

Insights into the current phase of Metaverse and its impacts on Muslim youth: A broad-spectrum cognizance

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Abstract

Education is one of the most important tools in the upbringing of our younger generations. With the advancement in scientific research and technology, seeking knowledge, assembling literature, and attending smart classes have aided students largely. However, at the same time, the rapid growth of the technological and digitalized world has created havoc among the younger generations that are spending much time on the internet, social media and video gaming platforms provided by a massive number of smartphones. The large-scale consumption of these electronic devices has trapped individuals particularly the student communities in a new phase of the Metaverse. This digitalized phase has although aided in the academic performances of the students, however, it has also brought many negative impacts like mental health issues, anxiety, insomnia, suicides, and drug abuse among students from primary schools up to the university level. The present study aims to provide an overview of the internet and social media addiction among Muslim youth and potential approaches to regulate the overwhelming impacts on their health.

Keywords: *Muslim youth, social media, internet, video gaming, addiction, mental health*

1.0 Introduction

In the present era of scientific and technological advances, a lot has materialized in the last decade than previous 200 years. Innovations in technology are rapidly proliferating in the mobile space and people for the most part youth are actually benefitting from the rapid and exponential growth of mobile technology (Melumad & Pham, 2020). On contrary, the smartphone revolution has changed the course of antiquity by further expanding the technological innovations in mobile applications that have supplemented an intensified intellect among the youth. The swift access in data transfer, knowledge, education-based online lectures, and communication has abetted students in diverse aspects of online-based education and literature assemblage (Firmansyah et al., 2020). A very large number of mobile applications are available on smartphones that have minimized the workforce to large extent. Provided the internet connection, most of the applications can be accessed anywhere and anytime.

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Metaverse is a combination of two words (Meta=beyond; Verse=universe). In simple terms, Metaverse is a broad internet experience that enables users to enter into augmented reality with computerized simulations in the form of a graphically rich virtual space (Mystakidis, 2022). Online video gaming has been already transformed by the Metaverse technology and social media network giant Facebook has launched “Facebook Horizon”, a virtual reality platform and entered into the race of Meta Platforms similar to what Microsoft and HTC did hitherto (Gadekallu et al., 2022) (Figure 1).

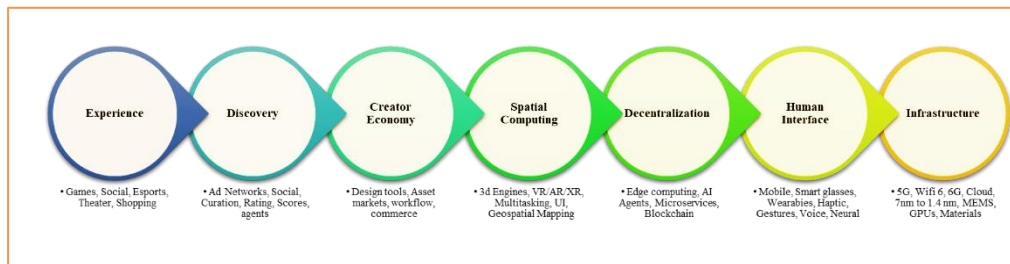


Figure 1. Seven echelons of the Metaverse

As we have experienced a different world with the advance of high-tech smartphones, tablets, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and technologies of the virtual world (Nevelsteen, 2018). However, there is much more for a student or younger generation that would take them to the online theatre, while sitting in a classroom. Youth particularly, the middle and high school students have largely been distracted by the online world, since the free access to visualize a different world can be experienced with a smartphone in their pocket. Bringing technology to schools can be dangerous, as it can bring problems out of the classroom into the classroom whether it be academic dishonesty or cheating and cyberbullying in most of the cases (Hasan, 2019). The main problem with the technology is that it is advancing at very high rate and at the same time exploiting our basic human psychology. We have built a society for our younger generation that is made up of people that are not able to design, repair or even operate most of the devices upon which their lives depend. In this vastly complex world, we are not been able to offer a satisfactory explanation for the many human-made phenomena we get to observe and use every day which is the reason technology is controlling us instead of us controlling it (De Vries, 2005).

2.0 Exploitation of internet among youth: A widespread concern

Internet is a fully distributed system that is made of a chain of a large number of independently operated networks. The internet plays an essential role in our everyday lives, as the users are able to socially interconnect with each other (Leiner et al., 2009). With a wide array of options that the internet can provide, it has made people’s lives very easier and has minimized the workforce. With the advance in internet technology, a lot has been changed in the areas of research, data transfer, information seeking, communication, business and education (Antonijevic, 2018).

Despite the fact, the internet has progressed as a technological tool in a number of aspects. However, the use of the internet has been dramatically increased because of the online users that in turn has resulted in its exploitation and pathological use among youth (Kurniasanti et al., 2019). Hefty usage of the internet refers to pathological internet usage and it was Dr Ivan Goldberg who proposed the term “Internet Addiction” (Chou et al., 2005). The usage of the internet has become a very common practice in our societies and individuals particularly the

student community has become vulnerable to developing a dependence on the internet. A number of reports have revealed that the impact has been observed on mental health of student communities that are studying in the middle and high schools because of psychologically addictive characteristics of the internet use (Nalwa & Anand, 2003).

A lot of research has been accomplished in the form of questionnaire studies, cross-sectional students and much descriptive analysis in the Muslim majority nations across the globe. The addiction of the internet among Muslim students has profoundly increased that has resulted in the deterioration of mental health and drug abuse in most of the cases (Lee et al., 2013). The swift access in communication and online drug trafficking is also a matter of concern that has been neglected for a long time. Research among the students from Muslim majorities nations have revealed a hefty usage of the internet followed by the mental corrosion of student's (Table 1).

Table 1: Internet addiction among different groups of students in Muslim majority nations and states

Educational hierarchy among students	Muslim majority Countries	References
Primary, Middle and High School students, University and college students, Medical students	Bangladesh	Jahan et al., 2019; Mondal, 2020; Mamun et al., 2019
	Egypt	Okasha et al., 2021; Rahman & Marzouk, 2020; Elbilgahy et al., 2021
	Ethopia	Mengistu et al., 2021
	Israel and Palestine	Agbaria & Bdier, 2019; 2021; Berte et al., 2021; Mahmid et al., 2021
	Indonesia	Fatimah & Hidayatullah, 2021; Diniaty & Vebrianto, 2020
	Iran	Rafiee et al., 2020
	Malaysia	Mulawarman et al., 2021; Jamil et al., 2022; Mooi et al., 2019; Hassan et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2022; Ismail et al., 2021; Haque et al., 2019;
	Pakistan	Nadeem et al., 2019; Suhail & Bargees, 2006; Waqas et al., 2015; 2016
	Turkey	Arslan & Coşkun, 2021; Günaydin, 2021
	Kashmir, India	Bhat & Kawa, 2015
	Kuwait	Kaposi, 2014
	Nigeria	Lawal & Idemudia, 2018; Saleh et al., 2016; Yusuf et al., 2020; Babalola et al., 2017; Ndubuisi et al., 2021
	Jordon	Solyman, 2020
	Saudi Arabia	Khayat et al., 2018; Elbilgahy et al., 2021; Bafakih et al., 2016; Isa & El-Sabbagh, 2014
	Sudan	Hamza et al., 2021

3.0 Extensive use of social media and video gaming

Smartphones and social media have added more fuel to addiction to the internet among students (Hou et al., 2019). Social media can provide bite-sized addictive chunks of recognition in the form of points, likes, streaks, followers, reels (shot videos), views and so on. Social media can provide a constant stream of buzzing, flashing and colourful reminders that make us people recognize around us. In this increasingly urbanized and digitalized world, individuals particularly students have the access to a massive social circle, where the internet acts as an overwhelming firehose (Gazi et al., 2019). Every minute, a 40-minute video is posted on YouTube and around 28 % of users on the TikTok application are under the age of 18 (Business of Apps, 2022). The problem lies in not using the social media applications, however, students who are using these applications on daily basis have drifted away from the real world and are not able to cope with the changes. The largest impact of these applications and their hefty usage have been observed on a particular group of younger generations that grew all together with these technological and social time bombs (Figure 2). The devices that have been placed on their hands from an early age have made a series of negative effects on their lives, as the students that are studying in primary schools to colleges, experienced more mental dilemmas than the ones that came before the Metaverse era (Akter, 2014).



Figure 2. A cosmos of the social media applications in the present era of Metaverse

With the large-scale utilization of these social media handles by the individuals particularly the students from an early age. A number of negative impacts such as depression, mental deterioration, drug abuse, and suicide have been reported among the youth from different parts of the world (Pantic, 2014). The problem with the substantial usage and addiction of social media applications that have provided users free access to massive content. Stimulating videos on Facebook and Instagram have allowed users to swing around to pornographic websites that have also brought about very serious concerns among the youth. The free access to pornography and its content is being shared between the groups that are created on these social messenger applications (Duffy et al., 2014). On contrary, Drug trafficking is also taking place on the internet and abusers and drug dealers are communicating with each other on the social media applications and the groups created between them (Mackey & Liang, 2013).

A number of reports have revealed a substantial usage in the social media applications among the individuals particularly the Muslim youth that has affected the both mental wellbeing and academic performances as well (Riaz & Shahid, 2019; Amedie, 2015; Abdullah & Chan, 2016; Croucher & Rahmani, 2015; Mokhtar & Bahari, 2021). Moreover, the consumption of pornographic content among the Muslim is also a matter of serious concern and have been reported from the Muslim majority nations across the globe (Hald & Mulya, 2013; Wijaya Mulya & Hald, 2014; Gesser-Edelsburg & Arabia, 2018; Rahman et al., 2020; Golder et al., 2017; Kasemy et al., 2016; Faisal et al., 2022; Mamun et al., 2019).

Online dating applications such as Tinder have also brought about cataclysmic impacts on the younger generations. The free access to unlimited matching between the younger boys and girls on these dating applications has triggered sexual encounters and intimate relationships at a very young age (Choi et al., 2016a, 2016b; 2018; Phan et al., 2021; Flesia et al., 2021). These dating applications have also brought about the easy ways to obligate sexual abuse and adultery among the younger generations both in person and via offline modes such as sexting, nude video calls and so on.

4.0 Potential approaches to engage youth in physical activities and fightback mechanism against internet and social media addiction.

Although the free access to a massive internet and social media content have brought people together with widespread clusters of communication routes. However, individuals mostly the student communities that had opportunities to accumulate the knowledge and intellect from the technological and digitalized world caught in between the world of Metaverse and their enlightenment. There is direct correlation between time spent on social media and symptoms of depression and teens that spent three hours or more per day on electronic devices mainly the smartphones are 35% more likely to have a risk factor for suicide (Jasso-Medrano & Lopez-Rosales, 2018). Adolescence is a prime time to development of social skills and interpersonal relationships that are often lacking when younger generations are tied to a digital niche.

To cope with such problems, an individual particularly an adult must have a specific goal in his or her life that will bond him to make a better world rather than making reels on a street. The disturbance in mental well-being because of the hefty consumption of the internet and social media among youth is a result of tethering between the walls of a digital world and not coming out from it. Online video games and technological marvels like AR and VR have also resulted in diminishing physical activities like indoor and outdoor games, and sports among youth. Observing the remarkable nature and natural world has also been neglected and unloved by the younger generations because of an unending virtual world in their pockets.

On contrary, parents can play a key role in the appropriate upbringing of their children. The surveillance by the parents upon their children can do the job of not making them addicted to a digitized world. Gathering knowledge, edifying, and assembling literature on the internet is the first option that parents can offer to their young children rather than equipping them with high-end smartphones and tablets. Parents should avoid offering their children smartphones at an early age as in the present times rather than teaching the children how to use their smartphones in turn kids are teaching the parents.

Apart from instructing students and teaching specified syllabuses on PowerPoint slides, teachers can also undertake some definite roles in the ethical upbringing of the students. Apart from the subjects, they teach, a little focus on biodiversity, nature, plants, animals, climate change, environmental issues, global warming, extinction of species, skill development, and ethics, must be delivered to the student communities. Once a week, physical activities like indoor and outdoor games should also be provided in schools and colleges and small gym units should be installed in schools as well. Homework, like observing animals and plants around their surroundings while leaving schools or home must be taken into consideration so that the younger generations must endure the beautiful world of plants and animals that nature has bestowed on us (Figure 3).

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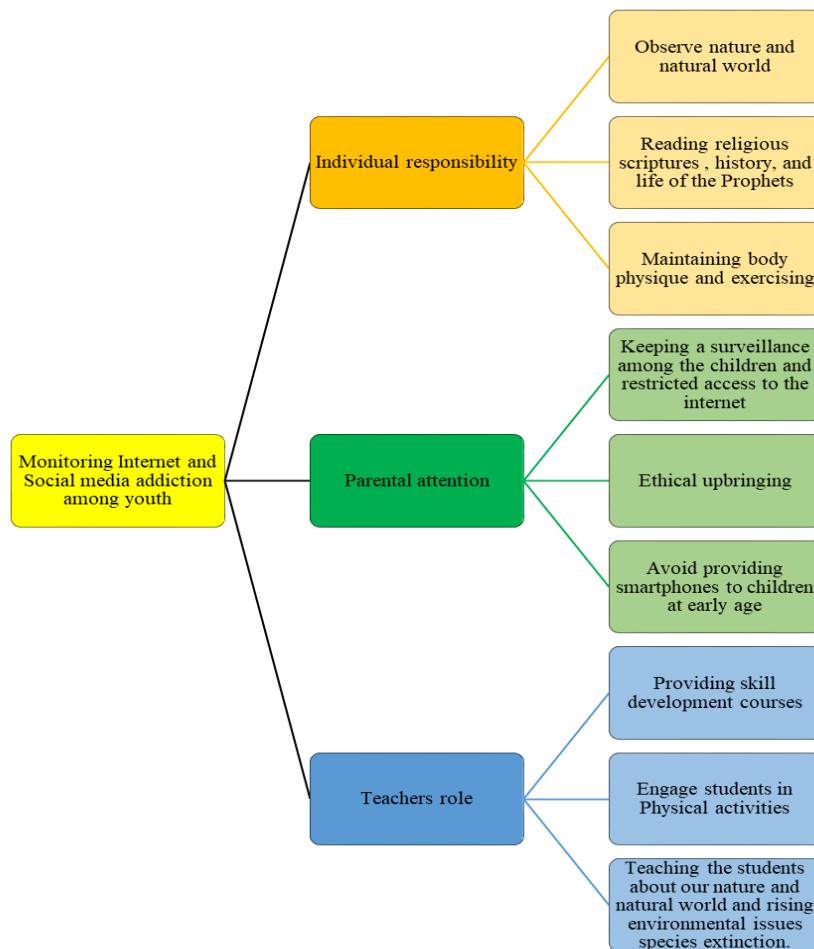


Figure 3. A chart map showing the potential approaches to manage with the problems of internet and social media addiction among youth.

5.0 Conclusion

The use of smartphones and utilization of the social media applications and gaming among the younger generations is generic entertainment. The present-day smartphones have been strategically engineered by algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) that present appealing content to a user. It knows individual preferences, interests and needs whether it is sports, stimulating content, or even gaming videos that are posted online. These algorithms have hacked the point, where they know a user better than he knows himself. These algorithms have hacked our impulses and know-how to keep the users addicted through massive content and virtual spaces, as such the users are no longer interested in the natural real world. Apart from social media, Metaverse is believed to be the next iteration of the internet, where the physical world will fuse with the digital screen that will form a virtual world where a user can socialize, work, play games and can be able to live a virtual life. However, growing up with these technological innovations of a virtual world, the younger generations will face even worst possible consequences of additional depression, anxiety and addiction to an augmented life.

One of the potential consequences these distractions have had on our lives and the ability of these technological marvels to make us forget the Almighty Allah and the Holy Quran is a matter of concern that should be dealt with accordingly as individual being in the first case.

Individuals mainly the Muslim students have many spiritual and fundamental duties that Islam has bestowed on them apart from their accomplishments in the academic world. However, these days the younger generations are consuming their precious time on social media, video gaming and the internet rather than studying the fundamentals of Islam and the life of our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a seamless illustration of how to perform better socially as well as morally. We as Muslims must have ethical standards in our lives and apart from performing better in the academic world; we need to consume our free time in a far better aspect rather than just swiping right on dating applications, and wasting time playing video games and scrolling over social media handles.

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