The Role of Internet and Social Network Sites in Teenage Social Life

Monika Cenameri (Taçi) [MSc]

Department of Social Work and Social Policy
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana- Albania
E-mail: monikacenameri@yahoo.com

Abstract. *Adolescents today interact with computer and internet in almost all aspects of their lives, including communication, entertainment, and formal education. More and more adolescents choose to live in a virtual world, a world of computers social networks, losing touch with the real world and its problems. Undoubtedly that the benefits of computers in everyday life cannot be questioned, absolutely in every field of science or life the computer has become a good and indispensable friend due to its specific effectiveness. But recent studies show that the teenages who spend very much time using the computer soon get to develop various problems. This paper aim to: to find advantages- disadvantages- effects cause by use of computer and internet use in teenages spare time. This paper through the literature reviewing provides an overview of the effects caused by use of computer and internet in adolescence.The data presented that use of computer by teenages in this vulnerable period correlate to the lack of family support. Many teenages choose to fill their free time by using computer and internet which offer ways of socialization, communication and information, but in the same time drive them away from their family and from the real life.*

Keywords: Identity; internet; teenage, behavior problems; social networking sites

1. Introduction

Whatever that is television, radio, internet, they are all connected with technology that in their own time they have been the cause of "revolution." Today's internet has increased the ability of individuals interacting with other individuals who live further apart from each other, but have similar interest. In the 20th Century youth used face to face communication and over the phone conversation to stay connected with each other. In today's world teenagers see the internet as the main way to communicate and stay in touch with their peers. (Lenhart, Madden & Hitlin, 2005; Lenhart, Rainie & Lewis, 2001; Subramanyam, Greenfield, Kraut, & Gross, 2002; Tidwell & Walther, 2002).

For the first time in Albania this "revolution" started in the late 90's. In today's world with all the changes going on the internet has brought a whole new way, changing people's lives and especially youth who are in the process of shaping their personality. It's common that certain parts of society position themselves in the opposite side. Lately we have seen a lot of reaction and criticism linked to the idea that people are not communicating with each other face to face and spending too much time online. Not balancing attention has impact in the shape of personality (Clifford Stoll, 1995). The latest researches (Roco, 2004) have shown that people who spend a lot of time using the computer develop a range of problems. For children and teenagers the use of computers is mainly a source of entertainment who takes away the biggest part of their day (Dinca, 2004).

The number of internet uses recently have increased in Albania. According to INSTAT, the number of people who use the internet in the year 2005 was 120,408 in the recent years the number of internet users has boosted even more and as a result people are using the internet and its benefits. Open Data Albania has done research to see how has the number of internet users have increased through the years. The data that they have used has been taken from the ITU. Last decade the number of internet users has changed as shown in the graph below.
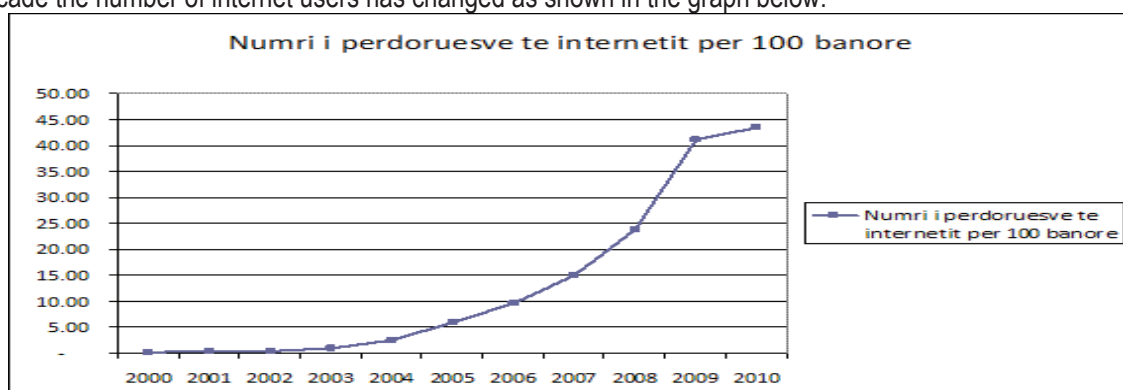
As the graphic shows there is an increase in the internet users in Albania, throughout the year 2010 around 43.5% of Albanians (or around 1.34 million people) are internet users compared with 41.2% in 2009 (ITU).

2. Literature review

2.1 Concepts about children development

Freud (2004) present the adolescence as an age of important change. Adolescence is a phase of life characterized typically by changes. Changes in adolescence years are physiological, but being unpredictable, unstable and contradictors, inevitable bringing destabilizing results. They involve people in their whole spectrum modifying the needs, which are; Physiological, social and material as shown in Fig.1.

On present time the youths world is not made up only from family, friends, school, but from all connections they create in social networking with other peers. Social networking has brought to teenage years a lot of possibilities for confrontation. If we refer to fig.1, and the way that SNS works its totally normal for children to be involved in it, until the moment that the virtual world becomes predominate in the minds and children's life. Then we are threatening by a risk (Carla Antoniotti, 2011).

If we analyze the use of the internet from children, according to ecologic model Fig.2 which describes development of children as a complex phenomenon, made during the interaction between individuals, families, communities and social elements, in a certain contexts all these elements follow each other. Reaction to protect children, according to this system, creates an environment where individuals themselves have the authority to change the system around them. FIG.2
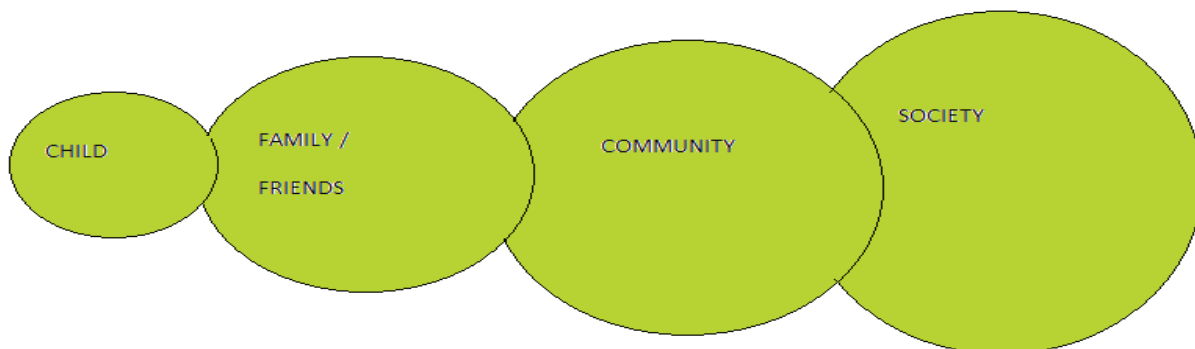
Ecologic model is a system that analysis multiple indication and correlation that social elements have with an environment which is naturally connected with children interaction thru SNS.

During the adolescence years from 12 to 18 years old

Child has a need for;
- ➤ Appreciation and feeling that you belong
- ➤ Develop self-esteem
- ➤ To take more responsibilities
- ➤ To express their sexuality
- ➤ For interaction with their peers
- ➤ To get educated
- ➤ Discover and adventures

> Freedom and independence
> More knowledge's about international culture and morals
> Hope for the future
> Role models

An adolescent learn and develops thru:
> Finding their own identity in the society
> Criticism/Rebellion
> Dangers behavior
> Discussion about life and death
> Finding their role models to follow
> New opinions and ideas
> Developing the morals the faith and values
> Separation from family

All the adolescence start to calculate to fulfill their needs, but each and every one has their own way of dealing with life, according to their modalities and their specific characteristics. Lukoff (2004) has identified certain factors that increase adolescents' tendency to the Internet.

2.1.1. To grow and develop with computer and internet.

In today's world the majority of this group age spends a considerable time in the internet. According to com score Networks 713 million people ages 15 an older (representing 14% of the global population) used the internet in June 2006, with 153 million of those in America (Lipsman, 2006). These numbers are growing as computer technology and telecommunications capabilities reach further and deeper into the countries of the world. This type of media or communication naturally is very attracted to children and teens, because of interactive nature is very fit for group age, also because of new prospective and practical side of this new development. Also in Albania, with the slow motion, but steady has created the info structure that made it possible to use the internet; this is a phenomena that more often has been seen, although children are using the internet often as a resource without deep knowledge.

2.2. The impact of internet usage and SNS on social life

The use of technology always have had a impact on the development of society. Today's interest in the technology of information, in creating and advancing; and developing the theory they look like interest never imagined before (Bar 2000). The information technology are in the center of the society's net. Specially to create connection in the internet and to gather information. Adolescence are the biggest users of the internet and social network sites (SNS). The studies have discovered that the youth spend a big part of their time communicating through this technology. The most common questions about the use of this technology are connected with the effects that are caused by the use of this technology in their development. The use of a PC from adolescence has effect in their personal life, the family relations and the way they get along with their peers. In one analysis to internet users in a group made to 93 families, was discovered in the first year of their computer access adolescence spent most of the time online; showing an increase on the hostility in social involvements, and an increase of loneliness and depression feelings (Krout 1998). Researchers are concerned about their physical, social and personal development, from the long hours of usage on the computer (Dorman 1997 and Miller 1993).

2.3 Effects for short and long time utilization of the computer and internet (Runcan, Patricia Lucian 2009)

Some authors call computer and internet addiction "the one minute more syndrome" according to the answer of the person asked to leave the internet or to shut down the computer (Mitrofan, 2005). Due to the excessive utilization of the computer and internet, the most affected areas of the child and teenager's life are the following: the health (mental and physical), the emotional and social life.
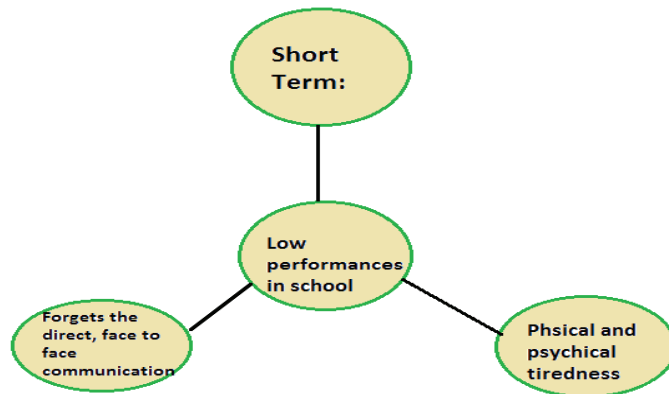
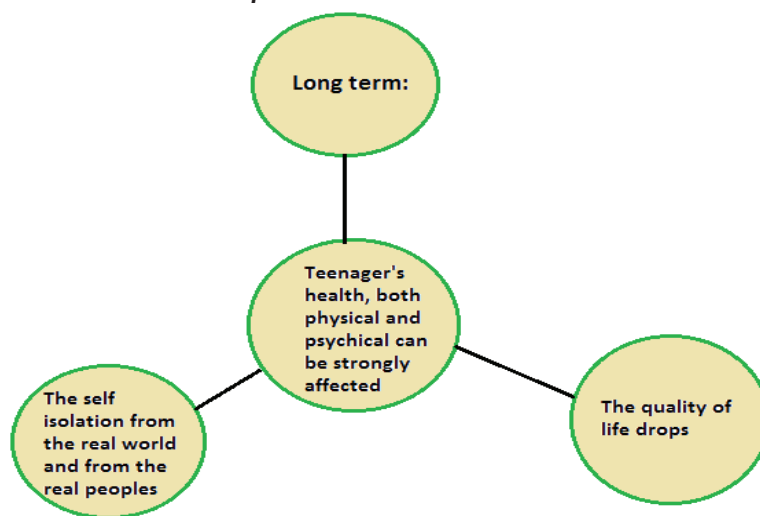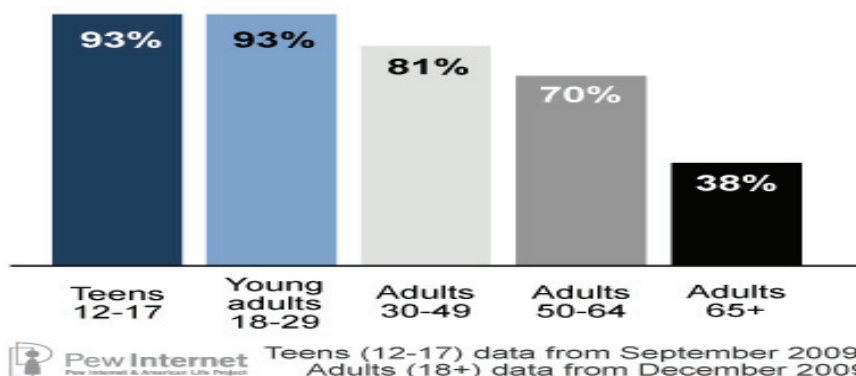*Fig. 3 Effects excessive utilization of the computer*

Fig. 4 Effects excessive utilization of the computer on the long term

93% of American teens ages 12-17 go online *(Pew Internet Project Survey 2009)*

Among adolescents, both boys and girls are equally likely to go online, but younger teens remain slightly less likely to go online than older teens. Fully 95% of teens ages 14-17 go online compared with 88% of teens ages 12-13. Most of the variance among younger teens is accounted for by 12 year olds, of whom 83% go online compared to 92% of 13 year olds.
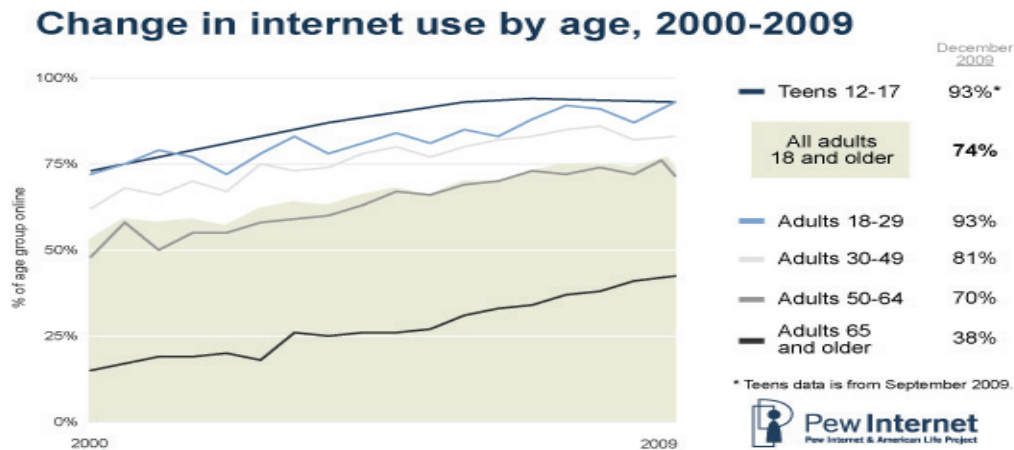
Teens continue to be avid users of social networking websites – as of September 2009, 73% of online American teens ages 12 to 17 used an online social network website, a statistic that has continued to climb upwards from 55% in November 2006 and 65% in February 2008.
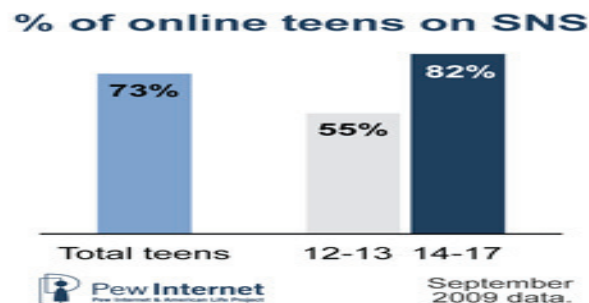
Over recent years, there has been an explosion in the number of people using social networking websites, such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Facebook, for instance, has over 800 million active users, and over a 100 million people use Twitter each day. These sites have brought with them many benefits, but also some downsides. It would be very beneficial to take a look of advantage and disadvantage of these social networks.

2.3.1. Advantages of social networking

- ▣ Easy access to a large amount of information;
- ▣ Speed in finding worldwide events;
- ▣ A very attractive alternative in spending the free time;
- ▣ The improvement of the cognitive capacity;
- ▣ A strong self confidence, a higher self esteem;
- ▣ Decreasing the boredom and the temporarily depression;
- ▣ Increasing the number of friends from "chat" services;
- ▣ Te refuge into another world.

2.3.2. Disadvantages of social networking

- ▣ Informational overload;
- ▣ Internet based relation addition;
- ▣ He forgets face to face communication;
- ▣ The student's involvement in educational programs decreasing;
- ▣ Eye problems, headaches and back pains occur;
- ▣ Continuous tiredness due to the lack of sleep;
- ▣ The lack of physical activity;
- ▣ He is not pay attention to a basic needs;
- ▣ Low communication with his family;

- ▣ Decreasing teenager's social activities;
- ▣ Increasing the depression and loneliness on long term.

## 3. SNS affect psychological well-being and self esteem

"I like my online friends more than my offline ones"

Adolescents are regarded as the best candidates for being Internet addicts (Mossbarger, 2008; Yen at al., 2007).Self-esteem and psychological well-being are two most common outcomes of interest in prior internet and SNS studies. A key debate among researchers considers whether higher use of the internet affect's one's self-esteem and psychological well- being (Kraut et al., 1998; Valkenburg and Peter, 2009). In these studies, it is seen that adolescents with low self-esteem tend to spend more time in social networking sites than those with higher self-esteem (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Steinfield, Ellison &Lampe, 2008).

The researchers found that longer use of the internet was related to increased depression, loneliness, and smaller social circles. The results suggest that internet use isolates individuals from their friends and family, and has a negative impact on one's psychological well-being. This effect is known as the reduction hypothesis (Valkenburg and Peter, 2009).

## 4. Internet use by Albanian's Teen

From a study done in Albania, Tirana-Albanian from Media Institution with UNICEF support with 500 students ages 13-18 titled (children and media) resulted that internet is very important for Albanian youth; results conclude as followed (*see graph below*)
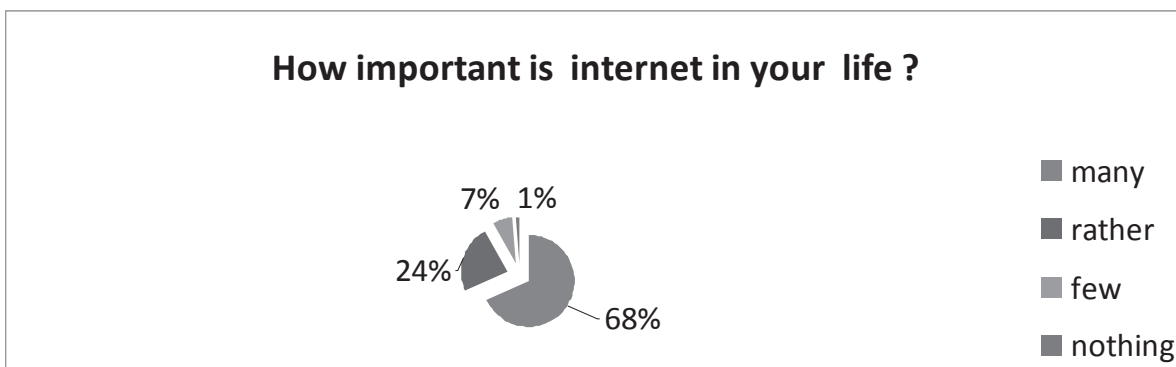
The question about internet usage in their life the Albanian teenagers answers as follows: from 1 more and 5 less (see the graphic below)
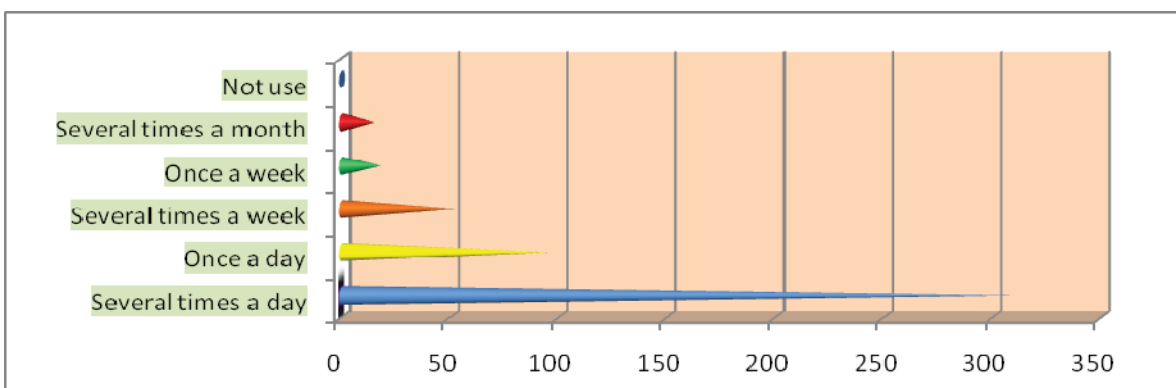
This high frequency of internet use shows the tight connections that this age group has for this type of media. Impact as shown from the questioner, the often reason of internet use was visiting social network sites, were only a small part of people that were interviewed said they don't use these sites. (See graph below)

130

Why do you normally use the Internet?
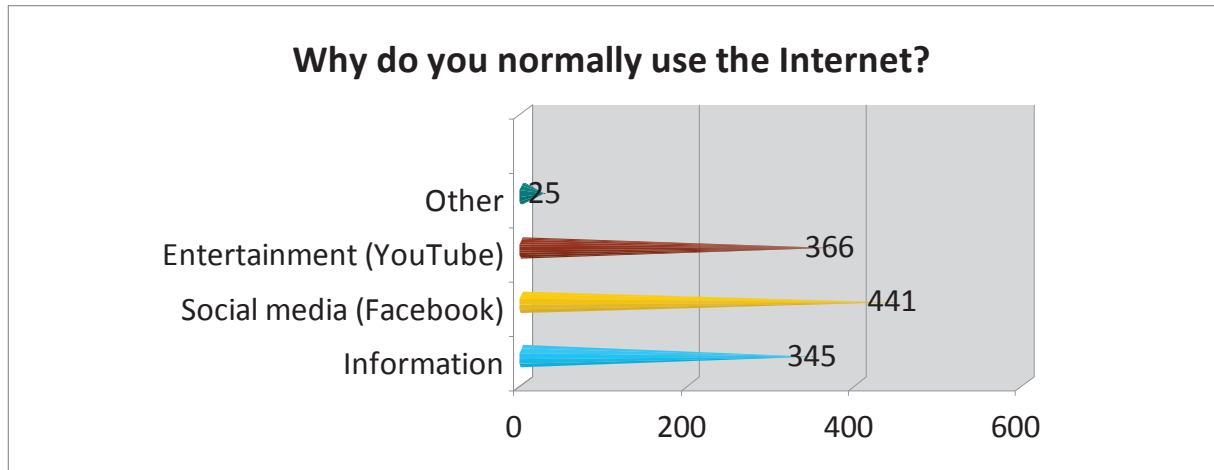
You can surely say this group age, uses this way to communicate, there is no doubt they use this more than traditional media. Perhaps in some cases you can say that virtual reality that they got through the internet occupies more space in the lives of this group age compared to everyday reality.

5. Conclusions

This article offers an over look of the studies which show that technology, is an important part in adolescence life. At the same time studies show that youth behavior, from using of this technology is indicated behavior. For today's youth the new technology of communications are important variable, which shows advantage and disadvantage analyzing these advantages will help imputing the right balance.

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