

A Survey on How Children Perceive Smartphone and Routine Adjustments towards Obsession

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Abstract: The usage of smartphones among children is high and exposure to smartphones occurs at young age with or without the parental assistance. The use of smartphones is increasingly widespread. Some of the obsessive properties are particularly agonizing, especially for school children. This study uses qualitative methods by collecting data through in-depth interviews. The paper explores how children view smartphones and adjust their attitude towards the obsession. These children are given to access to smartphones, but with parental supervision.

Keywords:- Smartphones, Children, Obsession.

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern life is technologically-motivated due to the presence of electronic gadgets. Technology has been progressing so rapidly over time and now it has become imperative in our lives. The impacts and effects of gadgets can be seen on individuals from all sorts of life and age groups. Therefore, the use of gadgets in modern times is now not only focused on adults. Even elementary children also know how to access the applications contained in the sophisticated gadgets. Indisputably, the usage of electronic gadgets also has its influence among children. As there are positive and negative effects, it also applies in situations where gadgets are employed to facilitate the learning process of children, but this needs to be monitored.

The definition of electronic gadget is broad. According to Conge (2012) electronic gadgets are defined as instruments which can perform many activities at a time with enormous speed and make hard work efficient. There are numerous electronic gadgets in the market, such as computer, smartphone, laptops, palmtops, digital camera, mp3 players, and so on. However, in this study, researchers are going to focus on smartphone due to interpretation and understanding given by the participants of the study.

Smart phones play an important role in our lives. Smart phones not only provide a social outlet, but are a means to engage oneself in interesting activities such as surfing the internet, playing games, conducting research, and taking and sharing photographs. They provide us with more flexibility compared to home telephones as they allow the user to leave home and remain connected. Smart

phones also enable us to seek help in case of an emergency and enable parents to keep an “eye” on their children. Parents should play a role in controlling the use of gadgets, especially smartphones by children who are still in school.

II. METHOD

The data have been analysed using thematic analysis and are centered on the objectives of the study. Creswell (2010) declared that qualitative research is a method for exposing and comprehending the meaning of a number of individuals considered to be descended from the social issues of the study. Interviews were held with six primary school children from Gong Badak residential area 5.

The researchers choose primary school children and ages ranging from 10 to 12 years old. The researchers choose age based criteria to explore and understand the capabilities of using the gadget in the aforementioned age range. For the reason that the development and learning process with gadget guidance and monitoring is important in this age. In this qualitative study a purposeful sampling system was used (Black, 2010) to saving time recruiting primary school children participants in residential involved. A research statement leaflet was distributed by the researchers through the community leader in the Gong Badak residential area 5. Potential interested participants contacted the researchers via e-mail for more information about the study. All participants’ guardian gave written consent to take part in the study. The information sheet was sent to potential participants prior to the interview. The participants were given the opportunity to ask questions both earlier and on the day of the interview. They right to withdraw at any time (pre, during or post interview), without explanation, was explained in the information sheet, and verbally prior to and post interview. All real names were modified to protect participant confidentiality. The guardians who volunteered their children to take part in the study were Malays. All children explained perfectly their own experiences. Thematic analysis method has been chosen because it functions to reflect reality and to make the issue transparent (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data were collected during in-depth interviews face-to-face with the child, commonly at their family's home. Interviews lasted between 15 and 25 minutes. The interview schedule was developed by the researcher and adaptations were made after obtaining comments from two experts in the

field. It consisted of seven open-ended straightforward questions derived from the literature and covered data on socio-demographic characteristics, how and to what extent these children were affected, and approaches towards monitoring the circumstances. The tape records of the interviews were transcribed straightaway after the interviews, input into a computer program and examined to identify themes.

III. ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is a way to classify the themes encompassed in this phenomenon. There are four themes obtained by the researchers. These themes sometimes overlap. Four superordinate themes emerged:

- A. How these children view electronic gadgets
- B. The purpose and function of smartphone to them
- C. Obsession habit and monitoring style
- D. Health effects and attitude adjustment in relation to smartphone obsession

❖ *Demographic Characteristic*

In total, six children took part in study participant characteristics at the time of interview are displayed in Table 1. This project involved three boys and three girls. The researchers took those children age 10 years onward which are considered as upper primary grade. Three of the participants were 12 years old; two were 11; and only one was 10. Five of the participants owned smartphones given by their family members. Those who performed excellently in examination got them as rewards for their achievements or as a present for birthdate anniversary.

A. *How these Children view Electronic Gadgets*

From 10 to 12 years of age, children start to move from childhood to observe a more adult world that they will obviously fancy. As early adolescents, they have an increased ability to learn and apply skills. During this stage, often called the potential stages, they are capable of learning, creating and accomplishing numerous new skills and knowledge (Erikson, 1982). This is also a social stage of the children, and the most significant relationships are with school peers (Erikson, 1982). In respect to the physical and mental development of the child, introduction questions related to the topic were given in this study. They were asked to define electronic gadgets in terms of their own knowledge and opinions. Each and every one of the participants had referred to the smartphone in their statement as their main gadget. They described the smartphone according to their knowledge.

➤ *Participant A (boy-12 years):*

“Electronic gadget? It’s a smartphone or mobile phone that we operate daily in life. Lots of function to assist us.”

➤ *Participant B (girl-12 years):*

“Gadget is...ermmm mobile phones and laptop.....you can bring it everywhere. Easy to carry and we can operate it everywhere as long as we have internet line.

➤ *Participant C (girl-11 years):*

“For me gadget is a mobile phone. Nowadays we called it a smartphone. It’s simple to carry, affordable to buy and multifunction.”

➤ *Participant D (boy-11 years):*

“Gadget.... it’s like smartphone and digital camera...I think.”

➤ *Participant E (girl- 12 years):*

“Gadget is a smartphone. For me I can listen to the music, watch video through YouTube channel and browsing information with the smartphone. One more thing I like it because it can help us to guide to a certain location I guess the program is Waze.”

➤ *Participant F (boy-10 years):*

“Gadget definitely a smartphone.....and tablet. We can surf lots of information but I like to play games with it....hahahaha.”

In brief, even these children did not have much knowledge of the genuine definition of gadget, nevertheless the listed purposes mentioned by all of them were correct. They paid particular attention to smartphones as an electronic gadget even though there are other entities classified as an electronic gadget too. These children have observed from adult and peers the multiple functions of the smartphone that they are keen to use daily.

B. *The Purpose and Function of Smartphone to them*

In a subsequent question from the previous theme, we have probed them to slightly elaborate their understanding about the specific purpose of a smartphone. These children managed to list at least four purposes of having a smartphone. The answers were: to shop online so that the item will be delivered at home; as a map navigator to search for a certain location; for long and short distance communication; getting update news; playing games; taking photos and video; recording voice; updating social status; obtaining information; and listening to music. Researchers have observed that these children habitually use and stay up to date with the technology around them.

In terms of smartphone functions, these children explained that they learnt how to use them from their peers at school and family members and especially their elder siblings (Nelson, 2018). To them, a smartphone is a gadget that would enable everyone do their jobs anywhere. Participants indicated that what makes them hooked to the smartphone were several programs such as games and social media. Social media programs, especially Facebook and Instagram, were the most common programs used by the girls to upload photos and update their activities. This finding is similar to the result conducted by Livingstone *et al.* (2014) for social network services especially Facebook among teens aged 10 to 12 years. Several of their statements are as follows;

➤ *Participant B (girl- 12 years):*

"I have to chat with my friends through Facebook and Instagram every day. I love to upload and follow certain people from this program too."

➤ *Participant C (girl-11 years):*

"Log in to my Facebook is a must every day and I like to play games as well with my phone."

➤ *Participant E (girl- 12 years):*

"I like to listen to the music with my phone. To interact with my friends every day, I have to gain access the Facebook. At the same time, I used to get several information regarding my studies and hobbies too."

➤ *Participant A (boy-12 years):*

"I love to play games with smartphone. Sometimes I do open my Facebook too."

➤ *Participant D (boy-11 years):*

"Of course games. Occasionally I will browse information that I need for my study and sports as well."

If we rank according to the answers, girl participants preferred to operate social media programs while boys would rather play games and glance through information about their hobbies, such as sports.

C. Obsession Habit and Monitoring Style

All of the children in this study revealed that they considered themselves as addicted to smartphones. They demanded several hours per day to use the gadget regardless of time. Four out of six participants confessed that they used smartphones more than three hours per day. From that figure, three out of four disclosed approximate times of about five hours per day. Simpul and Mantiri (2017) found that the respondents of their study used smartphones more than five hours a day too. One of the boys possesses declared using his smartphone almost nine to 10 hours per day during the weekend. Those four participants own the smartphone make them advantage to spend more than 3 hours daily. Participants A and C occupied less than three hours due to self-discipline even though they own the smartphones. And again, what make them so passionate look through the smartphone? Social media programs make them hooked and exceed more than three hours per day with the smartphone. According to Duggan *et al.* (2015), parents should facilitate a healthy and well-adjusted relationship between smartphones and their children by helping them to use social media effectively. Here are examples of obsessive behaviour in the following comments:

➤ *Participant B (girl- 12 years):*

"I addict to spend my time with the smartphone about four to five hours a day. I regularly skip my meals especially lunch as long as I can operate my phone."

➤ *Participant D (boy-11 years):*

"I love to look through my phone approximately 5 hours. I used to not take my dinner because of that activity."

➤ *Participant F (boy-10 years):*

"I am obsessing too with my phone. During the weekend I can spend roughly nine hours but my parents used to check the program that I peruse with my phone."

Their parents made themselves aware of their fanatical behaviour towards the smartphone. Each of their parents has numerous mechanisms to monitor them (see Table 1). A majority of them own the gadgets; nevertheless, their parents monitor and control the time spent with the smartphone daily. Since the smartphone only can be operated at home and not in school, most of the parents authorize them once they completed their homework. Participant A's guardian restricted him to spend no more than three hours a day. If he disobeys the rule, they will badger him over and over on that day. For Participant D, the parents will take the smartphone if he violates the three hours' contract. A routine for Participant E's parents is to verify the programs used. Participant F will get lectured if he overuses the smartphone that he owns.

D. Health Effects and Attitude Adjustment in Relation to Smartphone Obsession

These days among adults and youngsters not even a single day goes without a smartphone in their hand. Smartphones addiction has a negative impact on physical and mental health as well as the social behaviour of the individual by being the cause of changes in their lifestyle. The researchers explored health effects and attitude changes in regard to smartphones mania amongst children in this study. The children had responded about their behavioural obsession which could trigger health outcome towards them. The most noticeable attitude change is leaving out their meals especially lunch or dinner. Besides, sleeping at late night without parents realizing is another routine for them. Consequent to that attitude modification they felt sleepy, lethargic and could not concentrate on study at school. According to one of the children, several times disciplinary actions had been used with him. One more issue that they mentioned was retaining pocket money to buy air-time instead of saving.

➤ *Participant A (boy - 12 years):*

"I prefer occupy my smartphone rather than taking my lunch."

➤ *Participant B (girl - 12 years):*

"I used not to eat my lunch because of my smartphone."

➤ *Participant D (boy - 11 years):*

"More than few times I skip my dinner so that I can concentrate with the smartphone after I completed all my homework."

➤ *Participant F (boy - 10 years):*

“I am too devoted to my smartphone playing games. I spend too much time without my parents’ knowledge especially at night. I used to stay late night and end up sleepy in my class. Few times I get caught and disciplinary action was taken. My pocket money I spend to buy prepaid so that I can play games.”

Obsession towards the smartphone has caused unhealthy behaviour among these children. For example, skipping meals as they mentioned in the interview would

affect the physical development of teenagers. Cain and Gradisar (2010) discovered that there is a growing body of evidence that electronic gadget use during youth is related to later bedtimes, shorter sleep duration, and sleep disturbance. The findings of our study demonstrated the same outcome too. Exploitation of pocket money to buy top-ups becomes apparent instead of spending it practically. The obsession towards the smartphone has contributed to harmful attitude adjustments as well as health effects.

| Children | Gender | Age | Gadget Ownership | Usage Per Day | Parents Reaction & Control Mechanism |
|---------------|--------|-----|------------------|-------------------|--|
| Participant A | Boy | 12 | Yes | Less than 3 hours | Overuse - continually faultfinding |
| Participant B | Girl | 12 | Yes | More than 3 hours | Overuse - monitoring with completed homework |
| Participant C | Girl | 11 | No | Less than 3 hours | Overuse - parents always remind about it |
| Participant D | Boy | 11 | Yes | More than 3 hours | Overuse - take hold of the smartphone |
| Participant E | Girl | 12 | Yes | More than 3 hours | Overuse - check the smartphone regularly |
| Participant F | Boy | 10 | Yes | More than 3 hours | Overuse - get reprimanded |

Table 1:- Information on Participants’ Experience included in Analysis

IV. DISCUSSION

In this study, we can see how children at this stage interpret, observe and learn smartphones as the major electronic gadget in the market. They are not accustomed to devices other than smartphones. This has proven that early adolescents between 10 to 12 years have an added ability to learn and apply skills according to Erikson (1982). Majority of the children in this study own a smartphone. These children witness the function of the smartphone from the people around them, especially adults in the family and peers. That is how they can itemize more than four answers for the smartphone functions when we questioned them. Children in this age range learn to extend their way of thinking further than their personal experiences and knowledge. The useful part of the finding is that we can see the development of the child during this age towards digital technology. However, the overuse of the smartphone among these children is considered unhealthy. Most of the participants in this study were too addicted with the smartphone and utilize it more than three hours daily. They confessed that they be able to spend the smartphone more than six hours during the weekend. These children accessing the smartphone and internet in the privacy of their bedroom. On the other hand, all parents monitor the usage of smartphone among these children. Researchers also found one in six parents do not limit the amount of time their children spend on their phones. Most of parents restricted their child with the time spend and inspect the programs that they use. The obsession mindsets among

these children transform their behaviours and routines. Likewise, Kim and Kim (2015) findings endorsed this current study result when the proportions of participants using a smartphone while eating meals along or leave out meals due to operating a smartphone were also bigger in their study. According to Sonnentag *et al.* (2008), getting sufficient sleep is important. However, smartphone addiction causes insufficient sleep among the children (Perlow, 2012) as shown in this study as well. Ahn and Kim (2015) conducted a study among nursing students and discovered that if smartphones are used excessively, this can cause changes of everyday life of its owner, clearly affecting their health and sleeping habits. Furthermore, Carmody (2012) revealed that low income consumers sometimes have difficulty in making a decision whether to buy food or pay for Internet access. In this study, students have a preference as well to buy airtime compared to other necessities. Extensive outcomes mostly similar to this study uncovered that obsession with using the smartphone more than five hours a day has contributed to avoiding meals, exercise, revision and sleep (Simpul & Mantiri, 2017). To sum up, the use of smartphones, the internet and other electronic gadgets have intensely increased over the decade, and this increase is associated not only with increased social connectedness, more shared knowledge and argument, and a multitude of other benefits to users and societies, but also with documented cases of excessive use which often have undesirable health consequences.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study is an assuring study in the sense that we are living in a world of information and technology. Smartphones have many advantages but some disadvantages too. It has become a vital element for every person; however, nowadays it has also becoming an addiction to the young generation. Children have not reached the age to make rational decisions yet, so they can easily become addicted to smartphones. Parents should realize the strong influence of smartphones on their children. It is important not to simply give smartphones to them. Since children have weak control of themselves, they are in need of parental control.

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