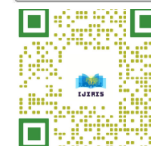
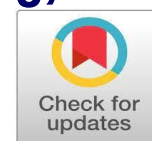


The Impact of the Internet on the Learning, Entertainment and Family Life of Teenagers Today

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Abstract: This study examines the influence that the internet has on the daily learning life of adolescent high school students living in non-urban environments. Through a quantitative questionnaire survey of a sample of 30 students, the habits, frequency of use and the reasons that push adolescents to use the internet, as well as the effects that this relationship has on their school performance and family life, are investigated. They are familiar with technology, mainly for entertainment purposes, but also recognizing its potential in learning. At the same time, differences between the sexes are found, while tensions arise in the family environment due to excessive use. It is concluded that the effective use of the internet as an educational tool requires a joint intervention of school and family, in order to cultivate cognitive and social skills without reinforcing phenomena of isolation or dependency.

Keywords: Internet, teenagers, entertainment, family, cognitive skills.

I. INTRODUCTION

The explosive spread of the internet is radically transforming adolescent everyday life, raising the issue of the consequences of digital activity on the school curriculum. Adolescents in the Greek periphery, although often lacking advanced technological infrastructure, show correspondingly high rates of connectivity with their peers in urban centers, dedicating a significant part of their free time to online activities. Capabilities for direct access to learning materials and collaborative learning tools, which can improve performance in schoolwork. At the same time, however, its excessive use has been associated with addiction phenomena, a drop in performance and deterioration in family relationships. This dual nature of the medium makes it imperative to investigate the way in which high school students outside large urban centers use the internet and whether this use strengthens or weakens the learning process.

The present study seeks to map access conditions, frequency and navigation purposes, with a particular emphasis on distinguishing between recreational and educational use. Of particular interest are the gender differences that have been recorded in international literature, with boys preferring mainly online games and girls taking greater advantage of the communication and cognitive capabilities of the medium? At the same time, the family context acts as a critical regulatory factor. The quality of parental supervision and attitudes towards internet use can either limit negative effects or intensify intra-family tensions, especially in the absence of clear boundaries and rules. In rural societies, the educational and economic capital of the family often determines the degree and way of integrating digital technologies into the student's daily life. In order to clarify the research problem and to examine the above aspects, a quantitative methodology was adopted with a structured closed-type questionnaire, which was completed by thirty high school students from areas of Pieria. The analysis of their responses aims on the one hand to capture the patterns of online use and on the other hand to assess the impact of these patterns on cognitive skills, school performance and family relationships. In this way, an attempt is made to document, based on empirical data, whether the internet acts as a lever of educational empowerment or as a factor of distraction and conflict in the specific population.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. The internet in modern times

The internet has become an integral part of modern reality, facilitating us in communication, financial transactions, but also in the educational process thanks to the immediacy it offers and the fact that it abolishes physical barriers, such as time and distance. Teenagers, in particular, now spend several hours every day in various online activities, as confirmed by numerous studies [1]. The benefits of online technology as a learning tool are documented in the modern literature, as it seems that it can enhance school abilities and improve students' performance in assignments or tests [2], [3].

However, along with these possibilities arise concerns about the negative consequences that excessive use can have: a drop in school performance, deterioration of family relationships, and even the appearance of various psychological symptoms [4]. It is indicative that relevant studies often lead to ambiguous conclusions, presenting reality as more complex [5]. When internet use exceeds the limits, it can lead to addiction phenomena characterized in the literature as "Internet addiction" [4] and accompanied by nervousness, aggression and social isolation [6]–[9]. These effects concern both the mental balance and the academic course of adolescents. However, technology is not necessarily burdensome: when used in moderation, it can strengthen friendships and facilitate socialization [10]. The proliferation of mobile devices, mobile phones, and cloud applications has made the digital world attractive, especially for students, offering infinite opportunities for communication and interaction [11]–[13]. Studies report that the frequency and the way in which young people use the internet depends on age, gender and cultural context [14]. Most teenagers focus on entertainment: online games, music and movies are key sections of their digital reality. Of particular interest is the relationship between age-internet use-school performance, with students aged 10–18 having the highest vulnerability to their academic performance [15]. Nevertheless, the internet remains an important means of searching for information directly related to school subjects [16]–[22]. More and more students are engaging in communicative and collaborative activities through blogs or educational material sharing platforms [23], [24]. Social media is also a space that can enhance, under certain conditions, academic progress [25], [26]. However, excessive preoccupation with them may have the opposite effect [24]. Finally, gender differences are evident: boys seem to prefer online games more [10], [16], while girls combine entertainment with educational uses and more often turn to communication tools, such as e-mail for educational content [3], [27], [28].

B. Internet use and student-parent relationships

The way in which parents perceive and manage their children's relationship with the internet is decisive for the nature of family life and for their school performance. Factors such as the gender of the child and the level of communication within the family substantially influence the online behavior of adolescents [28], [29]. Of particular value is the family environment and, above all, the readiness of parents to supervise and orient the use of the internet towards more productive, educational paths. When this happens, the negative consequences are significantly reduced [14]. Families with higher educational and financial data tend to be more supportive of the targeted use of technology for school needs [30]. However, it is common for long hours of online activity to become a cause for tension at home. Many parents consider the internet to be a competitor to systematic study and obligations, an element that often triggers conflicts and conflicts [31], [32]. The more difficult they find it to set boundaries, the more often the communication balances are deregulated, resulting in the appearance of negative emotions and intra-family disorders [33].

The presence of the internet in students' daily lives has now taken on a universal dimension, but the question of its real role in the learning process remains open. Do students use it mainly for entertainment or, indeed, do they use it as a lever to enhance school knowledge? This question is at the core of this research, which seeks to trace how, how often and for what purposes teenagers resort to the internet, as well as the consequences that this practice can have on various aspects of their lives: from school performance and social relationships to family dynamics. The proposed research problem focuses on the study of the electronic medium as a potential tool to support learning or, on the contrary, as a cause of distraction and tension in the family environment. Excessive use of the internet primarily for entertainment purposes may undermine study time and lead to conflicts between students and parents, especially when communication and mutual expectations are not clearly defined.

The structure of the research hypotheses captures the different parameters of the phenomenon:

- Using the internet for educational purposes can enhance cognitive skills and learning abilities.
- Strategy or knowledge games have a positive effect on the development of intellectual skills.
- Prolonged use for recreational purposes reduces available time for study and is associated with family friction.
- Balanced use helps maintain healthy social relationships with peers and does not lead to isolation.
- The attitude of parents is a critical factor that affects both the use of the internet and the overall impact of the medium on the school and personal life of students.

The confirmation or refutation of these hypotheses is carried out by studying and analyzing the answers collected, always based on the completeness and objectivity of the individual data.

III. PARTICIPANTS (SAMPLE) AND DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The study included 30 high school students from rural areas of Pieria, who mainly came from families with a rural professional background. Of the total, 20 were boys and 10 girls, a ratio that allows the investigation of possible gender differences. The selection of participants was made by random sampling, taking into account school performance and based on their voluntary participation, to minimize bias and enhance the generalization of results. Before participating, students were informed about the objectives of the research and their anonymity was ensured, in compliance with the prescribed ethical principles.

A structured closed-ended questionnaire was used as a data collection tool, an option that serves the statistical processing of the answers in the context of the purely quantitative approach of the study. The questions were organized in a logical sequence from general to specific topics and covered computer and internet familiarity, frequency and purposes of use, how to integrate into the educational process as well as family and social influences. Particular emphasis was placed on the clarity of the wording and the adaptation of the language style to the level of adolescents, while the restrictions on access to technological means that often characterize rural environments were taken into account.

Before completion, the students were informed about the process, the answers were collected anonymously and statistical analysis was followed to confirm or reject the research hypotheses.

IV. RESULTS

The processing of the ten questions reveals a detailed picture of adolescents' relationship with the computer, the internet and their family environment.

- For computer ownership, 4 out of 5 children (24/30) stated that they have a machine at home. The percentage reaches 90% in boys (18/20) but drops to 60% in girls (6/10), an indication of gender and, most likely, socio-economic inequality of access.
- The same inequality is reflected in the learning space: 24 students managed to use a computer at home and only 6 at school. Girls report twice as much dependence on the classroom (4/10) as boys (2/20), which highlights the central role of the family in "digital initiation" and the limited contribution of the school.
- Internet intimacy is almost universal: 28 teenagers (93%) feel familiar, a percentage that reaches 100% in girls and is slightly limited to boys due to 2 negative responses.
- Daily use goes beyond simple familiarity: 28 students spend at least an hour online. Here the boys appear completely connected (20/20), while two girls declare limited access.
- The question about the use of the internet outside school confirms the "portability" of the connection: 28 students (20 boys, 8 girls) answered positively, with only two negative answers from the girls.
- When the question focuses exclusively on entertainment, the positive answers are slightly limited to 26 students (18 boys, 8 girls), indicating that a small but existing part of the sample does not identify extracurricular use with pure entertainment.
- On the question of the educational benefits of games, the class is divided: 16 teenagers (10 boys, 6 girls) believe that strategy games or puzzles cultivate skills useful for school, while 14 disagree. The finding shows that boys are split right in the middle (10-10), while girls appear slightly more positive (6-4), confirming that attitudes towards the "seriousness" of gaming are not just gendered but also multidimensional.
- The sense of social alienation due to the internet does not seem generalized: only 10 students (6 boys, 4 girls) accept that their daily online presence distances them from friends, compared to 20 who deny it. Therefore, two out of three consider that they maintain an active social life off-screen, which contradicts stereotypical concerns about social isolation.
- Family dynamics outline the most sensitive aspect: 16 teenagers say their parents resent spending "a lot of time" online, while 14 do not experience obvious parental annoyance. Most negative reactions are focused on boys, which is associated with the longer duration and nature (gaming) of their use. The picture is intensified when the possibility of open conflict is considered: 14 students (mainly boys) admit that excessive preoccupation causes ruptures with parents, i.e. almost half of those who suffer parental dissatisfaction reach a point of conflict.

Overall, the analysis shows that students have a high level of digital literacy and spend a significant amount of time online, mainly for entertainment, but without feeling socially isolated. However, inequality of access (especially for girls), parents' perception of the duration of use, and the controversial educational value of online games remain key issues that require coordinated interventions in school and family with a particular focus on the nuanced nature and purpose of adolescents' digital activity.

V. DISCUSSION

The analysis documents that the internet functions both as an opportunity and as a challenge for the adolescents in the sample, with the final impact depending mainly on gender, available time and the parental supervision framework. Despite the fact that almost all participants are digitally literate, the study shows that educational utilization remains secondary. Students first move into the field of entertainment and only secondarily seek material for the school. The finding is linked to the international literature that highlights the tendency of adolescents to use the internet first as a means of relaxation and then as a learning tool, especially when there are no clear pedagogical guidelines [34], [14]. However, the recognition of the cognitive value of strategic games by 53% of the sample indicates that students themselves perceive potential learning benefits if they are given the appropriate framework to exploit them [10].

Gender differences appear on two levels:

1. First, boys have a computer at home more often and spend more time playing online games, which explains why they experience more intense parental resentment and more conflict.
2. Secondly, girls are more likely to resort to the school laboratory in order to become familiar with technology, which indicates inequality of access within the home environment and highlights the role of school as a compensating factor.

The observed disparities confirm international findings on the "digital gender gap" and indicate that girls' empowerment programs in rural areas are necessary. At the social level, the absence of a sense of isolation in most of the sample goes against the stereotype of the "lonely gamer" and is in line with research showing that online communication can strengthen rather than break friendships when use remains balanced [10]. At the same time, the frequent intra-family tensions are mainly attributed to the lack of clear boundaries and commonly agreed rules of use. Half of the parents express dissatisfaction, but only half of them reach active conflicts, which shows that conflict is not inevitable but intensifies in the absence of dialogue and understanding [31], [33]. Finally, research confirms that a combined model of school and parental guidance can transform the internet from a disruptive factor into a tool for enhancing learning.

Schools must provide clear strategies for integrating ICT into teaching, while parents need to move from a strictly prohibitive attitude to a control-supportive one, guiding children in creative online activities. Without these coordinated interventions, the risk of overuse and potential dependency remains real, and boys in rural areas in particular seem to be in a higher risk zone.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The research shows that the internet functions both as a valuable learning tool and as a potential source of risks, with its final impact depending on the purpose and duration of use as well as the parental and school guidance framework. Although almost all adolescents in the sample have access to and spend at least one hour a day online. Their activity focuses primarily on entertainment goals, while educational utilization remains secondary. The recognition of the cognitive value of strategy games or puzzles by a portion of students does not yet translate into systematic learning through the screen. In addition, gender inequalities are recorded: boys more often own a personal computer and prefer gaming, which leads to increased parental reactions and conflicts, while girls rely more on school for their digital familiarity. Despite the strong online presence, most students do not feel socially isolated, arguing that online activities can coexist with their friendships when usage is balanced. However, long hours of navigation still fuel family tensions, especially in the absence of clear boundaries and guidance.

Despite the small limitations of the sample, the research offers a pretty convincing picture of how teenagers in rural areas approach the internet and with what consequences. First, universal digital familiarity is confirmed: 24 out of 30 students have a computer at home and 28 say they connect for at least one hour every day. However, access does not automatically translate into pedagogically beneficial use, which is evident from the fact that all participants use the internet primarily for entertainment purposes and only as an ancillary to school activities. The relationship between time of use and school performance is implied but not directly quantified: the study does not measure performance, but records that long hours of navigation cause parental dissatisfaction (16/30) and family conflicts (14/30). This finding suggests that "recreational saturation" may take time and mental energy away from studying, especially when parental guidance is lacking.

The digital gender gap is of particular importance. Boys have a personal computer more often (18/20 vs. 6/10) and are more prone to gaming, which exposes them to more parental reactions and conflicts (14 boys admit parental dissatisfaction, compared to 2 girls). Girls, on the other hand, learn computers more often at school (4/10 vs. 2/20) and report milder family tensions, an indication that the learning space (home vs. school) interacts with socioeconomic and cultural factors of access. Although the possibility of addiction is not clinically investigated, the children themselves report almost universal daily use, and at least half experience family friction due to the duration of navigation. These data support the hypothesis that the risk of addictive behavior is real, especially in boys who prefer action and strategy games. However, the internet does not seem to undermine sociability: 20 out of 30 students reject the idea of being alienated from their friends because of online activity. The finding aligns with reports that, when usage remains measured, digital media can enhance social cohesion. The cognitive dimension is also important. Although only 1/3 of students (10/30) state that strategy or puzzle games improve skills useful in lessons, the gap between objective possibilities and subjective utilization shows that adolescents only partially recognize the learning benefits, which calls for pedagogical planning to transform digital entertainment practices into conscious skill development. Overall, the study highlights that the qualitative rather than just the quantitative use of the internet is the critical factor.

With coordinated school and family interventions, the medium can be transformed from a distraction into an essential driver of learning and development for adolescents. Specifically, the above converges into a model of mutual responsibility:

- The school must offer structured ICT activities to bridge the gender and access gap and transform recreational interests into cognitive resources.
- The family must negotiate realistic time limits and guide towards balanced, educationally fruitful practices, avoiding both uncritical confinement and the complete absence of supervision.
- Students themselves need to develop met cognitive awareness of the role of the internet in their academic and social development, utilizing its positive benefits without being trapped in exaggeration.

In other words, research shows that quality, gender, and regulatory context turn a shared digital experience into either a learning driver or a source of tension. Without conscious interventions, the already identified inequalities and risks of addiction will widen, especially among boys in rural areas.

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