THE USE OF VIRTUAL WORLD TOOLS BY ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN UZBEKISTAN DURING THE SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

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A B S T R A C T	K E Y W O R D S
Changes in a child's personality during adolescence. The attitude of representatives of the older generation to the changes in teenagers in the period when the tools of the virtual world became popular. The formation of competences in the correct use of virtual world tools is an important task for our society today.	Virtual world tools, competencies of correct use of virtual world tools, cyber culture, teenage girls, adolescence.

Introduction

In the 20th and 21st centuries, new technologies have greatly simplified human life. However, these technologies have been received differently by the older and younger generations. For instance, devices like the gramophone, television, and the internet were mostly met with positive reception, but there were also some negative opinions. Technologies considered to have little benefit or more harm to humanity did not gain popularity due to a lack of demand. Some modern technologies, unfortunately, are used for malicious purposes due to human morality. Examples include splitting the uranium nucleus to create atomic bombs or using drone cameras for privacy violations. This issue is not new and has persisted since ancient times, as far back as the story of Cain and Abel. As new technologies emerge, the ethical dilemmas surrounding them will remain relevant. Today, in society, many point to the internet, social networks, media, and television as the reasons young people are wasting time and neglecting education and skills. However, banning these technologies outright could cause a country to fall behind, as seen in places like North Korea. The task for today's educators, parents, and mentors is to ensure young people use virtual tools correctly, effectively, and in moderation, guiding them toward productive activities and maintaining proper oversight.

Objective

Many parents today are worried that their children spend too much time on virtual world tools. Adolescents often argue that the internet, computers, and smartphones are necessary for studying. Indeed, finding a teacher more engaging than online lessons is difficult, and many teachers use online resources as supplementary materials. If we define the virtual world, some describe it as "a space designed for users to spend their free time"[1], while others see it as "an artificially created world built through computer technology"[2]. It is undeniable that virtual tools have become the fastest way to

find information. However, despite the speed of access, there are still advantages to learning from teachers and real books.

For example, Imam al-Gazali, who studied abroad for years, once had his notebooks stolen by bandits. When he pleaded for their return, saying, "My knowledge is written in those books," the bandit leader mocked him, asking, "If all your knowledge is in those books, will it be lost if you lose them?" This experience taught Imam Gazali an important lesson, prompting him to return to his place of study and memorize his knowledge. This is a valuable example for those who believe that with all information available on the internet, there is no need to read books. Especially in today's era of artificial intelligence tools like "Chat GPT," which replace many intellectual tasks, the importance of real knowledge has only grown.

From a moral perspective, the use of virtual world tools today has advantages in operating anonymously or under a pseudonym. However, these tools also foster deviations from ethical norms and increase deviant behaviors, especially among adolescents during a psychologically unstable period. Examples include ludomania (gambling addiction), pornography, fraud, discrimination, arrogance, insult, mockery, slander, and gossip.

Humans have a natural curiosity for abstract concepts. Research shows that those who fail to achieve success in real life or lack affection and attention from their families tend to seek these needs in the virtual world. Yet, overconsumption of anything is harmful to human well-being. Virtual spaces, from ideological battles and political propaganda to misleading advertisements, create intellectual dependency in young people. Content promoting intellectual freedom and critical thinking is rare and not as popular.

The addiction to virtual world tools is addressed by referring to a saying from Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): "Indeed, your body has a right over you, your spouse has a right over you, and your guest has a right over you." This implies that one cannot spend their time however they please, as their time also belongs to others—family, society, and even the self. Even actions that seem personally beneficial can become harmful if overindulged.

Another example comes from Salman al-Farsi's advice: "Give your Allah and each right-holder their due rights." The same principle applies when overusing smartphones in front of children, impacting their upbringing. It is essential for older generations to remember that they must respect the rights of others in this context.

Currently, concerns over adolescent girls' attitudes toward virtual tools have led to studies involving questionnaires to understand their perspective. It has been observed that, while girls play fewer games than boys, they tend to gravitate more toward intellectual and logical games. Girls often use virtual tools to chat on social media, watch videos, and pursue educational activities. The virtual world has evolved beyond games, now encompassing video conferences and text-based chat platforms, "giving rise to professions such as streamers and bloggers" [3].

The term "internet addiction" was introduced by Ivan Goldberg in 1995. According to psychologists and the World Health Organization, internet addiction is recognized as a mental disorder. The dangers include disrupted sleep, neurosis, attention deficits, and vision problems. Research indicates that 79% of those affected by internet addiction are youth, with this problem becoming more widespread since the launch of iOS smartphones in 2010.

The reason behind the significant increase in addiction is that the visual and auditory senses – two of the five senses that most influence human emotions—are heavily engaged by smartphones. Emotion-

based marketing further exacerbates this issue, and girls are more vulnerable to such marketing tactics than boys. Marketers exploit this sensitivity, gradually turning society into a consumer-driven culture. Studies have shown that girls tend to purchase more items compared to boys. Nowadays, mobile phones have become indispensable, and it's difficult to imagine life without them. However, young people often lack the skills to manage their time effectively and are unaware of how much time they spend on their favorite activities.

For instance, "a 2013 survey by the British TV Licensing Authority found that people aged 25-34 watched 15-16 hours of television per week, although the actual time was even higher"[4]. Similarly, excessive use of smartphones has been shown to reduce attention span and limit one's ability to engage in tasks for extended periods, ultimately decreasing daily productivity.

Key findings and analysis:

Research focused on adolescents' proper, moderate, and effective use of virtual world tools. We explored what's currently popular among teenagers, what interests them in the virtual world, and the potential dangers and risks these tools pose to their mental, physical, and psychological development. The study was conducted via surveys and interviews with a total of 1,095 adolescents from various regions across Uzbekistan, including Fergana, Samarkand, and Tashkent, covering students, teachers, and parents from 8 different secondary schools. The results were analyzed using the SPSS program.

One question asked was how teenagers would react if a close sibling became addicted to the internet. The responses showed that 68% would try to explain the issue kindly, which is a positive result. However, 16%, mostly boys, said they would take away the phone, while girls did not favor such extreme measures. This shows there is still work to be done in developing a culture of proper virtual tool usage.

Among the most popular social media platforms, Telegram, Instagram, and YouTube were at the top. These platforms have a large user base in Uzbekistan. Instagram, Snapchat, and Telegram are particularly popular among girls, while Snapchat was rarely chosen by boys. YouTube was highlighted as the most useful for educational purposes, and Telegram is frequently used for communicating with loved ones. When we asked the question, "Do you want to become a blogger?" most girls responded with "No" The appropriate amount of time to spend using virtual world tools varies according to different experts, but all agree that more than 4 hours of usage per day for adolescents can have numerous negative consequences. According to our findings, 30% (328 individuals) of respondents use virtual world tools for more than 4 hours per day.

In response to the question, "Do you have someone you've never met in person but communicate with regularly online or via phone?", 28.5% (311 respondents) said "Yes" while 10.7% (118 respondents) said "I used to, but not anymore" and 60.8% said "No" This question aimed to identify whether adolescents have virtual acquaintances with whom they maintain close contact, despite never meeting them in real life.

Adolescents are known to experience increased curiosity about the opposite gender during this stage of life. Often, they feel hesitant to discuss hormonal changes with family members, making the virtual world a comfortable space to interact anonymously with the opposite sex. However, there are significant medical, psychological, and religious risks associated with this behavior. There are numerous cases of adolescents sharing personal information with strangers, later regretting it, and even

instances of suicide as a result. A tragic example is the "Blue Whale" game from 2015-2016, which led to several adolescent suicides due to the trust placed in strangers online.

Virtual fraud has also seen a rise in the past decade, particularly cases involving women and girls whose personal information is stolen and then used to blackmail them for money or force them into compromising situations. It's crucial to raise awareness among girls to protect their personal information.

Regarding the question, "Have you joined any online dating or acquaintance groups?", we learned that 29% of respondents had frequently joined such groups, while another 29% had occasionally done so. Adolescents often join these groups seeking friendship, companionship, or the opposite gender, especially when they feel lonely in real life. This trend is particularly significant in Uzbekistan, a predominantly muslim country with strong traditional values. As new technologies enter the country, so do western cultural practices, creating a unique challenge for uzbek society to preserve its cultural identity.

While many young people do not initially view these virtual acquaintances as serious relationships, the seriousness of such relationships has been steadily increasing year by year. As in other countries, Uzbekistan has also seen a growing trend of marriages resulting from virtual connections.

In our survey, we aimed to understand how adolescents' use of virtual world tools affects their family relationships by asking, "How does your use of the virtual world (internet, social media, TV, video games) impact your family's cohesion?" The responses were as follows:

- 15.4% of respondents said, "positively, it strengthens family relationships";
- 16.2% said, "it serves as a helpful tool in family interactions";
- 11.7% felt, "negatively, it causes us to spend less time with each other";
- 11.2% said, "very negatively, it leads to conflicts and arguments";
- 14.7% noted, "both positively and negatively";
- The largest group, 30.8%, answered, "I don't know".

These responses can be categorized into three groups:

- 38.9% reported that virtual world tools have a positive impact on family cohesion;
- 30.2% felt that these tools negatively affect their family relationships;
- 30.8% were unsure about the effects.

This indicates that 30.2% of adolescents believe improper use of virtual world tools is a factor in the deterioration of their family relationships. Adolescents, who are beginning to view themselves as independent individuals, often dislike being constantly monitored, leading to conflicts at home.

In discussions with girls, they expressed frustration with frequent restrictions from parents or older siblings, hearing phrases like, "That's not appropriate for a girl," "Girls don't do that," or "Girls aren't allowed to do that." These comments reflect a generational divide between parents striving to uphold traditional values and the modern worldview of adolescent girls. To prevent these differences from growing, parents should provide guidance and advice in moderation, serve as practical role models, and strike a balance between maintaining cultural values and understanding their children's perspectives.

Conclusion

In recent years, some individuals on social media have begun to challenge traditional values regarding the upbringing of girls in Uzbekistan. They argue that these traditional methods suppress girls, claiming

that such upbringing destroys their individuality, restricts their freedom, and imposes outdated norms such as the necessity for girls to remain virgins until marriage or seek permission to go outside. These podcast-style content creators suggest that these cultural practices are no longer relevant. This trend indicates that the upbringing of girls in our society is at risk. Instead of experienced educators, mothers who have raised daughters, religious scholars, and psychologists guiding discussions on how to raise girls, we now see inexperienced, unmarried young women with no children providing their opinions. This is not something to be taken lightly or ignored; intellectuals and experts must respond to such claims. Parents and educators must take an active role in instilling proper virtual world usage skills in adolescents to guide them in navigating these influences responsibly.

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