

Chapter XXX

Impact of Mobile Technologies and Gadgets on Adolescent's Interpersonal Relationships

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses and depicts the wide range of changes induced in the lives of adolescents by the use of mobile gadgets, as viewed by a certain cross-section of the society—the adolescents themselves and the teachers of young adolescents. The various stakeholders who view the effect of mobility on adolescents include the parents, the teachers, peers and friends, and the young adolescents themselves. This chapter particularly focuses on the view of the adolescents and teachers on the effect of mobility on young emerging adults within the Indian context.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the investigations into the effect of mobile gadgets on interpersonal relationships of adolescents in the Indian Context. The chapter is based on the research work carried out by the lead author in order to identify the various ways in which adolescents are affected by location- and time-independence. As a part of this study, it was discovered that there are various stakeholders who are affected by the use of mobility by adolescents – these stakeholders include not only the adolescents themselves but also their parents or guardians, the teachers and their peers or friends. In order to ascertain the full effect of mobility on adolescents it is important to study these four stakeholders, depicted in Figure 1.

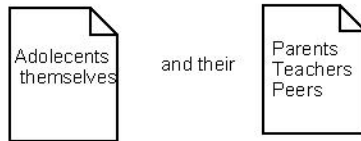
BACKGROUND TO THIS RESEARCH

a. Mobility and Adolescents

The changes and effects of mobility on adolescents include the opportunities to develop intimate relationships, maintaining secrecy and privacy, satisfying the intrinsic needs of 'contact', and at the same time freeing them from physical proximity and spatial immobility associated with land-based communication techniques. Moreover these location-independent mobile technologies function as stress-busters, owing to the multi-functionalities they provide to their users. These are some of the interesting aspects of mobility

Figure 1. Adolescents and the various stakeholders for mobile influence

Various Stakeholders affected by Adolescent Mobility



and adolescents described in this chapter. Furthermore, this chapter also delves into the issue of ever growing ‘consumerism’ that influences adolescents; this is so because mobile gadgets also serve a ‘status symbol,’ both - due to the status resulting from possessing a “cool” gadget and also due to the increasing opportunities for cross-gender interactions.

b. Indian Context

The use of mobile gadgets has increased at a remarkable rate in less than 5 years in India. The present chapter focuses on mobile telephony and its impact on adolescents’ social networks and its dynamics. In the year January 2003, India had just 10 million mobile subscribers which increased to 28 million by the end of December 2003 (Ahmed, 2004). Various surveys across the globe indicate that youth are the most important drivers of mobile business (Macro, 2004) and this is also evident, as companies keep adding features such as ‘cool’ ring tones, screen savers etcetera that appeal to the youth. It would be interesting to understand the adoption of this relatively new technology by this characteristic life phase.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature and has adopted a quantitative survey method to compare the two groups under investigation. A survey was created by the lead author and administered to a group of adolescents and teachers from schools within Vadodara (erstwhile Baroda city) in India. The survey questions were based on ascertaining the views of the adolescents and teachers pertaining to mobile adolescents.

MOBILE ADOLESCENTS

c. Adolescence: A Life Phase

Adolescence is a transition phase from childhood to adulthood. ‘Adolescence’ as distinct life phase has been recognized in the west, after 1900’s. The factors accounting for this recognition are segregation of young people from adult and children, establishment of school and passage of laws for prevention of child labor due to the industrial revolution (Grotevent, 2000).

In India ‘adolescence’ is a relatively new term because the process of transition from childhood to adulthood is gendered and class based in India (Saraswathi, 1999). For example, there is greater continuity between childhood and adulthood in traditional settings while in the contemporary Indian society for upper and middle class the discontinuity is greater. Upper class adolescents enjoy greater freedom due to less supervision of parents and have an easy access to material resources. They spend more time with peers as compared to adolescents belonging to other SES. Also child-adult continuity is more clearly evident in girls as the socialization to become good wives and mothers begins early in life. However, with globalization such distinctions seem to blur and ‘adolescence’ and ‘emerging adults’ as phases are widely becoming an Indian phenomenon.

Owing to the various physical, psychological and social changes taking place, adolescents have a great need to develop identity and intimacy (Erikson, 1968). There is also a shift in the attachment figures, when peers and opposite sex partner become more significant compared to parents (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Furman & Simon 1998; Furman & Wehner, 1993). Therefore, there is a need for privacy and emancipation from parental supervision.

In this pursuit adolescents employ various strategies in guise of extreme fashions and styles, jargons and language that clearly distinguish them from the older generation (Morris, 1969). And this struggle for distinct tribal identity is an ancient biological need for the human species when we take an evolutionary perspective. Therefore we find that although friendships are the least institutionalized of all relationships, they nevertheless have their own customs and private cultures (Dornbusch, 1989).

Having talked about the most important developmental characteristics and needs of adolescents, we can now appreciate how this ‘magic transmitter’, which we call the cell phone, not only serves the

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