Internet has become a highly effective and profitable means of distributing sexually explicit material as well as a sophisticated channel for compulsive sexual behaviour, sex trafficking and sex crimes (Galbreath and Berlin, 2002). Such free access and exposure to this information by adolescents who have not yet developed a full maturity could pose negative impact on adolescent development and could potentially manifest in their social interactions with peers, their sexual activity and their emotional developments (Subrahmanyam et al., 2006). Gould et al (2002) concluded that for the internet to realize its potential as an effective resource

for teenagers struggling with emotional problems, further studies are needed. It is, therefore, appropriate to investigate empirically whether locale, gender, academic stream and frequency of internet access independently or interaction with each other is accountable for difference in emotional maturity among adolescents or not.

Hypothesis: There is no significant influence of locale, gender, academic stream, frequency of internet access and their various interactions on emotional maturity of internet user adolescents.

METHOD

Design: A 2 (Locale: metropolitan and sub-urban) × 2 (Gender: male and female) × 2 (academic stream: science group and commerce group) × 3 (frequency of internet access: regular, moderate and infrequent internet access) factorial design was employed. The adolescents belonging to different locale were equally divided according to gender and then the equal numbers of male and female adolescents were further classified on the basis of academic stream and finally, science group and commerce group were equally classified in different frequencies of internet access. The numbers of respondents were unequal at each level of frequency of internet access. There were, thus $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3 = 24$ (Twenty Four) groups.

Sample: A total sample of 496 internet user adolescents studying in 10 senior secondary schools in Delhi (metropolitan) and Bahadurgarh (sub-urban) was taken. A multi-stage stratified random

Table 1: Descriptive Information of Sampled Internet User Adolescents

S. No.	Description		Metropolitan		
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
1.	Place where accessed the internet				
(a)	Cyber cafe 20%		97	39%	50
(b)	At home 72%		124	50%	179
(c)	School library 3%		17	7%	06
(d)	At friend's home 5%		10	4%	13
2.	Time period since using the internet				
(a)	Less than 1 year 25%		41	16%	62
(b)	1-2 years 32%		41	16%	79
(c)	2-3 years 21%		90	36%	52
(d)	More than 4 years 22%		76	32%	55

3. Regular visit of certain websites*			
(a) Yes	169	68%	151
61%			
(b) No	79	32%	97
39%			
4. Use of social networking sites on a regular basis			
(a) Yes	134	54%	69
28%			
(b) No	114	46%	179
72%			
5. Time period per day accessing the internet			
(a) Less than 1 hour	117	47%	121
51%			
(b) 1-2 hours	117	47%	79
33%			
(c) 2-3 hours	14	6%	25
11%			
(d) More than 3 hours	--	--	10
5%			
6. Frequent use of adult sites			
(a) Yes	31	12.50%	72
29%			
(b) No	217	87.50%	176
71%			
7. Feeling while using adult sites			
(a) Comfortable	42	17%	79
32%			
(b) Disturbed	206	83%	169
68%			
8. Internet is a way of escaping from problems or of reliving stress			
(a) Yes	114	46%	145
58%			
(b) No	134	54%	103
42%			
9. Effect of internet on adolescents grade/assignments			
(a) Yes	27	11%	52
21%			
(b) No	221	89%	196
79%			
10. Parent's permission to access the internet			
(a) Yes	196	79%	231
93%			
(b) No	52	21%	17
7%			
11. Purpose of internet use			
(a) Awareness	31	12%	38
15%			
(b) Entertainment	151	61%	120
49%			
(c) Communication	14	6%	42
17%			

(d) Education 19%	52	21%	48
12. Importance of internet in adolescent's life			
(a) Not very important 18%	45	18%	45
(b) Somewhat important 43%	148	60%	107
(c) Very important 39%	55	22%	96
13. Life without internet would be boring, empty and joyless			
(a) Yes 65%	151	61%	162
(b) No 35%	97	39%	69

* Respondents mentioned websites' names according to their preference

Sampling technique was used. 50 internet user adolescents from each school were taken for the study. Total sample was divided into groups at each level according to the design of the study. The age range of sampled internet user adolescents was 14-17. Descriptive information of 496 sampled internet user adolescent respondents was also explored (Table 1).

Tools: Emotional Maturity Scale: This scale was developed by Singh and Bhargava (1990). The scale consists of 48 items and is based on five major areas of emotional maturity i.e. emotional instability, emotional regression, social maladjustment, personality disintegration and lack of independence. The higher score on the scale the greater the degree of the emotional immaturity and vice-versa. The test-retest reliability of the scale was 0.75. The scale was validated against external criteria i.e. the Gha (.64). This scale is meant for adolescents and adults.

Internet Use Questionnaire: Internet use was confirmed by filling out the internet use questionnaire, developed by investigator, about adolescents' access to internet, the total time they spent online, and where they typically accessed the internet, information about their online activities and effect and purpose of internet use. The statements in question form included in the questionnaire and provide authentic information about adolescents' internet access.

Results : The data were subjected to four-way ANOVA and results revealed a significant main influence of locale on emotional maturity of internet user adolescents, $F(1, 472) = 6.66, P < .05$ (partial $\eta^2 = .014$) indicating that internet user adolescents having sub-urban locale ($M = 181.17, SD = 24.57$) were higher on emotional maturity than those having metropolitan locale ($M = 177.84, SD = 20.59$). Interactive influence of academic stream and frequency of internet access on emotional maturity of internet user adolescents, $F(1, 472) = 3.95, P < .05$ (partial $\eta^2 =$

.016) was also found significant which indicating that infrequent internet user adolescents (M= 117.54, SD = 28.60) of commerce group showed higher emotional maturity than regular (M= 110.82, SD = 29.25) and moderate (M= 109.78, SD = 26.78) internet user adolescents of commerce group. The interaction of locale and academic stream was also found significant, $F(1, 472) = 6.21, P < .05$ (partial $\eta^2 = .013$) indicating that internet user adolescents of science group having metropolitan locale (M=118.92, SD = 27.29) were found to have significantly higher emotional maturity than sub-urban internet user adolescents of science group (M = 106.51, SD = 25.77).

The ANOVA on the second order interactive influence of locale, gender and frequency of internet access on emotional maturity of internet user adolescents came out to be significant, $F(2, 474) = 3.62, P < .05$ (partial $\eta^2 = .015$). Infrequent male internet user adolescents of metropolitan area (M=123.66, SD = 31.08) showed higher emotional maturity than other groups. However, female infrequent internet user adolescents of sub-urban area (M=115.39, SD = 31.57) also showed higher emotional maturity as compared to others.

Discussion

The present study revealed that sub-urban internet user adolescents were higher on emotional maturity than metropolitan internet user adolescents. The result is consistent with the prior research indicating that internet use was more pronounced on the personal life of the sub-urban users than the metropolitan users (Siwach, 2006; Mitra, 2000; Mitra & Rana, 2001). Internet usage is a new experience for the adolescents of sub-urban area and they with their rustic curiosity explore and experiment the possibilities of the internet when they are exposed to such modern technology for the first time.

It is also observed that internet user adolescents having infrequent internet access but belonging to commerce group showed higher emotional maturity than regular and moderate internet user adolescents of same group. Further, Metropolitan internet user adolescents having science group scored significantly higher on emotional maturity than sub-urban internet user adolescents of science group. The current findings are in the line with the past researches indicating that adolescents' primary use of the internet is for school work, specifically searching the web for information needed for school projects (Kraut, Scherlis, Mukhopadhyay, Manning, & Kiesler, 1996; Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2002; Turow & Nir, 2000, Valkenburg & Soeters, 2001). Children who used the internet more showed greater gains in Grade Point Averages than

children who used it less (Jackson, von Eye, Biocca, Barbatsis, Zhao, & Fitzderald, 2003). Same study found that low-income youth who consistently used the internet exhibited higher grade point averages over the course of the time (Jackson et al., 2006) than less frequent users. Adolescents also use internet services for entertainment and communication which provides a common platform to connect with people of different age groups and different ethnicity. This interaction provides them a platform to deal emotional problems independently.

Infrequent male internet user adolescents of metropolitan area showed higher emotional maturity than all other groups of adolescents based on different combinations of two levels of locale, two levels of gender and three levels of frequency of internet access on emotional maturity. Further, female infrequent internet user adolescents of sub-urban area scored significantly higher on emotional maturity as compared to others. One possible explanation for this result could be that being a metropolitan male adolescent resident, infrequent internet user adolescent has comparatively more opportunity, exposure and freedom to access internet for educational purposes, social interaction and entertainment than sub-urban adolescents. Because they live in metropolitan area where life is very fast, maximum parents are working and adolescents deal virtual world and real world independently. On the other hand, parents are more protective in case of girls because of events happening around them. Female adolescents of sub-urban area are not getting sufficient exposure to connect with the world outside. But with internet access, they have sufficient exposure and support from parents as well as friend circle. They are spending time with siblings and virtual world as well which makes them more emotionally mature as compared to others. This finding confirms the previous research finding emphasizing the teenage girls used the internet less than did teenage boys (Kraut et al., 1996).

Implications and Limitations

The present study is of greater importance in recent time because we are living in a post-industrial era in which modernization and globalization exists. Internet is not only a readymade forum easily available to adolescents 24X7 but also a crucial need of present time for information, learning and interaction. The internet has implications for the physical, cognitive, social and behavioural development of children and adolescents (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000; Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2003; Greenfield, 2004; Katz & Rice, 2002; Kraut et al., 1998; Subrahmanyam et al., 2001; Thornburgh & Lin, 2002). So, there is a strong need to make aware and motivate the adolescents for safe and appropriate pattern of internet usage. Because of

easy access of internet, adolescents consider internet as a substitute to escape or relieving stress of the real life situations. So, it is the responsibility of the parents, teachers, counsellors and researchers that the problems should be identified at an early stage and immediate remedial measures should be provided to the adolescents to lead a better life in the virtual world as well as real world. Unfortunately, developmental research has not begun to systematically include the internet as a contextual factor when studying adolescent development. Because adolescents are the early adopters of this virtual world to a large extent, it is even more important to consider the internet when studying adolescent development.

It is important to mention the implications of the present study for the educational administration. Educational policy-makers must restructure the school curriculum in keeping the necessity of connecting to virtual world in the classroom to motivate the adolescents for excellence in learning which makes them rise to meet competition and higher expectations of the society especially in case of rural/remote area's adolescents.

The present study was conducted on certain limitations. The study was confined to 496 internet user adolescents drawn from different schools of metropolitan and sub-urban area. Indian adolescent population is one of the biggest in the world, so in future the sample size must be fairly large. This study was confined to sample of internet user adolescents having four demographic variables namely locale, gender, academic stream and frequency of internet access. A similar study can be conducted on a large sample with different independent variables. The present study was carried on highly resourced public schools. A similar study may be conducted on samples drawn from government and semi-government schools situated in rural areas and a comparison and validation of results may be made. It will also be advisable to conduct some comparative, follow-up, longitudinal and/or experimental studies as it is likely to go a long way to evaluate the perceived influence of internet use on different age groups at different levels e.g. school level, college level and university level. Some studies covering pattern of internet usage and internet addiction and its influence on the behaviour pattern among the adolescents could be undertaken.

Thus, the present research explored the influence of internet use on emotional maturity of adolescents on the basis of locale, gender, academic stream and frequency of internet access.

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Table 2: Mean, SD and N representing Academic Stream × Frequency of Internet Access interaction for emotional maturity of internet user adolescents

Frequency of Internet Access	Academic Stream					
	Science Group			Commerce Group		
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N
Regular	115.18	27.67	85	110.82	29.25	77
Moderate	115.27	24.65	84	109.78	26.78	82
Infrequent	107.34	28.81	79	117.54	28.60	89

Table 3: Mean, SD and N representing Locale × Academic Stream interaction for emotional maturity of internet user adolescents

Academic Stream	Locale					
	Metropolitan			Non-metropolitan		
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N
Science Group	118.92	27.29	124	106.51	25.77	124
Commerce Group	113.02	28.09	124	112.75	28.67	124

Table 4: Mean, SD and N representing Locale × Gender × Frequency of Internet Access interaction for emotional maturity of internet user adolescents

Access	Locale														
	Metropolitan						Sub-urban								
	Male			Female			Male			Female					
M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	
Regular	118.22	27.02	41	111.97	29.88	39	108.88	26.25	40	113.29	30.56	42			
Moderate	118.48	28.22	42	115.02	22.92	42	113.42	26.73	41	103.12	23.24	41			
Infrequent	123.66	31.08	41	108.70	26.28	43	103.86	24.31	43	115.39	31.57	41			