

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE INTERNET ON GAUTENG HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to look at the social impact of the Internet on Gauteng high school learners. This study was conducted to establish the kinds of activities that learners performed on the Internet and the length of time they spent on the Internet in order to evaluate the social impact that these activities may have on them. Using a sample of 50 learners from two high schools in the Gauteng region, qualitative and quantitative data was collected through the use of questionnaires. The results suggest that there is both a positive and a negative social impact of the Internet on Gauteng high school learners. Learners engage in Internet chat rooms and reveal their personal information to people they meet online. Further, they arrange for face to face meetings with their online friends. This puts the learners at risk of getting hurt because they meet people whose intentions they do not know. The positive social impact of the Internet is that it creates an environment where learners seek information which is needed for educational purposes.

The research concludes that parents, teachers and the government need to be aware of the social impact of the Internet so that where need be they can work together to come up with strategies that will minimize the exposure to harmful content on the Internet by the learners.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Internet

Access to, and use of, the Internet has increased drastically between the year 2000 and 2007. According to Markey, Well & Markey (as quoted by Christopherson, 2006:3038) during the year 2000 the number of people with Internet access globally was estimated to be around 400 million. This number grew to 600 million in 2002 (Manasian as quoted by Christopherson, 2006:3039). According to the statistics supplied by Internet World Statistics (<http://www.Internetworldstats.com>), the number of people with Internet access has grown to over a billion in 2007. South Africa is one of the leading countries in Africa with Internet access and had more than 5 million Internet users by September 2006 (<http://www.Internetworldstats.com>).

The Internet is a tool that is used for different things by different people. It is used by employees of various organizations to search for information and to also exchange information with other people. At home the Internet is used as means to chat to other people and to get news that affect the world in general. Some people make use of it to do business transactions such as banking. The benefits that often come with the use of the Internet such as obtaining useful information, have persuaded some schools in South Africa to make use of it for educational purposes. The Internet is not only accessed at schools by learners but also from homes and Internet café's.

There is a great variety of content that can be accessed on the Internet. The content can be about something useful or something harmful. The main issue of concern is that Internet content is often not classified.

The content that learners search for ranges from downloadable cell phone ring tones, to social networking websites. Some content may not be safe for learners to view. For instance having access to information which can teach a learner to make an explosive could pose a danger to society. In essence the content that the learners view on the Internet is important because it has the power to influence the learner's knowledge and decisions.

A positive social impact of the Internet is that it could make high school learners more innovative and able to start part-time businesses and to also improve the way they conduct research projects at schools. Another example of the positive impact of the Internet could be to create an environment to improve certain skills of a learner such knowing how to draw. Obtaining additional study material via the Internet could supplement and enhances their knowledge on school matters.

The purpose of this study is to determine the social impact of the Internet, specifically on high school learners in the Gauteng Province. This study will also help in giving an indication as to whether the use of the Internet by high school learners is common practice.

Gauteng in general appears to have a growing interest in technological innovations such as using social networking websites such as Facebook.com (<http://www.Facebook.com>) to network with other people who reside in the same or different locations. Part of this research is to determine if social networking websites are used by high school learners, and to find what kind of information the learners exchange through the websites.

There are various social effects which the Internet might have on young people. Tynes *et al.* (2004:667) is of the view that the Internet, because of its virtual nature, has the potential to impact the younger generation. The Internet creates a social and cultural world where youth become part of when they access the Internet.

Parents are often not aware of the existence of the social and cultural impact of the Internet on children. High school learners or adolescents are active contributors in this cyber culture that the Internet presents. An example of the culture that exists on the Internet: Learners often engage in teen or adolescent chat rooms where they use names such as Squid to identify one another, and they also make use of chat room jargon to communicate with one another e.g. u r der? Meaning "Are you online?" Knowing the social impact of the Internet on the learners will enable school teachers and parents and to come up with a way of regulating access to the Internet and monitoring Internet use, should a need to do so be identified (Tynes *et al.* 2004:669).

1.2 Problem statement

The exponential growth of Internet use globally has given rise to a number of challenges. One of these challenges is that different kinds of information have become available to everybody who has access to the Internet. Gross (2004:635) specifically mentions the fact that the youth has access to the Internet and it is not always known how the use of the Internet affects the well-being and development of children. This elaborates the need to know the effects of the Internet on different groups of people. Greenfield's (2004:751) research focused on the negative social impact that could result when young people are exposed to the unsafe content. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the Internet may also have a positive social impact on young people. For example, learners can use the Internet to supplement the things that are taught at school.

In South Africa the number of people who have access to the Internet is steadily growing (<http://www.Internetworldstats.com>). This means that there is also an increasing number of children and young people who have access to the Internet, and it is important to establish what the possible social impact of wider Internet access is on the youth in South Africa.

1.3 Research Questions

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the social impact of the Internet on Gauteng high school learners?

This research question has been broken down into the following **research sub-questions**:

Question 1

How has the use of the Internet influenced the learners' social life and the way they interact with their family, friends and teachers?

Question 2

What kind of information do high school learners search for through the Internet?

Question 3

What are the websites that the high school learners often visit?

Question 4

Do learners engage in chat rooms and do they trust the information supplied by their online friends?

Question 5

Do learners prefer to have online friends to physical (in person) friends?

Question 6

How much time do learners devote to surfing the Internet?

1.4 The structure of this report

This section gives an outline of the entire structure of this research report.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE SURVEY

This chapter discusses the results of the review of the previous literature that has been written regarding the social impact of the Internet in general. Various journals, books and articles have been reviewed which relate to the main research topic. The purpose of this theoretical review was to discover what the conclusions were of prior research relating to this research topic. Journals, Books and articles that discuss the effects of the Internet on youngsters, teenagers and the adolescent were also looked because of the understanding that learners fall under the category of youth, youngsters, teenagers and adolescents.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is detailed in this section.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The outcome of the fieldwork in the form of findings is discussed in this section. The results are interpreted and discussed in this section.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This section concludes the findings of the research and provides the necessary recommendations for future research by other researchers.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1 Introduction

Various articles and journals dealing with the Internet and the way it affects people in general have been reviewed. There was no previous research which focused specifically on the social impact of the Internet on learners in the Gauteng area in South Africa. Some of the literature was not specific to school learners but had some relevant information of the social impact of the Internet that related to specific groups of people. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the issues that have been raised by previous researchers on the Internet and its social impact.

The following sub-headings are for the topics which will be covered in the literature review. Subsection 2.3 introduces the subject of the social impact of the Internet in general and discusses what has been found in previous research. Section 2.4 talks about the anonymity of the Internet, which has an influence on the way people communicate with one another over this medium. The rest of the sections discuss the social impact of the Internet looking at various topics such as the social impact of the Internet chat rooms on high school learners.

2.3 The social impact of the Internet on learners

2.3.1 The effects of the Internet on adolescents: social isolation
and depression

2.3.2 The Internet is also seen as an identity playground for adolescents

2.4 Anonymity on the Internet

2.5 The Internet and self-harm

2.6 The length of time learners spend on the Internet

- 2.7 Safe Internet use in Europe
- 2.8 Divulging personal information on the Internet
- 2.9 Websites which high school learners often visit
- 2.10 The social impact of networking websites
- 2.11 The use of chat rooms
- 2.12 The Internet's influence on family relationships
- 2.13 Kinds of information that the youth search for on the Internet
- 2.14 Internet addiction problems
- 2.15 Internet safety controls
- 2.16 The Internet's influence on learners' social lives and the way they interact with family, friends and teachers.

2.2 Definition of terms

2.2.1 Schizotypal personality disorder. It is a personality character which often makes one socially isolated (<http://0-www.accessscience.com.innopac.up.ac.za/topic.aspx?searchStr=schizotypal+disorder&term=Anxiety+disorders>)

2.2.2 Schizophrenia. It is a mental health disorder which is common in the teens and early twenties. It is identified by mental experiences such as hallucinations. (<http://0-www.accessscience.com.innopac.up.ac.za/topic.aspx?searchStr=schizophrenia&term=Schizophrenia>)

2.3 The social impact of the Internet on learners

In the literature reviewed, most journals highlighted the Internet issues which seemed to have a social impact on youth in general. The literature further highlighted that people in general have certain perceptions about the Internet.

According to Gross (2004:635) people perceive the Internet in different ways and these perceptions can be summarized as follows according to his premises:

2.3.1 The use of the Internet is influenced by gender. Boys are seen to use the Internet more frequently than girls

2.3.2 The Internet may cause social isolation and depression in adolescents

2.3.3 The Internet is also seen as a playground which adolescents use for anonymous identity experimentation.

2.3.1 The use of the Internet is influenced by gender. Boys are seen to use the Internet more frequently than girls

Gross (2004:636) wanted to find out if indeed the Internet could be linked to social isolation and depression in adolescents. Looking at the first preposition which claims that girls use the Internet less than boys, it was revealed by Subrahmanyam et al. (as quoted by Gross, 2004:634) that when it comes to Internet use, boys prefer engaging in activities such as playing violent video games whereas girls prefer to take part in social activities such as engaging in a chat room forums. Gross realized that Instead of focusing on the fact that girls spend less time on the Internet, the focus should be on the activities that girls engage in on the Internet that could make them spend less time there than boys. According to Gross (2004:634), by looking at the activities that the adolescent girls and boys engage in, one would understand why boys tend to spend more time on the Internet than girls.

This is useful when trying to answer one of the research sub questions which look at the length of time that high school learners spend on the Internet. The length of time that learners spend on the Internet plays a role in determining the social impact of the Internet on learners. A learner who spends more time playing games on the Internet and less time studying could perform badly at school because of devoting less time to studies.

2.3.2 The effects of the internet on adolescents—social isolation and depression

From a survey conducted in the United States of America involving parents to establish the social adjustments of youth to the Internet it appeared that there was a common feeling amongst the parents that going on the Internet too often could result in children growing isolated from other people (Gross, 2004:636).

The survey also revealed that frequent use of the Internet was seen to cause a decrease in the overall well-being of the youngsters and a decrease in social network sizes.

The Internet was also perceived to create an environment whereby youngsters could easily forsake their social or emotional bonds with local friends because of the relationships that they have established on-line with strangers (Kraut et al. as quoted by Gross, 2004:635). Gross (2004:635) disputed some of these claims by arguing that some of these findings could be outdated in that they may exclude the belief that the Internet can be used by friends and family to communicate.

As Internet access increases, more and more people get connected and start chatting online. As a result, even friends and family members are likely to use the same communication medium to chat. Communications amongst known friends can also be facilitated by using the Internet.

Gross (2004:640) wanted to know if the previous survey findings that he referred to in his literature review were correct and if in fact the Internet contributed to social isolation, especially among youth.

The research looked at who the adolescents spent most of their time chatting to. The results of the research showed that adolescents did not spend a lot of time chatting to strangers. It was found that the people that the adolescents spent most of their time talking to were people they knew in person such as school mates and friends in their local network. The main reason why the youth spent a lot of time on online communication was because of there was nothing else that they could do except go on the Internet. According to Gross (2004:641), the nature of the topics that were engaged in via the Internet were amongst others, gossip and private conversations.

Gross also found that there is no social correlation between the length of time that is spent online and psychological adjustment. Correlation and regression analyses could not establish a close relation between Internet use and any measure related to a state of well-being such as anxiety or loneliness. Gross (2004:642) was therefore able to conclude his research findings on the note that the Internet did not contribute or cause any social isolation or depression amongst adolescents. In establishing the social impact of the Internet on the youth a conclusion can be drawn from Gross (2004:645) that the Internet has a positive impact on youth because it enhances the way in which the youth communicate with their family members and friends.

In relation to the sub-question “How much time do learners devote to surfing the Internet?” we can conclude from Gross (2004:646) that learners spend a significant

length of time on the Internet chatting to friends and family members who are not within reach.

2.3.3 The Internet is also seen as an identity playground for adolescents

The virtual nature of the Internet makes it possible for people to meet online and communicate without knowing the actual identity of each other. Gross (2004:647) wanted to know if indeed the Internet can be regarded as a place where people can deliberately fake their identities. In general it can be said that the nature of the Internet allows this kind of deception to happen because of its virtual nature. In a case where a person has been chatting to a stranger online, it is sometimes difficult to decide if you can trust them with your real name because their intentions are often not known.

Gross (2004:645) found that some of the respondents did at some time pretend to be who they were not. The teenagers often pretended to be people who were older and they would also pretend to be people who were famous or at least be somehow related to a famous person. Another common area where the teenagers were seen to enjoy deceiving others was where they would claim to be someone of the opposite sex. Teenagers saw deception as an easy thing to do because one cannot see the person one is talking to. The findings of this research highlight one of the social impacts of the Internet on teenagers as enabling teenagers to lie about their true identity. This could be dangerous in that trusting teenagers can be easily deceived by those they meet online.

On the Internet people are given an opportunity to meet and chat anonymously. This has interested researchers in looking at the social issues of the Internet and the way it affects social interactions.

2.4 Anonymity on the Internet

Trust in general is one of the most important subjects as far as the Internet is concerned. Christopherson (2006:3040) examined the social impact of the Internet on individuals paying special attention to the fact of remaining anonymous in this computer-mediated communication. It can be very challenging to establish trust with

online friends on the internet considering the nature of the environment which allows anonymity.

The Internet is seen as a medium in which people in general maintain their identity and are made feel free to communicate with whomever that they need to communicate with, without disclosing their true identity.

Anonymity is seen to have both positive effects and negative effects. One positive effect is that being anonymous protects one from harm or attack by individuals who could have been angered by the comments of the anonymous person. For learners or youth, being anonymous could prevent them from getting exposed to harm. The negative consequence would be where the contribution that is made by an anonymous person could need to be verified so that useful conclusions can be drawn. For instance, where an anonymous person on the Internet claims to have a cure for a certain disease which affects a lot of people but that person does not reveal who he is or where he can be found. Then it becomes pointless because he cannot help or assist anyone.

Maczewski (as quoted by Christopherson, 2006:3042), conducted research on anonymity. Youths aged between 13 and 19 were interviewed via an Internet chat room. The purpose of the research was to establish if online communication was seen as an important integral part of their social life styles. The responses from the youngsters were that they enjoyed online communication such as Internet chat rooms because it created an opportunity for them to remain anonymous. The ability to remain anonymous is therefore coupled with having the right to choose who to talk to online without feeling intimidated.

Youngsters felt that being anonymous enabled them to be more confident and more expressive than they would be in a face to face communication where they would probably feel intimidated at times.

These findings are expected to relate to the findings of the current research involving high school learners, especially when trying to answer questions such as “*Do you often divulge your personal details to people that you chat to online?*” Anonymity is more likely to be practiced by expert Internet users than novice users. The reason for this could be that when one is not familiar with the nature of the virtual world one

tends to be more trusting than users who are familiar with how the environment works.

2.5 The internet and self-harm

The Internet is seen as a tool which provides access to vast amounts of information or content. This content can be accessed intentionally or accidentally. Some of the content can influence the viewer to do acts of self-harm. Furthermore, given the fact that Internet is accessed by people from different backgrounds who share different beliefs it makes it possible for people to meet and share ideas. Some of these people could be criminals who can share information on how to commit crime. The virtual nature of the Internet allows people to share information or ideas freely without fear of being found or intimidated. The virtual nature of the Internet is seen to pose a great risk to people because the information that is available on the Internet could be for the good or the bad depending on the intention of the requester. Tam et al, (2007:453) identified the Internet as a dangerous tool because of its ability to provide information that could cause self harm to individuals.

The information content that is provided on the Internet is not regulated, and a person cannot be limited to what they can search for. Tam et al. (2007:454) looked at the role of the Internet in facilitating suicide. A general search on the term "Suicide methods" that was done on the 1st October 2007 brought 2 million results via the Google search engine. It must be noted however that not all the websites that were retrieved contained information on how to commit suicide successfully.

The details of how to commit suicide also extend to the recommendations on the best time to commit the act and how to lessen the chances of being caught. High school learners are amongst those who are often faced with disappointments such as not obtaining the right grades to go onto the next standard or level. Some learners have previously been reported in the media to have committed suicide because of failing to pass a grade. Making the information that could allow someone to commit self-harm could facilitate the thought in a person's mind to commit the act.

Tam et al. (2007:454) argue that this kind of information is not good for society, more especially the youth, because of the consequences for the community in general.

The society is seen to be better off without the Internet because this information would not otherwise be publicly available.

Online chat rooms have made it possible for the like-minded to meet and chat online. People who are contemplating suicide could get an opportunity to meet and brainstorm online on how they can go about executing the act. Tam et al. (2007:454) are concerned that because there are no regulations on the Internet. People could get exposed to harmful content which could lead them into carrying out acts of self-harm such as suicide. Tam et al. focused on the negative social effects of the Internet in their research.

The youth, including high school learners, could also get exposed to such bad content. That is the reason why research into the needs or interest of learners on the Internet is important. It can pinpoint the kind of websites that the learners visit and also the type of information that the learners search for. Knowing this information could enable teachers, parents and the government to do something about it by implementing the right controls that would minimize or eliminate the availability of such information that could encourage learners to harm themselves.

Tam et al. (2007:455) suggest that strategies should be sought which will prevent the Internet from making available the information that could lead one into self-harm. It is also recommended that these strategies be preventative in nature so that it could adapt to the evolving world of ICT. The strategies should be mainly Internet-based and able to reach the culturally diverse groups of people globally. It said that just like in the media, where there are regulatory mechanisms, users should also get involved in ensuring that the Internet conforms to the guidelines set when it comes to making the information available.

2.6 The length of time that learners spend on the internet

The length of time that the learners spend on the Internet on a daily or weekly basis could be attributed to the fact that they perform different activities on the Internet. In an environment where Internet access is closely monitored and users are often under very close supervision, learners could feel restricted and thus be obliged to limit their Internet use. In order for one to obtain the true reflection of the length of time that learners spend surfing the Internet, a balance should be struck between the time spent at school, at home or at Internet cafés.

The frequency of Internet use by males and females could also be proven to be different because of the interests that both groups have.

The social impact of the Internet can also be seen in cases where people or the youth spend more time on it than with family and friends. Papastergiou & Solomonidou (2005:377) conducted research on Internet access. They looked specifically at the gender differences in a Greek high school. High school learners were requested to complete a questionnaire on their attainability and frequency of Internet use.

The responses obtained were similar to the responses that were obtained on the questionnaires that were used for this research. The results of the questionnaire will be of great help to educators because it will enable them to have an idea regarding the needs of the learners as far as Internet use is concerned after getting to know the preferences that learners have on the Internet.

The gender gap that used to be identified in the fields of studies such as mathematics and science is shown to be reduced through the use of the Internet by girls (Papastergiou & Solomonidou, 2005:378). Female learners are now provided with vast opportunities to have new friends and socialize via the Internet chat rooms and to also have the opportunity to improve their communication skills.

The use of computers is no longer confined to playing of games or any type of solitary use as it was previously known (Fountain as quoted by Papastergiou & Solomonidou, 2005:379).

It was found that the Internet was more utilized or accessed at homes than at schools. This finding could be attributed to the fact that learners feel more comfortable accessing the Internet in places where they are not under constant supervision. Girls were found to enjoy accessing the Internet at school more than boys. This could be because they obtained more help and guidance on how to use the Internet at school than if they were on their own. The research findings also highlighted that the learners tend to spend more time even at school searching for information pertaining to the matters of personal interest than on structured searches. The activities that the learners spend a lot of time at school searching for information on are amongst others emails, downloading of ring tones and web page creation.

Boys were found to use the Internet more often outside school than girls. In terms of frequency, boys were found to use the Internet more on a daily basis than girls. The Internet was not only accessed from home but was also from places such as Internet cafés.

Internet use outside school by boys was focused mainly on entertainment-related activities and web-creation. Girls used the Internet outside school to find information about beauty contests since this is an area of interest amongst girls in general.

This research simply illustrates that there is still a gender gap between boys and girls when it comes to the use of the Internet. Boys tend to spend more time on the Internet than girls, searching for information and chatting online. The use of the Internet by boys for recreational activities was noted among the Greek high school learners. Boys proved to be highly motivated by the use of the Internet because they started using the Internet to develop web pages which is very good creativity. This research did not give an indication of whether the high school learners made use of the Internet to search for information which is inappropriate such as knowing how to use or design a gun. Knowing in detail the kind of information that the learners search for would assist parents and school teachers to implement strategies which would minimize the effect of such information on the learners.

Another gap that was identified in this research conducted by Papastergiou & Solomonidou (2005:382) was that the reasons for the gender gap in Internet use were not clearly identified. There could be barriers which if not addressed could continue limiting the girls in obtaining the rewards of making use of the Internet.

This research yielded similar results to my own research. Male learners spent more time exploring the Internet than girls did.

The general introduction of the Internet at schools and homes has often raised concerns around the issues of safety, privacy and abuse (Valcke et al. 2006:2838). School children or youngsters in general are often at risk of unintentionally viewing unsafe Internet content. The Internet can therefore be seen as a threat to the youth because of its ability to provide both safe and unsafe content. Various researches have been done on the Internet, looking at its effects on children, more especially at pupils in countries other than South Africa. The motive for these researches were similar in that they were aiming at bringing awareness to the parents, youth, teachers

and the government regarding what needs to be done in order to prevent the unsafe Internet use by the youth. There are various threats that are presented to the youth through the use of the internet.

The nature of the Internet currently makes it difficult to match the information to the age level of the various users. In essence, when a child or an adult searches for particular information through a search engine such as Google, the results of the search are not categorized based on the various age level to minimize the chances of children getting exposed to unsafe content (Bullen&Harre as quoted by Valcke et al.2006:2839).

Children are often faced with a threat when it comes to giving out personal details such as names, home address, and telephone numbers. The other danger that is associated with the use of the Internet by children has to do with arranging face to face meetings with people they have met online. These threats face all the children or youth who are very trusting when it comes to people that they interact with via the Internet. Lack of supervision by both parents and school teachers and also awareness from the side of the learners makes them even more vulnerable because the safe and unsafe use of the Internet is not fully known by the youngsters.

There are various websites that are available on the Internet that do not have any restrictions in terms of people who are allowed to view the content that is available on those websites. Children can intentionally or unintentionally visit pornographic websites and often suffer the effects of having been exposed to the unsolicited pornographic material.

2.7 Safe internet use in Europe

The use of the Internet by children could also expose them to hate sites and other unsafe content where they could feel intimidated or harassed after viewing the content or by taking part in the chat rooms on those websites.

Various countries, more especially in Europe, have identified these threats and they have taken action. The measures that these countries have adopted are as follows (Thornburg & Lin as quoted by Valcke et al., 2006:2839).

The Internet is a large virtual space where it is not possible for a single entity to identify all the unsafe content on every website that exists. Some countries make every Internet user responsible for identifying unsafe Internet content and informing the relevant authorities once they find unsafe or illegal content on any website. Hotlines have been established in some countries so that people can call and report any illegal content that they identify.

Awareness programmes are also showing to be popular in most European countries. These programmes are aimed at parents, school teachers and children. The purpose of these awareness programmes is to inform the parties about the safe and unsafe content that is available on the Internet so that the dangers are known by all. Children are the most vulnerable in the sense that they may not know all the risks that are associated with the use of the Internet. Australia is one of these countries. It established an Internet awareness programme in 2004, which aims at bringing awareness to the teachers and pupils on the issues pertaining to Internet use (Valcke et al., 2006:2840).

In addition to awareness programmes there are preventative programmes that are developed by expert psychologists. The main aim of these programmes is to develop important skills and the ability to use common sense when using the Internet. This preventative programme is normally designed for children aged 8-14 years. This programme is often combined with a programme that has been designed for parents so that the benefits can be realized from both the programmes.

In the literature that has been reviewed, there were no specific Internet safety awareness programmes cited by the authors that were available in South Africa. This could be attributed to the fact that unsafe Internet use by children at schools and homes has not been identified as a key issue that warrants establishing such programmes. European countries took the issue of Internet use by children very seriously and they embarked on establishing websites that even deal with the Internet use at a country level. There is a website called saferInternet (<http://www.saferInternet.org>) which is used by various European countries. The purpose of this website is to provide information per country on the action programmes and the national nodes that implement legislation which is relevant to Internet use.

On the issues of limiting the exposure of children to unsafe Internet content, children technological solutions are often considered. Schools and organizations often deploy content filtering software in order to minimize the amount of unsafe or illegal Internet content coming through their networks. These technological developments are seen to only minimize the exposure to harmful content through technical means.

Other countries resort to developing codes of conducts which foster self regulation in order to deal with unsafe Internet use. It is said that in 2005 an event was organized by various countries and it was marked "Safe Internet Day".

There is little if any information to show that these interventions discussed above have been effective (Valcke et al., 2006:2841).

Valcke et al. (2006:2843) conducted research on children's safe and unsafe use of the Internet both at schools and home. The study aimed at identifying the various monitoring mechanisms that are in place to ensure that the children are not always at risk of getting exposed to unsafe Internet content. Pupils and head masters of various schools in Flanders were questioned about what they perceived as the safe Internet use and the behaviour that accompanies safe Internet use.

2.8 Divulging personal information on the Internet

There are a number of articles that contain previous research findings on unsafe Internet use by youngsters. Valcke et al. (2006:2841) made special reference to the research that was done by Internet Safety Group (as quoted by Valcke et al., 2006:2842) in New Zealand. The results of this research highlighted that out of 347 girl pupils (aged between 11 and 19 years) 29% of the respondents agreed that they did send e-mails and 26% managed to keep a relationship going by also calling those people that they met online. Thirty-three percent of the respondents arranged for face to face meetings with their online friends. Some of these respondents did not disclose to their parents that they have established relationships with the strangers via the Internet. Instead they chose to conceal the relationships with their online friends.

From this kind of behaviour it is becoming clear that the relationships that some of the girls have with their online friends have a social impact. The desire for privacy

when it comes to such matters is a sign of the social effect that some of these interactions bring in youngsters. About 60% of the respondents disclosed that they used the Internet in a way that was perceived to be very risky or unsafe at least once. This was done by revealing their real names, physical addresses, contact telephone numbers and uploading their photographs for their online friends so that they can see what they look like in the real world.

The results of this study by the Internet Safety Group (as quoted by Valcke et al.(2006:2842) also revealed that girls often feel threatened whilst using the Internet, but there was no elaboration on the acts that are performed on the Internet that threaten them. A significant number of the respondents also revealed that there is no parent supervision on most of the respondents' Internet use.

In another study that was conducted amongst pupils aged between 8 and 11 it was noted that most of these children were not taught and as a result they were unaware of the basic Internet safety guidelines. It was also noted that as the years progress, there proved to be an increase in lack of awareness when it comes to Internet security (O'Connell et al as quoted by Valcke et al. 2006:2840).

In a further study that was done by Stahl and Fritz (as quoted by Valcke et al. 2006:2840) in a study of youngsters between the ages of 10 and 17 it was found that 45% of respondents spent time on sites related to guns and explosives. It also became apparent that 74% of the respondents had contacts with strangers via Internet chat rooms and e-mails. A significant number of the respondents also acknowledged that they had disclosed their personal details to the strangers they chatted with online.

The literature reviewed above highlights most of the issues that are to be investigated in my research which will be specifically looking at South Africa to determine the unsafe and the safe use of the Internet by high school learners. The usage of chat rooms is a common activity amongst pupils globally, but in South Africa a research which reveals such could not be found in the literature that was reviewed. Methods or approaches that have been adopted by states to minimize exposure to unsafe Internet content has increased to match the rise in Internet use across people of all ages in European countries. Techniques such as not allowing schools to give free Internet access are also used in some countries in order to limit the use of Internet resources and ensure that the Internet is only used for educational purposes.

The research findings of Valcke et al.(2006:2843) were not very different from the researches by the authors referred to in Valcke et al.(2006:2841)'s literature review. In the research findings, the pupils highlighted that when they are chatting with their online friends, they often do not know who they were really chatting with. Some of the pupils revealed that they have often disclosed their personal information and also sent pictures of themselves to their online friends. The research results also revealed that some of the pupils have met some of their online friends in real life. Girl pupils revealed that they were shocked by some of the content which they came across whilst surfing the Internet. Girls appeared to have been more shocked than boys by the content that they encountered on the Internet.

In terms of monitoring of Internet use by parents, the majority of the pupils revealed that they did not ever experience being controlled or monitored whilst using the Internet at home.

High levels of home Internet use are quite common as research findings have previously reported. It has been noted that high levels of using the chatting facilities on the Internet are linked with the likelihood of risky behaviour such as taking part in gangs that use drugs.

Research on unsafe Internet use pointed out that those children were likely to reveal their personal details to people they meet online. This behaviour is an indication of lack of education about safe and unsafe actions on the Internet. Proper awareness or education would prevent pupils from engaging in activities that could lead them into trouble. The findings of divulging personal information could be a call for a mechanism to prevent unsafe Internet use by pupils (Valcke et al., 2006:2845). All the findings of the discussed so far call for prevention strategies, both at school and at home.

The use of technology to prevent access to unsafe Internet content could prove to be insufficient if they are used in isolation and not with other strategies such as Internet awareness programmes. Children need to be taught about the benefits of the Internet in enhancing their intellectual capital and they also need to be taught about unsafe and safe Internet use so that they can take appropriate precautions when online. The intention of telling them about unsafe Internet use is not to scare or discourage them

from using the Internet but to teach them to be vigilant whilst exploring the benefits that come with the use of the Internet for personal development.

2.9 Websites that high school learners often visit

The use of the Internet has encouraged youngsters to take part in social networks. There are different websites that allow people all over the world to meet and chat about anything. In some websites there are groups which a user can choose to be a member of, for example one could choose to join a group of people with a special interest in scrap booking. The social networks therefore make it possible to meet and chat to others who are like minded. One of the benefits associated with these websites is that they are able to meet the social and relational needs of many people without costing much in terms of time and money.

Web-based social networks create an opportunity for people of different age groups to meet. The increasing popularity of these websites has caused concerns in certain countries where they have been seen to create a platform for youngster victimization. According to Hinduja & Patchin (2007:2), the major concerns with social network sites is that they can put teenagers at risk of being harmed by sexual predators and pedophiles. This happen because adolescents tend to give personal information during interactions in these websites which can be used by those people who have bad intentions. The nature of social websites allows people to interact and keep in touch with others with whom they seem to share a lot of things in common. The face to face interaction tends to have been redefined with the latest technology which has reshaped the interpersonal communication and relationships as we know them (Romm et al. as quoted by Hinduja & Patchin, 2007:2).

There are several of these social networking websites today with Facebook (<http://Facebook.com>) and Myspace (<http://myspace.com>) probably the best known. These websites are used often nowadays because they are a virtual space where people find themselves using a common language and are also able to share their interests, ambitions and goals. Former school mates and long distance relatives find a way of reaching one another faster on these sites.

Hinduja & Patchin (2007:1) paid special attention to Myspace because it was the most popular. Hinduja & Patchin (2007:7) conducted a study specifically looking at MySpace website. The purpose of this study was to determine the kind of content that adolescents tend to have on their web pages under this social networking website. One of the reasons for this study was that MySpace once received attention from parents, school teachers and law enforcement agencies (Hinduja & Patchin 2007:6). It gained popularity because of the noted vulnerabilities with regard to the personal information that gets revealed on some of the web pages belonging to certain adolescents. The research was aimed at conducting a thorough analysis of the content that is on each of the web pages that belong specifically to the adolescents. The content that is posted on the web pages can be exploited by people with bad intentions in order to do harm to those adolescents who are naïve and who unwittingly display or post personal information on the web pages. The content analysis of this study showed the kind of information that these adolescents are posting on these social network websites.

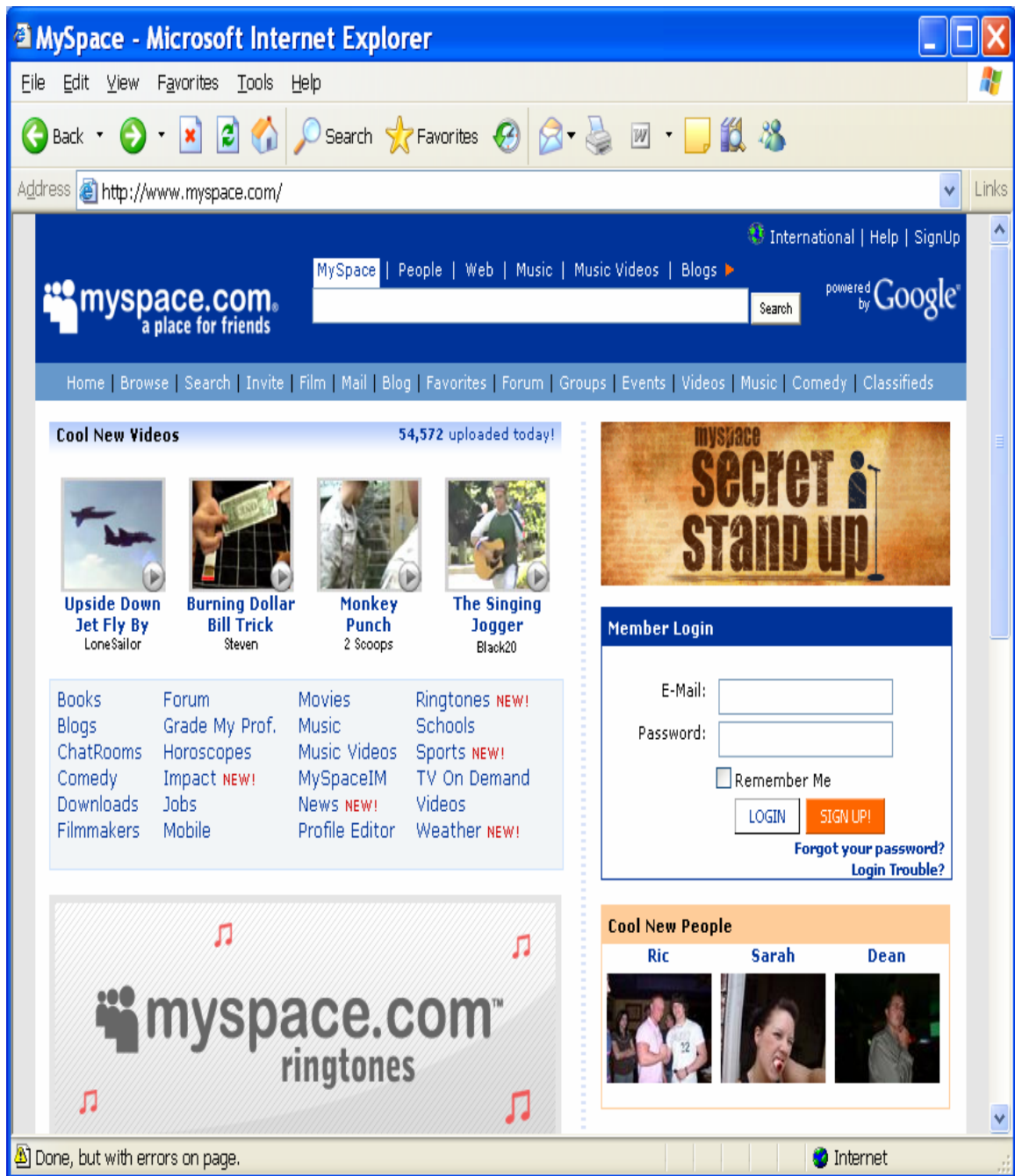


Fig1: MySpace Home page the top part. Adopted from www.myspace.com (5 October 2007)



Fig 2: MySpace homepage the bottom part (5 October 2007)

The benefits of using the social networking websites is to let people meet without the need of occupying physical space whilst making use of digital identities (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007:8).

Blogs are also commonly used by both young and old people to express their views, interests and emotions. Blogs are usually individual web pages that are created by specific people to enable others to read and post messages on these blogs.

Youngsters also tend to prefer the use of blogs as a way of communication because blogs are often seen to be very easy to use. Visitors to a blog are also given an opportunity to leave comments on the posted messages.

According to Huffaker & Calvert (as quoted by Hinduja & Patchin, 2007:5), on the 70 of the teenage blogs that they studied personal information was revealed just as it is apparent in some social networking websites.

Blogs have the same effects as social networking websites because they allow people to share various experiences and to talk about things that are of particular interest to each other. MySpace was found to give an opportunity to people in general to create their profiles on the website. A profile can include any details about the subscriber such as full names and even alternative contact details.

Teenagers between the ages of 12-17 were noted to have created their profiles on MySpace (Lenhart & Madden as quoted by Hinduja & Patchin, 2007:3). This implies that high school learners are amongst these teenagers who have subscribed to MySpace. Teenagers are attracted to MySpace because it combines features which are present in other individual social networking websites on the Internet. As the name suggests, teenagers are given a space where they present themselves, their bibliographical details, special hobbies/interests, etc. Teenagers can thereafter link themselves with other friends who share the same interest and they can start meeting and chatting. Being able to invite other people and reach thousands of people world-wide makes it more interesting to the youngsters who are curious about most of the things around them.

The site gives the users an opportunity to register and create a profile of themselves and the ability to check new messages that have been posted on their profile. Users can approve or reject a request if they do not feel like taking part in some form of social networking. Other users can post messages under a profile belonging to someone saying that they had visited that person's web page.

Social success is therefore measured by the number of postings or comments that one has received on one's profile and also by the number of friends that one has (Boyd as quoted by Hinduja & Patchin, 2007:7). As can be seen on figure 1 above, MySpace is interactive and consists of a host of activities that make it attractive to

users. It has various utilities such as calendaring, posting of videos or photographs, hobbies and many others.

2.10 The social impact of social networking websites

The risks associated with the use of social networking sites affect everyone more especially those users who are naïve and thus divulge information that is personal in nature and could result in being victimized. The benefits that come with the use of the social networking websites can be summarized as follows:

Participants in the online social networking website are presented with a venue where they can acquire new skills and learning through interacting with others. Mature users often benefit a lot from social networks because they tend to exercise the right judgment when interacting with others and apply self-control. People on social networking websites are said to be socially tolerant and tend to respect other people's views because they meet all sorts of people of whom some of whom are well behaved and some badly behaved. In some of the messages that are posted on the social networking websites crucial issues are discussed and important advice is sought.

Participants tend to engage in critical reasoning and make useful decisions (Berson et al. as quoted by Hinduja & Patchin, 2007:7). Furthermore, the social networking websites create a space to relax whilst having fun through talking to friends online at the comfort of your own location (Boyd, 2006). As mentioned in the beginning MySpace in particular has been subject to complains by various parties about the posting of personal information on the site by young people. The main concern was the danger that relates to how that information can be used by strangers to do harm to the youngsters. The press in the United States reported that some of the profiles have been linked to a number of social problems such as alcohol and drug abuse, and planned or executed bombings. People tend to discuss issues such as committing suicide, murder and planned school shootings, (Patchin & Hinduja, 2007:7).

Parents, teachers and law enforcement agencies tend to focus on the fact that the youth are often the most vulnerable to online predators and pedophiles. The social impact of the Internet on learners and teenagers in general becomes clearer in cases where online meetings are extended to face to face meetings with strangers.

According to Patchin&Hinduja (2007:4) several people are known to have been arrested in the US for sexual molestations of minors following interactions that the minors had with the strangers on MySpace (Angwin & Steinberg as quoted by Patchin & Hinduja, 2007:7).

These complaints about MySpace from the community led to the research by Patchin & Hinduja (2007:8) which was analysis of the content that is posted on the websites by the teenagers.

MySpace gives the subscribers an option to have their profile private or public so they could not assess the entire relevant teenager's web page as some of them were private. During the analysis the researchers noted that some of the teenagers misrepresented their age. Those who have inflated their age are likely to be younger than the minimum age approved by MySpace. The age data compiled by Patchin & Hinduja(2007:8) is therefore not completely reliable. The results of the research revealed the kind of information that the youth disclosed on the website. The results are listed on the Table 1 below with a percentage which indicates that out of 1475 teenage users how many did certain things on the website.

Table 1 provides a summary of the content that was analyzed for the purposes of the research by Patchin & Hinduja (2007:11). It illustrates for instance that on MySpace there are more female (795) teenager users than male (676) users. It was found that 839 of the analyzed profiles out of the 1475 profiles had their photos displayed and 8.8% of the users also revealed their full name. A small portion of the profiles revealed alternative contacts such as e-mail addresses and phone numbers.

Percent	Number
Male	676
45.8	
Female	795
53.9	
17 or younger (as listed)	1423
96.5	

Evidence that age is inflated 8.3	123
Birthdate 14.5	214
Customized page 44.8	661
Photo on profile 56.9	839
Photo in swimsuit/underwear 5.4	80
Photo of friends in swimsuit/underwear 15.5	228
Swear words on profile 19.9	293
Swear word in comments 32.8	484
Evidence of alcohol use 18.1	267
Evidence of tobacco use 7.5	110
Evidence of marijuana use 1.7	25
First name 38.4	567
Full name 8.8	130

Current city 81.2	1197
School 27.8	410
Instant messaging name 4.2	62
Email address 1.1	16
Phone number 0.3	4

Table 1: Adopted from Patchin&Hinduja (2007: 11)
Adolescent personal Information on MySpace (N=1475)

Revealing information such as full name, school name and contact telephone number provides enough information regarding where a particular person can be contacted. These are the issues that make parents and school authorities to be worried seeing that this information can be used to destroy the lives of teenagers. What was also revealed was that adolescents tend to demonstrate the adoption of adult behaviours such as smoking marijuana. These behaviours are publicly declared by teenagers on these websites which makes strangers have an idea of places where these adolescents could normally hang out. Another problem associated with revealing such behaviours is that adolescents could miss great opportunities such as employment or admission at university because of having publicly declared such behaviour.

2.11 The use of chat rooms by youth

Research on chat rooms looked at the use of chat rooms by youngsters in general. More attention was paid to whether teenagers tend to reveal personal details to people whom they normally meet online. This has often raised a concern by parents who often feel that some of the websites on the Internet are not doing much to protect the youngsters in the virtual world.

The literature reveals that there is an increase in home based Internet use by teenagers or adolescents. It is said that in the US almost half of the youngsters aged between 12-17 have home Internet access. This figure is taken from the census conducted in 2000 and the number is likely to have increased since then. Teenagers are generally said to be more interested on the Internet activities than adults in the US. This is so because of the various activities that can be done on the Internet such as downloading and playing of Internet games. According to Beebe et al. (2004:116) teenagers spend more time on the Internet on communication-related activities especially e-mailing, instant messaging and engaging in online chat rooms.

Looking at the benefits of such activities it has often been said that electronic communication channels help to improve the verbal communications skills, but there is not much clarity on how this is achieved. According to the survey that was done by the Pew Internet and American Life project the Internet has also made it easier for teenagers to relate well with others whilst also making it easier for teenagers to establish new groups of friends (Beebe et al. 2004:116). The positive social impact of the Internet is the ability to promote linkages between various groups of people online who can offer social support in times of need. The use of communication channels such as chat rooms can be beneficial in reducing loneliness and social isolation.

Chat rooms are often viewed differently from methods of communicating such as e-mailing because of the impact they can have on the lives of users. Chat rooms offer the ability to a user to meet people from all over the world in a short space of time whereas with e-mailing one first needs to have e-mail addresses of other people.

Beebe et al. (2004:117) highlighted chat room use seems to be a preferred way of communication via the internet. The level or form in which people interact online with the various modes of communication ends up making the chat room a better and preferred way to interact and connect to the various types of people who could be sharing the same interests.

There are various reasons that Beebe et al. (2004:117) cited which stand out as motivations as to why the Internet chat rooms are a preferred way of communicating. One of the disadvantages of chat rooms is that meeting new people is done easily and that is a motivator to most adolescents because they get to interact with people whom they do not know. Although this could be a motivator to teenagers, parents

often feel that the lives of their children are at risk through the use of chat rooms because they expose them to strangers which could have bad intentions.

Beebe et al. (2004:120) highlighted a very important issue which has not been clearly addressed with regard to the characteristics of the adolescents who are drawn to the use of Internet chat rooms.

The characteristics of chat room users are not known most of the time and because this information is often lacking, it becomes a concern when it gets noted that the chat room users are often more at risk than non-chat room users to sexual solicitations (Mitchell et al. as quoted by Beebe et al. 2004:116). Teenagers are also noted to fall victim to online sexual solicitations. This is because teenagers are likely to be curious and take part in online discussions with people whom they do not know.

Beebe et al (2004:117) conducted a study in order to come up with a profile of both chat room users and non chat room users whilst looking at how they compare in terms of demographic characteristics and psychological and behavioral risk factors. This study followed various studies that were undertaken on teens and chat rooms which suggested a correlation between certain behavioral factors with the use of the Internet. Teenagers who are not from a happy family background or have conflicts with friends and are depressed most of the time are said to be more likely to take part in Internet chat rooms and form close relationships with the people they meet there. In another study it was also found that these troubled teenagers are at a greater risk of sexual solicitation than their non-troubled counterparts. These studies suggest that more depressed teenagers are more vulnerable to exploitation by the individuals online, (Mitchell et al. as quoted by Beebe et al. 2004:116).

Beebe et al. (2004:117) compared the teenagers who made use of chat rooms versus those who did not in terms of factors such as demographic characteristics, psychological and environmental factors and behavioral risk factors.

The results of the analysis confirmed that a significant (90.2%) number of teenagers have access to the Internet from their homes. A significant number of girls give an indication of being troubled and in immense emotional distress and these girls were frequent chat room users. In short, the research findings highlighted that there is a relation between chat room users and psychological and environmental factors. Teenage chat room users who were depressed or had low self-esteem used the

Internet the most. A link was identified between depressed teenagers and the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours in Internet chat rooms.

There were high associations between the use of chat rooms with risky behaviour such as drug use and suicide attempts. Another finding from the study was that users with quite a lot of emotional distress could be led into seeking anonymous connections via Internet chat rooms. Those users who use the chat rooms could be doing so because of the feeling of being alone or just feeling sad.

2.12 The Internet's influence on family relationships

It is often said that people who make use of the Internet a lot tend to spend less time interacting with their family and friends. The reason for this behaviour is often not understood. It is often quite interesting to find out if teenagers or high school learners just prefer to have online friends rather than real life friends.

My research will not focus on the causes of such preferences, although it would be interesting to know such facts.

Excessive Internet use by the youth is often linked to psychiatric symptoms or problems in the individuals (Mittal et al., 2007:50). Mittal et al. (2007:51) examined the rate at which the Internet is used by those adolescents who have personality disorders. There are various personality disorders that exist amongst adolescents so the research mainly focused on the use of the Internet by adolescents who had the Schizotypal personality disorder. This disorder is associated with a lack of interpersonal skills or weak interpersonal skills. The research was motivated by the fact that there is literature which suggests that the excessive use of the Internet is linked to psychiatric symptoms or an abnormal behavior. According to Treuer (as quoted by Mittal et al., 2007:50) individuals who make use of the Internet for several hours a day or who are excessive users of the Internet for non-related work activities tend to be suffering from psychiatric disorders. Yang et al. (as quoted by Mittal et al., 2007:51) in their study also found evidence that amongst the list of other Internet users, high school learners who use the Internet a lot do have some psychiatric symptoms. The problem with such a finding is that it does not give a clear indication of what constitutes excessive use of the Internet or "several hours". Other studies tend to reveal that excessive use of the Internet is related to the feeling of loneliness (Engelberg & Sjoberg as quoted by Mittal et al., 2007:52).

These findings reveal the negative effects of excessive Internet use. The literature by Shapira et al. (as quoted by Mittal et al., 2007: 51) suggests that in case where the Internet is used excessively it could impair the social and emotional functioning of a human being. However; it does not say how the Internet could impair the emotional and social functioning. These are also some of the grey areas that call for future research on the matter due to its importance in finding ways of minimizing the negative social impact of the Internet.

The positive effects of Internet use as noted by Berger et al. (as quoted by Mittal et al., 2007:51) show that the Internet can be used as a support structure where one is not available in real life. It was also found that people who do not have good relationships with their parents and often feel depressed resort to establishing other relationships on the Internet in order to feel better. The youth in general is likely to sometimes feel withdrawn more especially if the parents seem to disapprove of certain behaviours. As a result, the youth are likely to resort to spending more time on the Internet in order to feel more socially involved. The Internet is therefore seen as a good place for those who have difficulties in dealing with the real life interpersonal challenges but yet want to fill that gap of loneliness. The danger of resorting to the Internet because of underlying psychiatric problems is that they can be harmful if left untreated.

It was because of these issues that Mittal et al. (2007:52) embarked on the research which looks at the correlation between excessive Internet use and psychiatric symptoms. As mentioned above, the research focused on the relationship between teenagers with the Schizotypal personality disorder (SPD) and the rate of Internet use to determine if there is a linkage between SPD and the rate of Internet use.

SPD is a disorder which consists of various social and cognitive psychiatric symptoms which can be viewed as common manifestations of the schizophrenia disorder (Mittal et al., 2007:52). The people who are usually diagnosed with SPD are normally seen to carry the following conditions such as anxiety, paranoia, strange beliefs and experiences that are often unusual (Mittal et al., 2007:53). A lack of people to confide to or close friends is often linked to SPD. The problem with SPD has to do with its negative impact on the social interactions that get limited in people who suffer from SPD.

Teenagers who suffer from SPD are easily identifiable because they tend to be reserved when in face to face interactions because of fear that they may be wrongly appraised by others if they say something that they do not like. After reviewing what constitutes SPD it becomes clearer why it is more likely for people who suffer from the syndrome to prefer to spend several hours a day on the Internet. People do so because the Internet creates a virtual environment where they meet their peers and chat without fear of being judged or feeling excluded. Previous research points out that there are various SPD symptoms that can be associated with certain Internet actions or activities. For instance, an Internet user who frequently plays fantasy games on the Internet could use such games as a way of interacting with friends. Individuals who are not good at talking in an acceptable manner, or who have odd speech, often feel isolated and tend to keep quiet because of not wanting to expose their weaknesses to their peers. The Internet is often used in order to compensate for missed interpersonal forums that take place in the real life environments. Adolescents who suffer from odd speech and fear peer rejection tend to use the Internet chat rooms a lot because that is where they are less subject to rejection.

In short it was found in the previous research that individuals who have more anxiety could choose Internet related activities such as playing games, sending and receiving e-mails and chatting as a social platform.

The hypothesis of the research done by Mittal et al. (2007:52) was that individuals who have SPD would spend more time on the Internet on activities such as engaging in Internet chat rooms or playing online games. The individuals studied were adolescents. There are various questions that were asked which are very similar to the questions that are on the questionnaire that was prepared for my research purposes. Questions pertaining to the length of time that the users spend on the Internet, length of time spent in a day sending e-mails to a friend, length of time in a day spent in chat rooms and lastly the length of time that is spent in a day playing games were also asked. The individuals were further classified into the following categories: Non-psychiatric, schizotypal and other personality disorder. These groups came about after an assessment was done by individuals themselves and also the researchers to confirm the categories that they fall under. When an analysis was conducted by looking at a category which has the highest numbers of interpersonal friendship, it was revealed that individuals with non-psychiatric symptoms have greater interpersonal friendships than individuals who had the Schizotypal personality. This can be attributed to the fact that individuals with Schizotypal

personality tend to spend less time with other people but instead spend much of their time on the Internet, playing games, sending e-mails and chatting to other individuals via the Internet chat rooms.

The results of the study revealed that adolescents with SPD spent more time on the Internet conducting social activities such as playing games and taking part in online chats. Adolescents with SPD were noted not to devote any time sending e-mails. The reason could be that e-mails are normally sent to those who have previously been met in person.

The SPD adolescents were also found to be motivated in having these online interactions with other people. The adolescents make use of these chat rooms to feel socially connected and not isolated. The research found that excessive Internet use should be monitored because of the potential of putting the youth at risk of meeting people with bad intentions via the Internet chat rooms.

What can therefore be drawn from this study is that while there are adolescents who use the Internet within the normal limits. There are also those who spend several hours playing online games or taking part on the Internet chat rooms. In other countries research has been conducted to look at the effects of the Internet on the youth, students and adolescents in order to determine if the Internet pose any risks to the youth. The study conducted by Mittal et al. (2007:53) revealed that there is always an underlying cause for excessive use of the Internet by adolescents. Knowing the causes of such behaviour will enable the parents, teachers and even care takers to be alert when an adolescent displays such behavior of excessive Internet use.

Instead of focusing on the negative effects of excessive use of the Internet, it was also indicated that the Internet could be useful to those individuals who just do not want to be lonely but yet do not want any face to face interactions. The positive effects come with meeting new people with one shares interest.

2.13 Kinds of information that the youth search for on the Internet

The Internet provides a variety of information that one can search for. Search engines such as Google do not provide a catalogue facility that gives a user hints regarding the information that is available on the Internet. Learners are amongst the users of the Internet and this research aims to find out the kind or types of information that these users search for on the Internet. Knowing the kind of information that learners search for will help to understand the social impact that information has on them as learners. The literature that has been reviewed so far talks about the use of chat rooms by adolescents but it does not go into details regarding other types of information that adolescents look for on the websites.

Borzekowski & Rickert (2001:49) looked at the kinds of health related information that adolescents looked at. In America the Internet has been seen as a useful channel for giving health related information. Adults make use of the Internet now and then to look for information pertaining to certain diseases. They look amongst other things for the symptoms of the diseases, and treatment or treatment options. This information is often beneficial to the individuals because it makes users more knowledgeable about certain types of disease. Doctors are often very busy and when one makes a visit they tend not to talk much about the causes of the diseases and the symptoms. Through the Internet one gets to learn more about diseases. The only set back with the websites pertaining to providing this kind of information has to do with the credibility of such information. The providers of information can be people who are experts or people who are less knowledgeable. In terms of the recommendations for treatment, some suppliers would be biased and recommend only certain products because they would benefit from purchases made by the users. In essence the advice that these individuals obtain should always be confirmed by visiting a doctors who will do a proper diagnosis and recommend the proper medication that will cure the disease.

According to Miller & Reents (as quoted by Borzekowski & Rickert, 2001:51) 40% of adult Internet users have searched for health information. The kinds of information that adults search for on the Internet include the following: information on diseases, diet and nutrition, women's health issues such as pregnancy related information and health support groups. Online support groups can be very beneficial to people who are suffering from chronic illness and need someone to talk to and share ideas with.

After having found the sort of health related information that adults search for on the Internet, Borzekowski & Rickert (2001:54) conducted research on adolescents to find out the kind of health-related information that adolescents search for since there was no information available from previous research on adolescents.

The approach that they adopted was as follows: they firstly evaluated three health websites that targets the adolescents and provide the health information that relates to them.

An analysis of the following websites was done namely: *Zaphealth.com* (<http://www.Zaphealth.com>) *CyberIsle.org* (<http://www.CyberIsle.org>) and *Not-2-late.com* (<http://www.Not-2-late.com>). The analysis of these websites was done using the following criteria: the intended purpose of the site, the target audience, and the use of advertisements.

Zaphealth.com. The analysis of this website revealed that it is a site for adolescents which aim to provide answers on health related topics which they are afraid to ask their parents about. The information that appears on the website appeared unbiased according to the analysis done by Borzekowski & Rickert (2001:54). The kinds of topics that are discussed on the website include advice on weight loss, relationships and topics on sexually transmitted diseases.

Cyberisle.org is more of a network that aims to promote education on health matters to the youth. This site has been designed in such a way that there are no advertisements that are linked to the site with regards to medication.

The other website that was analyzed by Borzekowski & Rickert (2001:54) is *Not-2-late.com*. This site aims to provide information about the emergency contraceptives that exist. It was noted that this site is not specially designed for adolescents but it was considered relevant for research purposes.

After conducting a review of these websites an exploratory study was done to establish the kinds of health information that the adolescents search for on the Internet. The study was also aimed at finding out the ways in which adolescents seek information on the websites.

The results revealed that 50% of the adolescents have tried to obtain information on the Internet about certain diseases such as cancer and heart diseases, while 37% have sought information on the Internet about fitness and weight loss. A small percentage searched for information on sex, alcohol and drug abuse, and on mental health issues.

The information that adolescents looked for also extended to: violence amongst kids, parenting, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. These topics were found not to have been searched for by the majority of the adolescents.

Borzekowski & Rickert (2001:55) believe that the Internet websites should be properly structured and be user friendly in order to provide the right information to the adolescents and help them to meet their needs. The emphasis was more on having websites that are safe, secure and confidential. There was no illustration of what would constitute a safe, secure and confidential website. The reasons for the criteria were not given except that it would be user-friendly.

The research should have gone a step further and looked at the effects of knowing such information from the adolescent's point of view. They should have also argued whether it was beneficial to present information about gang violence to adolescents. I feel that the presentation of the information on the websites is not that significant. However, the content that can be found in the health websites intended for adolescents is something that should be looked at because of the impact that it could have on the adolescent's life. There are so many advices that are available on these websites which can be detrimental to the lives of the adolescents. Weight loss pills for instance which can be bought over the counter can be harmful to some adolescents who have other pre-existing conditions. It would instead be advisable to encourage adolescents who suffer from weight related problems to visit nutritionists.

I feel there was a diversion from the main objective of the research by Borzekowski & Rickert (2001:56). The fact that they could obtain information regarding the kinds of topics or information that adolescents searched for proved that usability of the websites was not an issue that should be looked at in more detail.

2.14 Internet addiction problems

My research is also aimed at finding out how much time the learners devote to Internet use. The reason for this is to be able to determine if there are some learners who are addicted to the Internet. As with substance abuse or any other form of addiction, it is always negative to be addicted to anything because that implies excessive use at the expense of other things.

Internet addiction could be harmful because it can cause an individual to have a poor quality of life and lose out on the benefits of not being an Internet addict such as having a balanced amount of sleep. High school learners who are addicted to the Internet could have their studies, social life and other aspects of their lives disrupted.

It is reported that in Korea in 2002 there was an increased number of adolescents who had Internet access as compared to the 1999 statistics according to Kim et al. (2006:185). This implies that the youth is now migrating from the traditional society to the Internet based society which introduces a culture which is unique to the virtual world.

The general public has both negative and positive impressions of the Internet. This has become apparent from the literature that has been reviewed thus far. The main reason for viewing the Internet optimistically and pessimistically can be attributed to the fact that the Internet has its strengths and weaknesses which are often noted and discussed in the public domain. One positive aspect of the Internet lies in its ability to unite people in order to meet and share ideas which create a healthy diversification in the society. Another positive attribute of the Internet lies in its ability to provide knowledge to anybody who requests it. This can also be viewed in a negative way because it provides all types of information without screening the audience first to determine the appropriateness of the content to the audience. Because of this challenge it is argued that the Internet causes things such as Internet addiction, spreading of inappropriate content and revealing certain types of private information (Song as quoted by Kim et al., 2006:186).

There are other problems that are also attributed to the use of the Internet for instance there are people who spend more time on the Internet and spend less time with people in real life which can be harmful to family relationships (Young et al as quoted by Kim et al., 2006:186). People who make use of the Internet a lot are

normally known to have a high level of psychological arousal, to eat less and being physically inactive (Young et al. as quoted by Kim et al., 2006:186). In the literature that has been reviewed thus far it appears that more researchers have negative feedback about the Internet than positive.

Kim et al. (2006:186) conducted research to determine the level of Internet addiction among adolescents because Internet addiction is seen to be a health concern. The research findings showed that 11% of Korean adolescents showed symptoms of Internet addiction. Males and females displayed similar symptoms of Internet addiction. This research did not look at the causes of Internet addiction which makes it difficult for a reader to try and establish what the causes of Internet addiction are.

The research did however give an indication of what the consequences of Internet addiction are, which have a negative social impact on the lifestyle of a particular individual.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the research by Kim et al. (2006:189) are that the Internet presents more challenges than benefits. The Internet is addictive and there are various consequences for addiction such as loss of sleep and not having a quality lifestyle.

2.15 Internet safety controls

Internet safety is what most parents are concerned with because children have ready access to the Internet. Children have been known to get hurt because of having had access to the Internet. The Internet does not conduct screening of the requests and determines if the requested information is appropriate to the requester instead anyone who requests information via the Internet, it gets provided.

In the literature that has been discussed thus far it became obvious that children can request information such as how to make explosives and also information such as how to commit suicide. Such information could influence a youngster to do self harm or to associate with gangsters whose aim is to destroy the community through their actions. The concerns around the Internet that most parents have lies with the use of Internet chat rooms. The design of the Internet chat rooms enables people throughout the world to meet and establish friendship and chat online.

The benefits associated with these environments have been summarized in the previous sections. For instance, people who are troubled or depressed can find relevant support groups that they join and share things with. In a chat room environment a user is not always required to reveal their true identity or his or her real contact details because of the consequences that this could have. Novice users such as teenagers, adolescents and learners who fall in the same category in terms of age, often fall victim in chat rooms because of being nonchalant. Expert users often benefit from chat rooms more because they know how they should protect their identity on the online environment. The focus is normally on the negative impact that the Internet has on children and teenagers. Only a few benefits were singled out in the literature.

Safety in using the Internet seem to be a great concern in most European countries and various research has been conducted on how they can make the Internet to be a safe place for everyone. Children are often faced with a risk of viewing inappropriate material on the Internet such as pornography. This information can be accessed both deliberately and accidentally (Wishart, 2004:194).

Research was done to determine the safety practices of schools in order to prevent learners from accessing inappropriate or unsafe Internet content. Various reports that have been discussed that show the use of the Internet to be a trend both at school and home. More children access the Internet from home than at school. In an effort to find a solution to Internet safety, researchers need to be broad minded and look at the different ways that children gain Internet access. In this way various strategies can be exploited in order to make the Internet a safe place for children.

Home Internet access should be supervised by parents in order to ensure that children only view the content that will be beneficial to them. According to Wishart (2004:194) a report was once issued that claimed that the Internet has a lot of benefits for children but because the parents are having ongoing fears about the virtual world, they are limiting the exploitation of the virtual world by their children.

In general there appears to be both actual and perceived risks on the Internet. For instance, when parents think about having accidental access to the unsafe Internet content that can be a perceived Internet risk.

According to the literature that was reviewed by Wishart (2004:195) schools have a vital role to play in ensuring Internet safety for children. A co-coordinated effort between schools and homes would be even more beneficial in ensuring Internet safety at both school and home. Wishart (2004:195) conducted research in the form of an audit. The purpose of the audit was to identify those schools which are applying Internet safety teachings, and to identify other issues at schools which are related to Internet safety, , among other objectives.

The research revealed that the breaches that have been taking place at most schools have to do with accidental access to inappropriate content. It was found that this tended to increase in proportion with the number of students who enroll in the school. In summary the breaches that were found to take place at schools were as follows: accidental access to unsafe content, deliberate access to unsafe content, accessing of Internet chat rooms, downloading of content without permission and sending and receiving of inappropriate e-mails (Wishart 2004:198).

There are other commonly reported concerns such as the ability of children to tamper with systems that are meant to prevent their accessing of unsafe Internet content. Children also had the tendency of meeting the people that they chat with via Internet chat rooms. Previously reported in the various literature reviewed so far, the issues with regards to breaches are almost the same everywhere. The use of chat rooms to meet with strangers is the most common one.

The advice that came from this research was that the government and the schools should provide advice on the proper use of Internet chat rooms and also provide the support for schools regarding the use of Internet chat rooms. The Internet keeps growing at a very fast and new modes of communication get introduced .As a result, the government should provide regular updates to schools regarding the enhancements or new development in technology and advise on how the schools should safely make use of the technology.

Teaching materials which aims at teaching students about Internet safety should be prepared and distributed in order to ensure safe Internet browsing.

The research by Wishart (2004:199) did not reveal much about the role of parents with regard to ensuring the safe use of the Internet by students both at home and at school. In my opinion there should be an ongoing joint effort to ensure that parent monitor their children's use of the Internet at home. Parents also should educate the school children about the uses of the Internet.

2.16 The Internet's influence on learner's social lives and the way they interact with family, friends and teachers

In the literature that was reviewed there were no journals or books that specifically looked at the influence of the Internet on the learner's social life and the way the learners interact with parents, friends and the school teachers. The research conducted by Erwin et al. (2004:629) appeared relevant in context although its focus was not high school learners particularly. The research that was conducted by Erwin and colleagues in 2004 looked at the effects of the Internet on individuals who suffered from a social anxiety disorder. Social anxiety disorder is a behavior which a person demonstrates when having a social encounter. It is normally characterized by shyness and a tendency of not wanting to appear at social gatherings due to the fear of being judged or criticized by others. People who suffer from social anxiety tend to avoid social interactions.

Earlier research also suggests that the Internet could affect people in different ways depending on an individual's character traits (Erwin et al., 2004:630). High school learners differ in their personalities in that some are more outspoken and others more quiet and reserved. Knowing the different personality types and personality disorders of people in general might help in knowing how the Internet affects them. An individual who has a problem such as a social anxiety disorder is likely to be sensitive to the negative critics by other people and as a result they could withdraw a little bit from face to face interaction with others.

The Internet is seen as a useful channel because it creates a community for people with social anxiety disorders to meet other people and chat online without the need of meeting face to face. Over the Internet, a user can simply use text to communicate in applications such as the Internet chat rooms and e-mails. This helps these individuals to avoid embarrassment, negative comments and to also avoid certain social frustrations such as blushing or shyness. The Internet creates a benefit to most individuals of being able to create broader network of communication where

new and old friends can meet in order to share ideas or chat online. The Internet is therefore used as a communication media for long distant friends who now and then meet and chat online. According to Cummings et al (as quoted by Erwin et al., 2004:630) the Internet has also enabled people with hearing disabilities to be able to find a convenient way of communication through chat rooms and e-mailing. This makes it an advantageous way of communication which does not compete with other modes of communication such as voice or telephoning.

Although the benefits of this communication channel are evident there are always setbacks or disadvantages that are cited against the Internet. For instance, the Internet is often seen as a medium which often discourages face to face communication with family and friends. People who spend a lot of time on the Internet are often seen to suffer from loneliness because they seldom socialize with anyone face to face. People who spend a lot of time on the Internet chat rooms could be seen to have little interaction with their families and their friends. Relationships can suffer due to excessive use of the Internet (Erwin et al., 2004:631).

This assumption may prove not to be true for people with different personalities. For instance for people who are outgoing or extroverts they could spend a lot of time on the Internet surfing on websites which provide information about the events that are taking place in their area. One could be interested in knowing about these events because they want to go there and make friends.

Kraut (as quoted by Erwin et al., 2004:631) is of the view that personality traits indeed determine the effects that the Internet has on an individual. Individuals who are reserved in nature compared to extroverts could be affected differently. An analysis of the research outcomes in the literature that was reviewed by Erwin et al. (2004:632) showed that regular users of the Internet who were extroverts improved the relationships that they had with their family and friends. Further it was noted that extroverts made use of the Internet to draw even bigger crowds of people by making people more within reach through the use of platforms such as chat rooms and instant messaging.

The Internet makes it possible for introverts to have a greater trust in other people in general. They achieve this by establishing online friendships where they get to share information about themselves or share ideas.

It would have been a great thing for the researchers who did this analysis of extroverts and the Internet to research more on how the Internet accomplishes the role of letting people gain trust. It is an interesting point to look at because trust on the Internet is an issue that is discussed in literature and more often than not it is seen to be a problem. The Internet is a virtual world and because people who often meet do not really know each other because of geographical boundaries or distance, the issue of trust becomes a serious problem.

The question of how the personality traits determine how people are affected by the Internet also extends to introverts. Introverts are generally known to be reserved and they are known to like keeping to themselves with little interaction with others. According to the literature reviewed by Erwin et al. (2004:631), introverts seemed to be negatively affected by the Internet because of the following cited issues: The introverts who used the Internet frequently were noted to have less involvement in the community. They reportedly suffered from increased pressure, low-self esteem and loneliness. According to the literature, not much was said about the factors that made the introverts behave this way. It could be because of the sites that they visit and the activities that they perform. More should have been done to find out about the types of websites that introverts prefer to visit.

On the subject of social anxiety disorder it was found that people who had this problem preferred to chat extensively online with people whom they did not know in order to fill the gap of loneliness. Erwin et al. (2004:632) specifically looked at the positive and negative effects of the Internet on the individuals who suffer from the social anxiety disorder. In terms of the kinds of Internet use by the individuals with social anxiety disorder, it was found that more time was spent passively observing Internet activities, and a lesser percentage of time was found to be used for active participation on the Internet. It was not quite clear as to what constituted active participation on the Internet and what constituted to passive.

In terms of the positive effects of the Internet on the individuals with social anxiety disorder the following was found:

The respondents stated that the Internet provides support from other people who are suffering from the same disorder or from people who know others who have the same condition. Obtaining support makes them feel better and to realize that they are

not alone. The support that these people get often prepares them to deal with social anxiety disorder when confronted with anxiety provoking circumstances.

They feel free to express their feelings because there are no face to face interactions with anyone. It is also easier for the respondents to establish friendships online which boost their confidence when they finally have face to face interaction. The Internet is also said to have had a positive effect on these individuals because it enables them to acquire more information regarding social anxiety disorder such as what it is, what the causes are and how it can be treated or where to go for help. By making this information available it has made people with the problem to seek better ways to deal with it because it is a condition which can be solved. An understanding that social anxiety disorder is a common condition also helps those who suffer from it to be positive because of knowing that since many people suffer from it could mean that there are ways of dealing with it.

Social anxiety disorder is a condition which even affects high school learners. Learners or any child who has the condition is likely to portray certain character traits. For instance when some children are requested to speak in front of a crowd they start crying or sweating extensively. Some learners try by all means to remain quiet even if they know an answer even when a question has been asked to a class by a teacher. A learner with a social anxiety disorder is likely to keep quiet because of fear that if they say something wrong, it could subject them to criticism by the other classmates. Finding out the length of time that is spent on the Internet by learners could give an indication of whether the learners have social anxiety disorder or whether they are just fascinated by the Internet innovation. Having an understanding of different personalities helps to make one understand why certain people choose to engage in certain activities on the Internet.

The findings of Erwin et al. (2004:635) on the negative impact of the Internet on individuals with social anxiety disorder were also noted. Because individuals who suffer from a social anxiety disorder prefer to have less social interaction with others they tend to use the Internet to avoid face to face interaction with other people. This is so because the Internet creates a platform for talking anonymously at the comfort of one's own space and time.

The respondents spent less time with close family and friends and more time on the Internet either browsing or in Internet chat rooms. This behaviour was also seen to

contribute to the social anxiety disorder. Other negative effects of the Internet are that it has led some to believe that social anxiety disorder is a serious weakness which can result in having other people rejecting you if they know that you suffer from that condition.

For some the Internet is seen to be good because it prevents other people from seeing visible signs of the disorder and so not forming any judgment about the physical appearance of the individual.

The findings of Erwin, et al. (2004:638) can be summarized as follows:

The Internet makes those suffering from social anxiety disorder feel comfortable by creating an environment which enables them to take part without fear of being judged or criticized by others. This is seen as a negative impact from the researcher's point of view because fear to confront weaknesses does not make the weaknesses disappear but instead could make the weaknesses worsen with time. However, the respondents see the virtual world of the Internet giving them the opportunity they need to express their feelings and to also participate in social interactions online.

Respondents highlighted that they make use of the Internet to know more about the disorder and to seek help thereafter but this on its own does not help in solving the disorder. An individual will still need to have face to face interaction with specialists who will help with suggesting therapies that are recommended for people with such a problem.

The Internet makes it possible for people to express their feelings about many things. Youngsters often get exposed to things such as being bullied online which can also be referred to as Internet harassment. Ybarra & Mitchell (2004:320) define Internet harassment as a deliberate act of aggression towards other people that one is communicating with online. The social impact that this has on the youngsters is that after being harassed they could become despondent and that could affect the relationships with immediate family and friends. There was no literature that talked specifically about the influence of the Internet except the articles that mainly talked about the effects of the negative content that is available on the Internet which can also be accessed by the youth.

The work of Ybarra & Mitchell (2004:320) had some bearing on the impact of the on youngsters and its influence on how they relate with family and friends. They looked at whether youngsters ever experienced any forms of online harassment. The research was also aimed at seeing the influence of care-giver relationships with Internet bullying behavior that is demonstrated by youngsters on the internet.

The Internet being a tool which enables people to communicate anonymously often deprives the participants of the ability to visually confirm the people that they are talking to. When one is communicating to another via the Internet there is a lack of verbal cues which gives an indication of at least the mood of the other person. Some people see the Internet as a venue where they can express their emotions and also bully others whilst taking advantage of anonymity.

According to Finkelhor et al (as quoted by Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004:320) Internet harassment has now become an issue that affects the both the health and emotional well-being of youngsters. Youngsters are said to experience nasty comments or to embarrass others through the Internet.

According to Ybarra & Mitchell (2004:321), Internet harassment is reported to happen most frequently via Internet chat rooms.

Ybarra & Mitchell (2004:326) revealed that youngsters do now and then experience harassment. Amongst the youngsters it was also found that they also make nasty or rude comments via the Internet as well. So in general the youth was found to be exposed to online harassment and they were also found to be taking part in online harassment of others.

Youngsters who harassed others online were found to have poor relationships with their care givers. For instance it was found that there was no close monitoring by care giver on the use of the Internet by youngsters.

2.17 Gaps identified in the literature

The literature reviewed highlighted the social effect of the Internet on the youth from different angles. Some of the literature considered the social effect in line with the kinds of activities that the youth perform when they are on the Internet.

The gap that was identified in the literature was that there was nothing that specifically looked at the Internet and learners or youth in the South African context. Other countries are already taking preventative measures in ensuring that the youth does not get exposed to the unsafe Internet content and with no research conducted locally, it is not clear if in South Africa Internet safety controls have already been implemented.

2.18 Conclusion

The Internet can create great benefits if it is used safely by learners or by youth in general. Knowing the social impact that it has on learners could help in exploiting the benefits that it presents to learners. By knowing the negative social impact of the Internet on learners, parents, school teachers and the government could co-operate in implementing measures to prevent harm to learners.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Defining the research question

This chapter aims to discuss the research methodology that was applied in this research paper. The methods used to conduct the research will be discussed in much detail. The research was aimed at looking at the social impact of the Internet on Gauteng high school learners. The research question was thus phrased as follows: “What is the social impact of the Internet on Gauteng high school learners?” In order to find answers to this research question, the main research question was broken down into various sub-questions. A questionnaire was generated which consisted of questions which would enable the learners to provide information which would collectively answer the research sub-questions which form part of the research main question. Learners from two Gauteng high schools were requested to complete the questionnaires.

3.2 Questionnaire construction

The guidelines used in the construction of the questionnaire have been recommended by Olivier (2004:82) and were adopted by the researcher in constructing the research questionnaire:

3.2.1 Length of the Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed consisting of 32 questions. The reason it was limited to 32 questions was because if it were too long, learners could lose interest and not complete it. The questionnaire could not be too short because of not wanting to leave important information not asked.

3.2.2 Uncomplicated language to suit the audience

The language that was used to construct the questionnaire was simple and easy to understand for the learners. The actual names of websites such as Facebook were used, instead of asking the learners about social networking websites which could have been a confusing term for the learners. The use of complicated IT jargon was avoided to prevent misunderstanding of the questions by the learners. Ambiguous statements were also avoided.

3.2.3. Wording of the questions

The questions were worded in such a way as to prevent confusion on the part of the learner. The questions were short and did not require the learner to pay too much attention to detail. Leading questions were avoided because of their potential to limit the learners.

3.2.4 Related aspects grouped together

The sequence of the questions was as follows: questions pertaining to age and gender were asked at the beginning of the questionnaire. Questions that referred to time spent were grouped together one after the other. The sequence of the questions allowed learners to save time by skipping certain sections after having answered “no” to a certain question.

3.2.5 Types of questions

Both open ended and closed ended questions were used in the questionnaire. Open ended questions were used in cases where the responses were likely to differ according to personal preference, e.g. “Name your favourite top ten websites.” This question gives a learner an opportunity to list any ten websites of their choice. Closed ended questions were used in cases where the answer is expected to satisfy any of the suggested responses such as either a Yes or a No.

3.2.6 Few open ended questions

Most questions were closed-ended questions instead of open ended, to avoid complication during data analysis.

3.2.7 Nominal measures were used

These measures were used to assist the respondents to select from a list of alternatives which allowed for faster completion of the questionnaire.

3.2.6 The question and content selection

Below is a discussion of how each question in the questionnaire relate to the research sub-questions which link back into the main research question.

Question 1

In what way has the use of the Internet influenced the learner's social life and the way he or she interacts with family, friends and teachers at school?

If the answer to question 3 is the same as the answer to question 4 it would mean that there is a balance between the times spent studying and surfing the net in a week.

If the answer to question 21 is 11-hours and longer, the expected answer to question 4 should not be the same because that could imply that the truth is not being told.

If the answer to question 23 is yes, a selection of less hours (1-5) should be made on question 21. If the response is contrary to this then it could imply that the truth is not being told.

If question 24 has been answered by a yes, question 5 must have the answer "school related information", question 22 should be answered "yes" and the answer to question 25 should also be a "yes".

The answer to question 20 could illustrate that the Internet enhances the creativity of learners in various social aspects of their lives.

The answer to question 28 could be indicative of the freedom that learners prefer to have when using the Internet.

The answer to question 29 could give the time learners prefer to access the Internet. Different times could imply different things e.g. "in the evening" could be a more relaxed time to surf the net whereas during the day could imply that there are no other priorities that these learners have except to surf the net during the day.

If the answer to question 30 is "always alone" it could imply that learners required privacy when surfing the net.

Question 2

What kind of information do high school learners often search for through the Internet?

Answers to Question 27 could be interpreted as follows: “Browsing through” could be chosen by a learner who is not quite clear as to what he or she needs to search for on the Internet and who pays attention to anything that seems interesting. “Chat rooms” could be selected by a learner who has experience with the Internet.

The answer to question 6 could show that a learner is experienced in using the Internet and if this question is answered with a yes, then they need to answer question all questions in Section B.

Question 3

What are the websites that high school learners frequently visit?

The answer to question 31 could give an idea of the kind of information that users look for on the Internet.

The answer to question 26 could be indicative of whether the learners find the Internet to be useful or not.

Question 4

Do learners engage in chat rooms and do they trust the information supplied by their online friends?

If the answer to question 10 is “yes” then that could imply that a learner is at risk of being deceived. The answer to question 11 could imply that learners are at risk of meeting people who might have bad intentions.

The answer to questions 12 and 13 indicates the kind of feeling that these learners have when meeting online friends in real life.

The answers to questions 14-18 illustrate how comfortable the learners are with divulging personal information to online friends.

The answer to question 19 would indicate the preference of users when it comes to real life friends as compared to online friends.

Question 5

Do learners prefer online friends to physical friends?

The answer to question 19 would indicate the preference of users when it comes to real life friends as compared to online friends.

Question 6

How much time do learners devote to surfing the Internet at home and at school?

Question 3 and 4 should not show same long hours because that would mean there learners spend a lot of time studying and a lot of time surfing the Internet.

3.3 The questionnaire

Each question on the questionnaire had a specific role to play in answering the main research question. Below is a discussion of all the questions e on the questionnaire and their purpose in the research.

1. How old are you?

This question was asked in order to obtain information about the learners' ages. This was done to establish if there are significant age gaps between the learners which could influence their level of knowledge of the Internet.

2. I am a Boy/Girl?

In order to know the gender of the respondent this question was asked. Another purpose of this question was to establish whether there were significant differences on Internet use based on gender differences.

3. On average how much time do you spend surfing the Internet per week?

The question was aimed to giving an indication of the length of time that learners use to surf the Internet per week. The more hours they chose the more likely they are to be addicted to the Internet which is a negative social impact.

4. On average how much time do you spend studying per week?

The purpose of asking this question is to find out the length of time learners spend studying in a week on average. If the answer to this question is higher than the number of hours spent surfing the Internet per week, it shows that a learner is striking a balance between his/her studies and using the Internet.

5. What kind of information do you search for through the Internet?

The purpose of this question was to find out what kind of information high school learners search for through the Internet. In order to give learners guidance, a few options were presented which the learners had to choose from. Learners were not restricted in terms of the kind of information that they search for because they could also list other information. The objective of this question was to establish if the information that learners search for is safe or unsafe so that the social impact of viewing such information could be determined.

6. Do you sometimes communicate or chat to other people using the Internet?

This was a closed ended question which was asked in order to find out if the learner made use of chat rooms or not. Learners who had not used the Internet to chat to other people were excused from answering section B of the questionnaire which is about chat room use.

7. Have you ever visited the Facebook.com website?

This question was used to determine how up to date the learner is with social networking websites. In social networking websites learners may post real pictures of themselves, which could put them at risk. Facebook.com is a very popular website

and if learners respond that they have once visited the site, it would be an indication that they are up to date with social networking websites.

8. If you answered yes above, which activities did you perform on Facebook?

This was a follow-up question to the one preceding it. The purpose of this question was to establish the kinds of activities that learners perform on the website. Learners who just browsed through could prove to be novice users. A learner who joins a network of friends could prove to be an expert user because they are quite familiar with social networking websites.

9. If you answered “Not really” to Question 7 which website similar to Facebook.com did you visit?

In order to give clarity to those users who may have used social networking websites other than Facebook, this question was aimed at obtaining other websites similar to Facebook which learners make use of.

10. Do you trust the people whom you communicate with via the Internet chat rooms?

The purpose of asking this question was to determine if learners are trusting when it comes to online chats. This was a closed ended question so that it can be clear from the responses if there are learners who are generally trusting – or even too trusting – in online chats. The responses to this question will highlight the social impact of trust in online chats by learners.

11. Have you met any of your online friends in real life?

This question was aimed at examining the level of comfort that learners have with online friends. Where a learner has answered “Yes,” he or she may get hurt by meeting people that they do not know. The social impact of that could thus be negative.

12. How many of your online friends have you met in real life since you started using the Internet?

This question was aimed at revealing the frequency of meetings learners have had with their online friends. The more the meetings the more the learners could get exposed to people with bad intentions.

13. How did you feel after meeting your online friends in person?

The feeling of excitement could easily be associated with the fact that learners do not have a full picture of the consequences of meeting strangers. Feeling scared could be attributed to the fact that a learner has an idea of what could go wrong in meeting a stranger. The purpose of this question is to try to establish how cautious the learners are in meeting strangers online.

14. What kind of issues do you discuss via chat rooms?

The purpose of asking this question was to enable learners to specify the kinds of topics that they discuss via the Internet chat rooms. If the issues discussed could cause harm to the learners then a conclusion could be drawn from the responses on this question that chat rooms have a negative social impact on the high school learners.

15. Do you believe the things that friends tell you over the Internet?

Responses to this question indicate how educated or uneducated the learners are with regard to safe and unsafe use of the Internet. Trusting everything that strangers tell learners could be a sign that learners are not well educated with regard to the Internet security issues, and this could have a negative social impact.

16. Do you divulge your personal details to your online friends e.g. your real name and residential address?

The objective of this question was to have an idea if learners give away their true identity and provide personal information.

17. Do you prefer to confide your personal problems to your online friends rather than your real friends?

This was a follow-up question to verify the level of trust that high school learners have in the people they meet online. Confiding in someone shows a great element of trust.

18. If you answered Always or Sometimes in Question 17 above, please explain how you decide to confide.

This question was asked in order to establish the circumstances under which a learner would confide.

19. Do you prefer having online friends to real friends?

This question was aimed at determining the dependency the learners could have on the Internet. A substitution of face to face interaction with friends with online friends could be an indication that the use of the Internet affects the social lifestyle of the learners.

20. Have you ever read something that made you acquire a new skill on the Internet?

This question was aimed at finding out if the Internet was a useful tool to learners in helping them acquire new skills which will be beneficial to them. The skills could either be good or bad skills and whichever it is will impact the learners' social life either positively or negatively.

21. On average, how many hours in a week do you spend with your family /friends chatting?

This question was asked in order to determine if the Internet has influenced the way in which learners interact with their family and friends. Where a learner spends less time chatting to family face to face and spends more time on average in a week chatting to friends on line it could highlight a preference for online chats to face to face interactions.

22. Have you made use of the Internet to conduct research for school assignments?

This question was asked to determine if the Internet is used for educational purposes.

23. Have your friends/family complained that you are spending less time with them because you are always on the Internet?

Responding by a “Yes” to this question could be indicative of the fact that the Internet is causing a strain on family relationships. Responding by a “No” could highlight that the Internet does not have an impact on the family relationships.

24. Do you sometimes use the Internet to supplement the things that you learnt at school?

The purpose of this question was to determine if the Internet is used for educational purposes.

25. Do you sometimes confirm the things that are taught at school through the Internet?

The purpose of this question was to determine if the Internet is used to supplement what the learners are taught at school.

26. Do you find what you are looking for on the Internet?

This question was aimed at determining if learners find the Internet useful and regard it as a resource. If the answer to this question is “Always”, that shows that the Internet is relied upon by the learners as a source of information.

27. What do you enjoy the most on the Internet?

The purpose of this question was to obtain a list of activities that learners enjoy doing on the Internet and to further see if the activities are safe or not.

28. Where do you prefer accessing the Internet from?

The purpose of this question was to determine how accessible the Internet is for the learners.

29. When is a convenient time for you to chat with your friends?

This question was asked to determine preferences that the learners have with regard to a suitable time for Internet activities.

30. When you access the Internet do you prefer to be?

The response to this question could suggest the kinds of information sought or the activities performed on the Internet. If a learner prefers to always be alone whilst accessing the Internet it could be an indication that they engage in unacceptable activities that they do not want others to see.

31. What are your top 5 favourite web sites?

This question gives the learners an opportunity to list all the websites that are of interest to them. The question was open-ended, allowing the learners to list websites they like visiting the most.

32. How long have you been chatting on line?

The aim of this question was to establish the number of years or months that a learner has been engaging in chat rooms.

3.4 Sample design and sampling methods

Stratified purposive sampling was used for the purposes of this research. High school learners in Grade 8 and Grade 11 were requested to complete the questionnaire. The learners consisted of 25 females and 25 males. The learners were from two different schools in Gauteng. One school did not have enough learners to complete the questionnaire so another school had to be approached in order to fill the gap.

In order to obtain data from respondents, two approaches were adopted. At the first school (Uitsig) which is in Centurion in Gauteng Province, the questionnaires were left with a school teacher who gave them to learners to complete during a free time and the questionnaires were collected the following day.

At the second school (Rand Park Ridge) which is in Randburg in Gauteng, the researcher made an appointment and waited whilst the questionnaire was being completed.

3.5 Data collection methods

The questionnaire was pre-tested by giving it to high school learners and to members of the working class to evaluate by answering the questions that were asked. Certain changes, additions and deletions were made to the questionnaire following the pre-testing.

3.6 Data capturing and editing

Data was captured on an MS Excel spreadsheet for analysis and interpretation. The questions were numbered in ascending order vertically and the students' responses were captured on the horizontal axis corresponding to the questions. Every questionnaire had a unique number which prevented the mistake of capturing it twice. Once a response was captured on the spreadsheet it was marked as captured.

There were a few missing values in the responses which could be indicative of the fact that a learner did not fully understand what was being asked.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using MS Excel and through calculations by the researcher. Where for instance the question "Have you ever used chat rooms?" was asked, a calculation would be done to determine how many learners out of the sample population responded Yes and this would be converted to a percentage. In instances where open ended questions were asked such as "What are your top 5 favourite websites?" all the responses were obtained and most responses were similar such as MXIT and Google so the results were summarized to give a picture of what websites appeal to high school learners.

3.8 Methodology limitations

The sample was limited to two grades instead of including all the learners from the most junior to the most senior. The most senior learners could have given responses which could have highlighted certain issues that the rest of the learners may have not known about. The methodology should have included the use of a statistician in order to come up with the most effective and efficient way of interpreting the results. This methodology resulted in spending a considerable amount of time doing data analysis which could have been avoided if other ways were adopted.

3.9 Summary

The methodology was able to assist the researcher in obtaining the relevant information from the respondents. Data was collected on time and most respondents attempted to answer most of the questions on the questionnaire. This made it easy for the researcher to collate the data and analyze it. There were a few instances where questions were left unanswered. Despite the methodology's short comings, it assisted the researcher in coming up with findings in support of the research topic or question.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The research findings on the social impact of the Internet on Gauteng high school learners will be discussed in this chapter. The research conclusion and recommendations for future research will also be discussed in this section.

4.2 Demographic analysis

The research was conducted from two high schools in the Gauteng province. Fifty learners in total were selected from two schools. Twenty-five of the respondents were male and 25 were female students. The students were between the ages of 14-16 years.

	Uitsig High	Rand Park Ridge High
Boys	20	5
Girls	13	12
Total	33	17

Table 2: Sample of student distribution from both schools

4.3 Interpretation of results

The results have been interpreted in relation to the research sub-questions. The responses are linked to specific research questions.

In what way has the use of the Internet influenced learners' social lives and the way they interact with their family, friends and teachers at school?

Out of the 50 respondents who completed the questionnaire about 46% indicated that they spend more than 11 hours and longer per week with their family and friends chatting. This number of hours is far greater than the total time that is spent on the Internet or studying.

Seventy-eight percent of the respondents indicated that their family and friends have never complained that they spend a lot of time on the Internet. Some of the respondents (22%) gave an indication that their friends and family have complained that they spend a lot of time on the Internet and less time with them.

What kind of information do high school learners often search for through the Internet?

Looking at the activities that learners enjoyed on the Internet the following was found. Seventy-four percent of the respondents enjoy browsing through the Internet. Twelve percent enjoyed visiting chat rooms and 4% indicated that they enjoyed playing games when on the Internet. The majority of the respondents enjoyed browsing through and this could be the result of not having explored the Internet's capabilities to the maximum. Learners who visit chat rooms could be those who have great exposure to the Internet and as a result they know most of the activities that one can engage in via the Internet.

Learners seem to be interested in using the Internet to search for information that is school related. Seventy-four percent of the respondents said that they used the Internet to search for the school related material whereas 6% used Internet chat rooms, 4% used the to have access to MXIT and 20% used it to download music. Internet games are quite popular for high school learners. About 34% use the Internet to play games.

The use of social networking websites amongst high school learners is in its infancy. Only 30% of the learners said they have used Facebook before whereas 54% had never used Facebook before. Eighteen percent of the respondents did not answer the question regarding Facebook and this could be because they did not know what Facebook is.

The Internet provides the learners with an opportunity to supplement the things that they learn at schools. Twenty-eight percent indicated that they have acquired new

skills through the Internet. The following are amongst the skills acquired by the learners:

Number of respondents	Skills acquired through the Internet
1	How to make bombs, gunpowder & black powder
1	Health and beauty tips
3	To surf the Internet better
1	Dancing
1	Origami
1	Drawing
1	Guitar playing
1	Making space cookies
1	Graphic designing
1	Taking care of bearded dragon
2	Programming

Aside from one respondent who had learnt how to make a dangerous weapon the rest of the responses were about good skills such as knowing how to play the guitar or computer programming.

What are the websites that high school learners frequently visit?

The results showed that learners visit the websites listed above. These websites are the top five websites which learners often visit. Google, MXIT, Myspace and Mini Clip came up as the most popular websites that learners often visit. Most learners also indicated an interest in websites about pets and about games, entertainment, music and downloading of video clips. Despite all the learners being under the age of 17, some females enjoyed visiting seventeen.com which deals with teenagers that are much older who are at least at University. The website contains news about dating, fashion, health, sex and fitness.

Do learners engage in chat rooms and do they trust the information supplied by their online friends?

Sixty-six percent of the respondents said they do engage in Internet chat rooms. Fourteen percent of the respondents indicated that they do trust the information that is supplied to them by their online friends. Forty percent of the learners revealed that they sometimes trust the people who they communicate with via Internet chat rooms. Twenty-two percent of the respondents did not trust the people they communicate with via chat rooms.

Some of the respondents revealed that they have at some stage met in person people that they met via chat rooms. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents had done so. In terms of the number of people that each learner has met face to face, about 22% indicated they had met more than one of their chat room friends, and 18% indicated that they had met just one of their chat room friends face to face. Twenty-eight percent per cent of the learners indicated that they were excited to meet their chat room friends online. Only 2% were scared to meet their online friends.

Turning to information that is shared via Internet chat rooms, 40% of the learners revealed that they always trusted the things that friends told them over the Internet chat rooms. Another 40% trusted such information sometimes.

A small percentage (4%) indicated that they always reveal their personal information to their online friends such as name and residential address. Fourteen percent indicated that they sometimes reveal their personal information to their online friends.

Twenty-four percent indicated that they sometimes confide their personal problems to their online friends and 2% of the respondents indicated that they always confide their personal problems to their online friends.

Do learners prefer having online friends to physical friends?

Most learners prefer their physical friends. Only 2% of the respondents preferred online friends but 40% preferred their physical friends. This could be attributed to the fact that most learners spend more time with their real life friends than they do with their online friends.

How much time do learners devote on surfing the Internet at home and at school?

Eighty-six percent of the respondents spent between one and five hours a week on average surfing the Internet whereas the rest of the respondents spent the same

number of hours studying. The learners proved to dedicate most of their time to studies. This is shown by the 40% of the respondents who spend more than five hours on average in a week studying.

The length of time that learners spend surfing the Internet is quite reasonable given the fact that they still dedicate most of their time to studying which shows a balance.

Looking at the answers that have been obtained to the research sub-questions it is evident that the Internet has a social impact on the lives of the learners. The social impact that the Internet has is seen by its use by learners to conduct school research and to also acquire new skills such as drawing. In this study there were no learners that indicated that they made excessive use of the Internet. The opinion that the Gauteng learners appeared to have of the Internet was that it was a useful tool for communication. The social impact of this is for the learners to improve their communication skills and also interpersonal skills.

The negative side of the Internet which could have a negative social impact is that it allows learners of different ages to have access to unsafe content. From the results obtained there were few responses indicating use of the Internet to obtain information which could harm them if it is used. In terms of the use of Internet chat rooms or social networking websites, the learners indicated they frequently make use of these and some even indicated that they go as far as meeting their online friends in person. The social impact that could arise from these meetings could be negative if learners are exposed to dangerous people. The social impact of the Internet has proven to be more positive than negative to the Gauteng learners and maybe this could be attributed to the fact that most learners do not have unlimited access to the Internet from their homes and schools.

4.4 Discussion of findings

The Internet is very popular amongst Gauteng high school learners. While most of the learners accessed the Internet from school, home and Internet cafés, some of them indicated that they mostly access the Internet from their cell phones.

The social impact of the Internet was apparent when some of the learners revealed that they spend so much time surfing the Internet that their families and friends have

complained about this. Spending excessive time each day on the Internet could be an indication that a learner is becoming addicted to Internet use.

The use of Internet chat rooms is quite popular with high school learners. Sixty-six percent of the learners indicated that they make use of Internet chat rooms. The use of a chat room is not bad for a learner who makes use of the opportunity to chat to other people about things that will be beneficial to him/her such as a discussion on school related matters. The negative social impact of the Internet as far as Internet chat rooms is concerned is when it is used in an unsafe way where a learner feels free to divulge confidential information about themselves to strangers. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents revealed that they sometimes divulge personal information to strangers. This could be very dangerous to a learner because they could be divulging such information to people who might intend to harm them. The tendency of revealing confidential information could be as a result of the learners not having been taught about the safe and unsafe Internet use. One shortcoming of this study was failure to find out if the learners were taught at schools about the safe and unsafe Internet use. The results of that could give an indication if schools are doing enough to educate the learners about the safe and unsafe Internet use.

Learners also make use of the Internet to look for information about various topics of interest. It was also found that some of the learners looked for information about making dangerous weapons such as bombs and guns. The Internet does not protect the youth against accessing or viewing unsuitable content. This is because the Internet is a virtual world where access is not authenticated. Parents, learners and schools need to be aware of the social impact of the Internet in order to take measures that will prevent harm.

These findings are not very different from what the other researchers have found in other countries even though there are minor differences in certain areas. Learners demonstrated through their responses how advanced they are in the use of the Internet. They indicated they were making regular use of Internet chat room facilities where they exchange information with their online friends. This sharing of information and confiding to online strangers could be attributed to a lack of parental or teacher supervision which was also noted on the literature reviewed. The difference in the findings with the literature review was that not all the learners displayed Internet addiction problems as compared to some of the findings that were cited in the

literature review. This could be because use of the Internet among Gauteng learners is limited by the available access.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions from the literature review

The literature review revealed much about the impact of the Internet on the youth in general of which high school learners form part. The nature of the Internet allows people to communicate freely whilst remaining anonymous. The fact that a person can choose to be anonymous could have a negative social impact on the youth who are naïve and trusting.

One of the conclusions drawn from the literature review is that because the information that is on the Internet is not categorized according to the age of the viewer, it puts the youth at risk of intentionally or accidentally viewing inappropriate Internet content.

The use of chat rooms is also seen to be a very popular activity amongst the youth in most European countries. There is a growing concern among parents and school teachers about the safety of these environments for the youth. The main concern is that the youth establish friendships with strangers and by so doing put their lives on danger.

The literature review focused more on the negative social impact of the Internet on the youth and very little was said about the positive social impact of the Internet on the youth.

5.2 Conclusions from empirical study

Learners are amongst various people who make use of the Internet on a daily basis. The social impact of the Internet becomes clear when the actual activities that are conducted on the Internet are revealed. The length of time that learners spend on the Internet also highlights how socially isolated the learners might be. In this study, it was revealed that there is both a positive and a negative social impact of the Internet. This was revealed by the responses that were obtained from the Gauteng high school learners. Knowing about the social impact of the Internet will enable parents

and teachers to take action where needed to educate the learners about safe and unsafe Internet use.

On the other hand, knowing about the positive social impact of the Internet will encourage learners to maximize the use of the Internet in order to benefit more through its use.

5.3 Recommendations for future research

There are various research topics which can be looked at in South Africa regarding the social impact of the Internet. This research was limited to the Gauteng area and further research could be done looking at the same topic in other provinces. Further, one could look at the legislation which governs the use of the Internet by young children. In addition to this research could also be conducted on legislation which protects the learners or youth from accessing unsafe Internet content.

The literature revealed that the Internet has a social impact on the youth .The literature focused mainly on European countries. Internet addiction problems were noted to be associated with certain personality disorder. For future research purposes one could look at the youth in South Africa who have Internet addiction problems and also look at the causes of such addiction.

The literature reviewed focused more on the negative social impact of the Internet and I recommend that another research be conducted to look fully at the positive social impact of the Internet on the youth in general.

The literature reviewed also highlighted that the youth often use Internet chat rooms. Further research could be done looking at the kinds of activities that the youth engages in on social networking websites. This could be done by analyzing the activities that are performed online or by taking part as a user and documenting the experiences which would entail the advantages and disadvantages of social networking websites.

Further research could be done in the South African context on the concerns that parents and teachers have about Internet access by youth through mobile devices.

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APPENDIX

Respondent number		V1	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	1-2
Venue		V2	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	3-4
SECTION A					
1.	How old are you?	V3	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	5-6
2.	I am a	V4	<input type="text"/>		7
	Boy				
	Girl				
3.	On average, how much time do you spend Surfing the Internet per week? (tick only one box)	V5	<input type="text"/>		8
	1 – 5 hours				
	6-10 hours				
	11 hours and longer				
4.	On average, how much time do you spend studying per week? (tick only one box)	V6	<input type="text"/>		9
	1 – 5 hours				
	6-10 hours				
	11 hours and longer				
5.	What kind of information do you search for through the Internet? (Tick all options that are applicable to you)	V7	<input type="text"/>		10
	School related information	V8	<input type="text"/>		11
	Sports	V9	<input type="text"/>		12
	Games	V10	<input type="text"/>		13
	Other (please specify)	V11	<input type="text"/>		14
	*	V12	<input type="text"/>		15
	*				
6.	Do you sometimes communicate or chat to other people using the Internet?	V13	<input type="text"/>		16
	Yes				
	No				
If you answered “no” above, please go to Section C					

<p>7.</p> <p>8</p>	<p>Have you ever visited the facebook.com website?</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not really(I visited I similar website)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>If you answered yes, above which activities did you perform on facebook?</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Browsed through</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Joined the network of friends</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other(please specify)</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Yes		Not really(I visited I similar website)		No		Browsed through		Joined the network of friends		Other(please specify)		<p>V14 <input type="checkbox"/> 17</p> <p>V15 <input type="checkbox"/> 18</p>				
Yes																		
Not really(I visited I similar website)																		
No																		
Browsed through																		
Joined the network of friends																		
Other(please specify)																		
<p>9.</p>	<p>If you answered not really on Question 7, which websites similar to facebook.com did you visit?</p> <table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>																	<p>V16 <input type="checkbox"/> 19</p> <p>V17 <input type="checkbox"/> 20</p> <p>V18 <input type="checkbox"/> 21</p>

SECTION B

"Please note that term chat room refers to any website which allows people to meet online and communicate or chat."

10.	Do you trust the people that you communicate with via the Internet chat rooms?			
	Yes			
	No			
	Sometimes			
			V19	<input type="checkbox"/> 22
11	Have you met any of your online friends in real life?			
	Yes(If yes, please answer all the questions)			
	No(if no, please go to Section C)			
			V20	<input type="checkbox"/> 23
12.	How many of your online friends have you met in real life ever since you started using the Internet?			
	One			
	More than one			
			V21	<input type="checkbox"/> 24
13.	How did you feel after meeting your online friends in person?			
	Excited			
	Scared			
	Other(please explain)			
			V22	<input type="checkbox"/> 25
14.	What kind of issues do you discuss via chat rooms(Tick all relevant boxes)			
	School related		V23	<input type="checkbox"/> 26
	Private and personal issues		V24	<input type="checkbox"/> 27
	Hobbies		V25	<input type="checkbox"/> 28
	Music and movies		V26	<input type="checkbox"/> 29
	Other(please explain)		V27	<input type="checkbox"/> 30

15	Do you believe the things that friends tell you over the Internet?		
	Always		
	Never		
	Sometimes		
		V28	<input type="checkbox"/> 31
16.	Do you divulge your personal details to your online friends e.g. your real name and residential address?		
	Always		
	Never		
	Sometimes(If sometimes, when do you decide to divulge)		
		V29	<input type="checkbox"/> 32
17.	Do you prefer to confide your personal problems to your online friends rather than your real friends?		
	Never		
	Sometimes		
	Always		
		V30	<input type="checkbox"/> 33
18.	If you answered always or sometimes in question 17 above, please explain how you decide to confide		
19	Do you prefer to have online friends to real friends?		
	Yes		
	No		
	Sometimes(when do you prefer to have online friends		
	Yes		
	No		
		V31	<input type="checkbox"/> 34
		V32	<input type="checkbox"/> 35

SECTION C			
20.	<div>Have you ever read something that made you acquire a new skill on the Internet?</div> <div></div> <div>Yes(if yes, please give an example)</div> <div></div> <div>No</div>		V33 <input type="checkbox"/> 36
21.	<div>On average, how many hours in a week do you spend with your family/friends chatting?</div> <div>1-5</div> <div>6-10</div> <div>11 hours and longer</div>		V34 <input type="checkbox"/> 37
22.	<div>Have you made use of the Internet to conduct research for school assignments?</div> <div></div> <div>Yes</div> <div>No</div>		V35 <input type="checkbox"/> 38
23.	<div>Have your friends/family complained that you are spending less time with them because you are always on the Internet?</div> <div>Yes</div> <div>No</div>		V36 <input type="checkbox"/> 39
24.	<div>Do you sometimes use the Internet to supplement the things that you learnt at school?</div> <div></div> <div>Yes</div> <div>No</div>		V37 <input type="checkbox"/> 40
25.	<div>Do you sometimes confirm the things that are taught at school through the Internet?</div> <div></div> <div>Yes(if yes, please give an example)</div> <div></div> <div>No</div>		V38 <input type="checkbox"/> 41

26.	Do you find what you are looking for on the Internet?			
	Always		V39	<input type="checkbox"/> 42
	Usually			
	Sometimes			
	Not very often			
	Never			
27.	What do you enjoy the most on the Internet?(Tick all relevant options)			
			V40	<input type="checkbox"/> 43
	Browsing through		V41	<input type="checkbox"/> 43
	Chat rooms		V42	<input type="checkbox"/> 44
	Playing Internet games		V43	<input type="checkbox"/> 45
	Other(please specify)		V44	<input type="checkbox"/> 46
28.	Where do you prefer accessing the Internet from?(Tick all relevant options)			
			V45	<input type="checkbox"/> 47
	Home		V46	<input type="checkbox"/> 48
	School		V47	<input type="checkbox"/> 49
	Internet café		V48	<input type="checkbox"/> 50
	Friends or family's homes		V49	<input type="checkbox"/> 51
	Other(please specify)		V50	<input type="checkbox"/> 52
29.	When is the convenient time for you to chat with your friends on the Internet?			
			V51	<input type="checkbox"/> 53
	Morning			
	During the day			
	In the evening			
30.	When you access the Internet, do you prefer to be?			
	Always alone		V52	<input type="checkbox"/> 54
	Sometimes alone, sometimes with friends			
	Always with friends			

31.	What are your top 5 favorite web sites?		V53	<input type="checkbox"/> 55
32.	For how long have you been chatting online?		V54	<input type="checkbox"/> 56
	6 months			
	6-12 months			
	More than a year			

ETHICS FORM

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
FACULTY OF ENGINEERING, BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
FACULTY COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH ETHICS AND INTEGRITY
APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF A RESEARCH PROJECT

This application form must be read with the Regulations for Research Ethics and Integrity and completed.

Important: Each item must be completed.

1 .Applicant's name

Thembekile Olivia Mayayise

2. Postal address

P.O Box 10841

Vorna Valley

1686

3 .E-mail address

ThembekileM@dbsa.org

4 .Telephone

0825514520

5. Fax number

011 206 3181

6 .School in Faculty (**underline one**):

- Engineering
- Built Environment
- Information Technology

7 .Title of research project

The social impact of the internet on Gauteng high school learners.

8. Date of submission to committee

18 September 2007

9 .Names, addresses, e-mail addresses and capacity of co-researchers/students/lecturers involved with the project

Dr E.Cosijn (Research supervisor)

Department of Information Science

University of Pretoria

E-mail address: erica.cosijn@up.ac.za

10. Which other specialists' services will be used,

Statistician

11. Furnish as brief outline of the following so that the relevant ethical aspects can be identified clearly:

Statement of the problem

The use of the internet has an impact on the different aspects of our everyday life. The internet enables people throughout the world to meet online and communicate. Various research projects have been conducted regarding the issues that should be looked at when aiming to allow youngsters to access the internet safely without letting them have exposure to the unsafe content because of fear of the negative social impact it could have on children. This implied that there is a positive and negative social impact of the internet which the parents, school teachers and even learners need to be aware of. This has been a motivation to conduct research on the social impact the internet has on the Gauteng high school learners. The research will be confined to only the high school learners.

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the social impact of the internet on the Gauteng high school learners?

This research question has been broken down into the following **research sub-questions**:

- In what way has the use of the internet influenced the learner's social life and the way they interact with their family, friends and teachers?
- What kind of information do high school learners search for through the internet?
- What are the websites that the high school learners often visit?
- Do learners engage in chat rooms and do they trust the information supplied by their online friends?

- Do learners prefer to have online friends to the physical (in person) friends?
- How much time do learners devote to surfing the internet?

Statement of objectives

The purpose of this research is to look at the social impact of the internet on the Gauteng high school learners.

In order to achieve the objectives of this research, the questionnaire has been prepared which consists of questions which will enable the researcher to identify the social impact of the internet from the responses received from the respondents.

Key terms

Internet, chat rooms, internet games, surfing

Experimental methods/ measuring instruments

The research method that will be used is questionnaires. This method has been chosen by taking into consideration the fact it is a research that will involve learners. A set of questions has been prepared and a meeting will be scheduled with learners where they will be requested to complete the questionnaire.

Materials/Apparatus

Questionnaires will be used to collect information from the students.

Profile of research subjects/target group/animals/environmental factors.

High school learners from grade 11 and grade 12

12. If the project involves people, either individually or in groups, furnish a brief outline of the following:

12.1 Possible safety and health implications that participation in project may pose.

N/A

12.2 .Expected duration of participation of subjects in the project
45 minutes

12.3 Manner in which confidential information will be handled and
confidentiality assured

Participants will not be required to write their names and surnames on the questionnaire. Generic information such as age and gender will be asked. Learners will be assured that their inputs will only be used for research purposes only.

12.4 Remuneration offered to subjects for participation

No remuneration will be offered.

13 If the project involves animals, furnish a brief outline of the following:

N/A

13.1 Possible safety and health implications participation in the project may hold

13.2 Expected duration of participation by animals in the project

13.3 Care/housing/feeding of the animals during the project

14 If the project may also have a potentially detrimental environmental impact, furnish a brief outline of the following:

N/A

14.1 Potential impact on the environment

14.2 Expected duration of the impact

14.3 Locality of the project

14.4 Preventive measures

15 Method of publishing/application of the results

MIT research report findings

APPLICATIONS MUST INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS

I, Thembekile Olivia Mayayise... in my capacity as the researcher and a student I hereby declare that,

- 1 Research subjects will be informed, information will be handled confidentially, research subjects reserve the right to choose whether to participate and, where applicable, written permission will be obtained for the execution of the project (example of permission attached).
- 2 No conflict of interests or financial benefit, whether for the researcher, company or organization, that could materially affect the outcome of the investigation or jeopardize the name of the university is foreseen.
- 3 Inspection of the experiments in loco may take place at any time by the committee or its proxy.
- 4 The information I furnish in the application is correct to the best of my knowledge and that I will abide by the stipulations of the committee as contained in the regulations.

5 Signed: _____Thembekile Mayayise_ Date: __18 September
2007_____