

PLEADING AGAINST EXCESS OF INTERNET UTILIZATION IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG ONES

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Abstract

The paper aims at making aware first parents, then children and adolescents, on the fact that the Internet used in excess is toxic, harmful, that it can produce profound behavioral changes, while exposing to numerous, unpredictable risks. In this context, the paper briefly presents some consequences of the cases of neglecting the risks of networking with unknown friends, within the virtual word. It is shown that the dependence of internet and social networks replaced reading books recommended by school curricula, producing complications, relational errors, thus contributing to increasing subculture and noneducation among the users. All educational factors and all media should be involved in supporting an environmental education of parents and children, in order to reduce online risks.

Keywords: *social networks, online environment, behavior, networking, addiction, risks, inappropriate content.*

Nowadays, addiction to Internet became a manner of living, virtual relationing being capable of producing serious mutations, of restricting considerably our ability to observe and of being observed and understood by those around us and by ourselves, finally, of having a normal behavior. Indeed, the computer appears as an excellent means for those who do not have the time, ability or courage of communicating and interacting directly with the others.

When utilized rationally, the Internet appears as the most accessible solution for information and dialogue, being therefore viewed as a friend. However, when accessed in excess, the Internet becomes an element of psychic disorder and, implicitly, an enemy.

In the European Union, almost one person of two utilizes the Internet on a regular basis. That is why, the Union is facing numerous technical challenges, such as, for example, providing a great number of virtual addresses, storage and

transfer capacities, as well as realization of some technological standards for its whole territory, capable of assuring interoperability, protection of online private life or accessibility.

In this respect, the European Union is making efforts to combat illegal online activities by the implementation of measures for child protection within the digital world, as significant changes have been registered, in recent years, in the conduct of utilizers, especially of the underage ones¹. They are mainly interested in mobile devices, firstly on-line video games, an aspect which generates an increasing number of available services required through the Internet. As a new phenomenon, the socialization networks have gained special importance, both for individual utilizers and from a social perspective.

The multiple examples at hand show that the on-line socialization networks may induce numerous risks, especially as to the illegal contents and contacts unappropriate to certain young ages.

The relational illusions among adolescents and young ones evidenced – in a precise statistical manner – that two of three busy users of computers have had at least one idyll or flirtation on the Internet, actually considered as a paradise for such type of relations (Ellis, 1992).

Psychologists give us notice that, in such a paradise, numerous complications and relational errors may occur. In the case of communicators by the Internet, an idealization phenomenon, a false perception of the other usually occurs. Psychologist H.B. Davidson asserts that, when becoming acquainted – by means of the Internet – with a person considered as pleasing, this is

actually a fanciful projection of our own desires and impressions.

The consequence is that, on the Internet, the friendly relations, flirtations are much more idealized than in real life. Sometimes, we are even inclined to neglect the persons most closed to us, the relations we already cherish, for a friendship and relation in the virtual world, which we consider as much more promising. As a matter of fact, the real, long-term confrontation with the persons one comes to meet by Internet appears, in 70% of the cases, as disappointing.

The consequences of such experience are the tens of suicides and attempted suicides, motivated by the profound disappointment caused by the direct meeting of the person who, at least on the Internet, appeared as the great love of one's life.

For example, a Swedish teen-ager posted his suicide directly on an Internet page. The persons who saw the images, really shocked, alerted the police, unfortunately too late².

Another example is that of a young girl who established a date with a person she knew by means of the Internet. A man from China had an immense surprise when he discovered – as related by chinasmack.com. – that his friend from the Internet, whose identity he did not know, was none other than the wife of his son³. Both the man and his daughter-in-law lied as to their private life, sustaining that they had no family (Miege, 1997).

A man from Cluj was arrested by the representatives of the organized crime combat, being suspected of traffic of minors, infantile pornography and black-mailing. Using the available socialization networks, he used to promise gifts and celebrity to minor girls, asking instead photos of theirs with explicit sexual connotation, hoping to have sex with them⁴.

Subculture and a scarce education are probably the most serious aspects evidenced by the Internet, which became a substitute for reading and instruction. For example, reading of the books recommended in curricula has become an obsolete activity, much easier being to find their abstracts and comments by a simple command on the computer⁵.

Even solutions to problems of mathematics, projects and essays for students are available on

the Internet, which has become a sort of paradise in this respect, to say nothing of the numerous electronic games, sites euphemistically defined as "for adults", violent movies and many other tentations, which makes the cinema, TV or reading completely out-fashioned.

In his turn, the ambassador of the Great Britain in București, Martin Harris, stated that minors' exposure to the online medium registered an exponential increase in recent years, and not only in Western Europe.

Each day, more and more numerous children use the Internet and the social networks. The rapid changes makes their parents feel helpless. Not accustomed with the new technologies, they choose non-involvement, feeling incapable of fully understanding the online world – which is an immense mistake. If not paying attention to the activities of their children, they ignore the problems their children face. As a matter of fact, many parents are aware of the risks involved by the Internet, yet they hope that children look for information for doing their homeworks, and not some dangerous sites.

Large part of the on-line offences involves different forms of harassment or aggressions, children and young persons being most vulnerable to such actions; in most of the cases, they can be easily deceived. This type of actions may begin on social networks, from where they come to be manifested in the real world, becoming forms of blackmailing, traffic of infantile pornography or psychologic abuse against children. These infringements are not new, however the anonymous condition permitted by the Internet offers new possibilities for their committing (Freeman & Mendras, 1995).

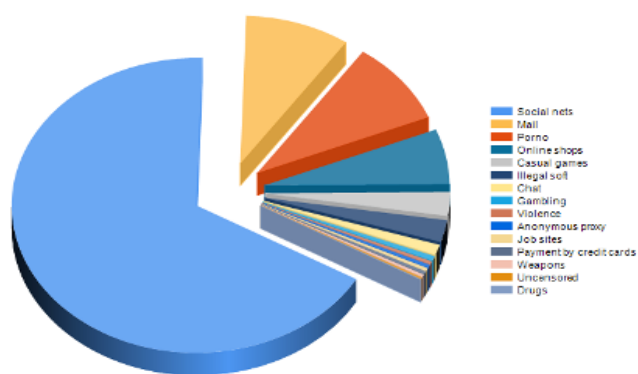
According to a study performed by "Pediatrics Journal", one of the main aspects the adolescents have to face is related to the fact that they send or display photographs with sexual connotation, by means of their mobile phones or social networks.

According to a questionnaire, 7% of the young Internet users had already received ill-famed images and more than that 2.5% of them accepted to display images of theirs with sexual connotation. Out of them, 61% were girls and 72% of them had ages between 16 and 17 years. 6% had ages between 10 and 12 years and used to display photos as a form of amusement.

The most dangerous aspect of the messages with sexual connotation is that they may have serious consequences, such as harassment on the Internet or blackmailing with the content of the messages, which may be accessed by cybernetic offenders (Patriciu et al., 1999).

The greatest danger involves children's and teenagers' lack of discernment: quite frequently, the young ones cannot appreciate the potential impact of such images, neither emotionally, nor legally, upon themselves and upon their families, so that they may become easy victims of offenders⁶.

According to the statistics provided by *Kaspersky Network Security*, the socialization networks are more popular than the e-mail or pornographic sites, which explains why cybernetic offenders "hunt" their victims from here⁷.



Generally, people access the social networks in the afternoon, between 13.00 to 18.00, while the pornographic sites - more frequently between 12.00 and 15.00.

According to the Decision 2004/68/JHA of December 22, 2003 of the European Union Council on the sexual exploitation of children and infantile pornography, infantile pornography refers to a pornographic material describing visually or presenting:

1. a real child involved or engaged in an explicitly sexual behavior, including lastful presentation of genitals or of the pubic areas; or
2. a real person - possibly a child - involved or engaged in the above-described type of behavior; or
3. realistic images of an inexistent child involved or engaged in the type of behavior described above.

The most important international juridical stipulations in the field of infantile pornography are the following: Convention of United Nations on the rights of children; the optional Protocol to the Convention on the rights of children, with reference to selling of children, prostitution of children and infantile pornography; Convention of the Council of Europe on informatic criminality; Decision 2004/68/JHA of December 22, 2003 of the Council of the European Union on the combat of children sexual exploitation and of infantile pornography; Convention of the Council of Europe on children protection against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse; Convention on the interdiction and immediate reaction for eliminating the most severe forms of child labour exploitation (Castells, 1998).

In force in Romania are three norms incriminating infantile pornography: infantile pornography in the variant stipulated by Law no.678/2001 on the prevention and combat of human traffic and Law no.196/2003 on the prevention and combat of pornography; infantile pornography by means of informatic systems, which represents a special offence - as stipulated by Law no.161/2003 regarding some measures for assuring transparency in the accomplishment of public duties, public functions and in the business environment, prevention and sanctioning of corruption. As a conclusion, at present, the Romanian legislation has too many normative acts incriminating infantile pornography, including iterative regulations. Nevertheless, the incriminating elements of these texts have been synthesized in the stipulations of the New Penal Code, which observes the provisions of the Decision of the European Union Council no.2004/68/JAI of 22.12.2003 on the struggle against children's sexual exploitation and against infantile pornography, as well as the conditions of the European Council Convention on children's protection against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, issued in 2007.

When the Internet is utilized for facilitating infantile pornography offence, the associated on-line activities may leave an electronic trace possibly related to activities of the real world. In order to assign the on-line activities to a person, the investigators should first identify the computer accessed for the infringement, then to determine who utilized it in the respective moment of time.

More than that, the investigators should discover a clear-cut connection between the on-line activities and the computer of the suspect, thus establishing the continuity of the offence.

Recovering from the Internet dependence requires, first of all, a "disintoxication" process, namely a progressive elimination of all habits related to an almost exclusive communication by means of e-mail, implicitly of the computer or mobile phone. This is not an easy task,⁸ as it involves not only the distance taken from the computer in itself, but from the whole world of the Internet to which we are used to be connected, by the whole spider's web of relation created within only few years of communication of such type (Guide, 2004).

In the case of infants - in whom this dependence is much stronger and, consequently, more difficult to defeat - a special care and affection is imperiously necessary from the part of parents. They should replace the absence of Internet communication with open discussions with the children, with explanations on the necessity of performing other activities, encouraging them to discover and develop new aptitudes and qualities.

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Endnotes

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