

## Chapter 7

# Virtual Worlds, Learning Tools or Risk for Addiction?

### A Literature Analysis in a Psycho-Sociological Perspective

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#### **ABSTRACT**

*The chapter aims to provide an exploration of phenomena related to the use of technology-supported programs in the education field, with a specific focus on virtual worlds. In a psycho-sociological perspective with a psychoanalytic approach, the essay provides a literature analysis. Papers about virtual worlds and internet addiction are detected in order to explore the relationship among them. By studying mass media publications, emerging problems related to the use of technological tools in school are revealed on local and global scale. The proposal is to analyse the introduced issues by re-inscribing them within the coexistence context where they emerge. The highlighted hypothesis focuses on technology use as deeply marked by emotional approaches, determined by local cultures, which are shared among people participating to a specific context. It is possible to face specific issues, which afflict school professionals, students, and families, by analyzing emotional symbolizations they share.*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In the last two decades, technological progress have been characterized by rapid development. Consequently, information and communication technologies have become entirely integrated into people's daily lives, bringing new challenges to diverse social contexts.

This chapter focuses on the effects involved by the introduction of technology based education programs in school contexts.

Conspicuous studies have been realized about the advantages and risks of using technology in teaching programs.

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At the same time, rising economic investments have been dedicated to promote technology usage in the education field, grounding on the principle that technology-mediated learning environments allow students to develop specific competencies which are required to be competitive in the 21st century marketplace, fostering the development of new learning environments.

Concurrently, technological usage at school, in particular, and technological usage in youth, in an extended acceptance, have become a matter of public debate in different countries. This scenario, deeply marked by a fast technological growth, founds a crosswise interest in problematic internet use, by conceiving it as a potentially major public health issue, entailing a social demand for professionals' responses. Psychology and Psychiatry endeavour to answer to this request, achieving the conceptualization of diagnostic categories concerning internet addictions, as described in Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) - Edition 5, published by American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2013).

This chapter proposes to analyse the introduced phenomena grounding on a psycho-sociological perspective with a psychoanalytic approach.

The highlighted hypothesis is that technological improvements and their usage should be explored by focusing on the specific local culture within which they are displayed. Namely technology usage could be conceived as strictly connected to the way it is symbolized. Hence it is connected to the way social groups participating to specific coexistence contexts share symbolizations founding local cultures (Carli & Paniccia, 2003). Furthermore, drawing attention to the school context, different symbolizations lead to discrepancies in terms of paradigms, methodologies and tools for interventions (Mazzola, 2018). In a wider perspective, they lead differences in term of representations about professionals', students', families' experiences.

This chapter purposes to introduce an exploration of these phenomena in order to stress critical issues and problem related to the way technology is perceived and utilized with the aim to highlight potential developments in the field.

## **THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The chapter aims to explore phenomena related to technology usage, with a specific focus on virtual worlds and the education field, and its connection with problematic internet use phenomena. This exploration is conducted by realizing a Literature analysis, grounding on a methodological proposal: texts could be conceived as cultural products; hence they could be interpreted as a clue to detect symbolizations about phenomena which are shared among a community, founding local cultures (Mazzola, 2020a).

The introduced methodological approach to Literature analysis grounds on a semiotic and historical paradigm (Ginzburg, 1989). By citing the category of "paradigm", the reference is to an overall conceptual construction (Kuhn, 1970), involving a precise epistemology, which founds a certain research tradition. Specifically the study concerns a qualitative research perspective.

The purpose is to analyse individual, social and situational phenomena by detecting details, inconspicuous aspects, small clues, grounding on the hypothesis they could disclose something bigger and submerged (Demetrio, 1992). The essay strictly founds on an idiographic approach, rather than a nomothetic one, hence the attention is drawn on the particular, with the intent to achieve a wider knowledge about peculiar case studies, instead of looking for general laws. The objective is not to achieve an "absolute truth", but to get closer to an extensive understanding of focused phenomena (Caronia, 1997), by analysing clues and detecting traces. Therefore from a methodological perspective, this essay is based on inductive

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