Pupils' Perceptions of the Importance of Mobile Phones in Their Lives

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Abstract

Studies show that mobile phones are an important part of youth lifestyle and culture. In establishing this, it is important to know how youth themselves perceive the importance of mobile phones in their life. Our research was based on a sample of 6th and 9th graders from Slovenia (n = 820). The data was collected using a questionnaire. The study showed that the most common reason for using mobile phones is to communicate with other pupils and the reason for having a mobile phone is to be connected with others. Moreover, various feelings and fears connected to mobile phone use are experienced by pupils. The study also revealed some possible dangers of MPs use by pupils. Based on the results, it is necessary to raise pupils' awareness of the safe, moderate and critical use of mobile phones in their everyday life.

Key words: *characteristics of mobile phone use, pupils, mobile phone, advantages of mobile phone use, negative aspects of mobile phone use*

Introduction

Life in a modern society cannot be imagined without modern technology. Salehan and Naghban (2013) state that modern technology has changed our lives. Mobile phones¹ (The abbreviation MP is used in the article; it stands for mobile

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phones.) are not an exception. The young are especially susceptible to its use, since they have grown up with MP. The use of MP is becoming an important part of youth culture (AITameemy, 2017; Grimm and Rhein, 2007). The purpose of this article is to show how youth themselves perceive the importance of MP in their life.

MPs bring many advantages into the lives of young people. First, there is a sense of security and reachability (Döring, 2006; Ling and Yttri, 2002; Vacaru, Shepherd and Sheridan, 2014). MPs can also represent a means of safety. Surveys (Cvek, 2019; Vasudev, Kaur, Kumar and Chaturvedi, 2012) show parents tend to buy their children MPs because of safety (Ling and Yttri, 2002; Vacaru et al., 2014). Young people's (and parents') daily lives and timetables can be organized by using MPs (Döring, 2006; Ling and Yttri, 2002), which represents an important social need. MPs are used by young people because they offer various freetime activities; they are a means of entertainment (Döring, 2006; Gkiomisi, Gkrizioti, Gkiomisi, Anastasilakis and Kardaras, 2017; Grimm and Rhein, 2007). Döring (2006) states that MPs serve as constructors of one's identity. The author explains that MPs are a common conversation topic for children around 10 years of age, a symbol of transition to puberty. MP's technical features are more important to boys, whereas girls prefer the outside of MPs. MP represents a tool for youngsters' self-expression (Ling and Yttri, 2002). What is important is the physical appearance of an MP, the way of using the MP and culture, shaped by the MP use. Several surveys (Boursier and Manna, 2018; Gkiomisi et al., 2017; Hong, Jahng, Lee and Wise, 2020; Macheroni, Vincent and Jimenez, 2015) show that using MPs represents a tool for youth self-presentation and self-expression.

MPs represent an important means of socialization (Döring, 2006; Geser, 2006b; Gkiomisi et al., 2017; Ling and Yttri, 2002, 2005; Vacaru et al., 2014), since they enable new social connections between peers, which brings changes into families and peer relationships (Ling and Yttri, 2005). Vacaru et al. (2014) point out that MPs are a means of communication and socialization allowing young people to connect with peers wherever they are. The MPs are an important factor in adolescent emancipation (Lehmann, 2009; Ling, 2007; Ling and Yttri, 2005). With the help of MPs, not only is integration into peer groups easier, but also the distancing of youth from their primary family (Ling in Yttri, 2002). In this way, young people engage in activities and relationships among peers and within the wider society.

Despite many advantages of MPs, MP use causes many hazards in the lives of young people. Moreover, either young people are not paying enough attention to them, or they are not critical enough or liable to wrongly interpret them. One of the potential risk is nomophobia, a disorder of the 21st century (King et al., 2010,

in Yildirim, Sumuer, Adnan and Yildirim, 2015). This can be defined as a constant concern about mobile unreachability (García, García and Sánchez, 2013; Yildirim et al., 2015). This phenomenon can be caused by the loss of an MP, unreachability, empty battery, and the loss of signal or credit and can lead to unease or distress (Yildirim and Correia, 2015, *ibid.*). Pucci et al. (2015) state that nomophobia symptoms may vary from feelings of anxiety to panic attacks, and may include shallow breathing, dizziness, sweating, fast heartbeat, chest pain and nausea. Some research suggests that men are more prone to developing nomophobia than women (e.g. Nawaz et al., 2017), while other research suggests that women are more likely to do so (e.g. Yildirim et al., 2015).

Methodology of Research

Research problem

The purpose of this article is to show how pupils themselves perceive the importance of MP in their life. An insight into this question is crucial, since it can prevent or limit the hazards and help pupils teach safer and more responsible use of MPs. Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

- Why is it important for pupils to have an MP?
- What is the most common reason for using their MP?
- How do pupils feel when they forget the MP at home?
- What are the pupils most afraid of, connected with MPs?

In all the above, we were interested in whether there exist gender differences among pupils.

Research Sample

Twenty-four Slovenian primary schools participated in the study. The research sample was based on stratified random sampling. All public schools in the Republic of Slovenia were divided into 12 statistical regions; from each region, two schools were chosen. From the chosen school, one 6th grade class and one 9th grade class were randomly chosen. A total of 843 pupils from the 6th and 9th grades participated in the research. The article is based on data collected from pupils who answered that they possessed their own MP ($n = 820$).

Instruments and Procedures

The data was collected from students by anonymous questionnaire. The survey was anonymous and voluntary. The questionnaire consisted of multiple parts: in

the first part, basic information about respondents was collected. Based on the answers from these closed-type questions, we gathered the necessary data on pupils' most common reason for using the MP; importance of having a MP and pupils' feelings after forgetting an MP at home. Different answers were offered to choose from, as described in the tables below. The scale of alternative judgements (yes or no) shows what students are most afraid of in connection to MP; the scale includes five statements: losing my MP, forgetting my MP; no network or no signal; no free Wi-Fi access; and empty battery. The data was processed by using statistical data processing program SPSS on a level of descriptive and inferential statistics.

Results of Research

The importance of having an MP

In the following part, our focus turned to the importance of having an MP and pupil's opinion about it.

Table 1. The number (f) and structural percentage (f %) of importance of having a MP.

By using an MP I can (be) ...		Gender		Total
		Girls	Boys	
Connected with others	f	292	234	526
	f %	67.7	60.2	64.1
Available	f	104	113	217
	f %	24.1	29.0	26.5
Safe	f	11	15	26
	f %	2.6	3.9	3.2
Free	f	10	14	24
	f %	2.3	3.6	2.9
Part of/included in a group (member of social media)	f	5	8	13
	f %	1.2	2.1	1.6
Someone important	f	7	4	11
	f %	1.6	1.0	1.3
Anonymous	f	2	1	3
	f %	0.5	0.3	0.4
Total	f	431	389	820
	f %	100.0	100.0	100.0

The table above shows that being connected with others is the most common reason for having or owning an MP. Approximately one quarter of pupils stated availability as an important reason. The result of the χ^2 -test shows no statistically important difference in having an MP based on gender ($\chi^2 = 7.764$; $P = 0.254$). Boys and girls both primarily have MPs in order to be connected with their peers and to be available.

The Reason for Using MPs

Based on the theoretical part of the article where we discussed various possibilities of MP use among young people, a question about the major reasons for pupils' MP use was raised.

Table 2. The number (f) and structural percentage (f %) of reasons for using MPs among pupils

The most common use of MP		Gender		Total
		Girls	Boys	
Communication with others	f	283	196	479
	f %	65.7	50.4	58.4
Fun	f	44	88	132
	f %	10.2	22.6	16.1
To kill time	f	57	69	126
	f %	13.2	17.7	15.4
To be informed	f	29	26	55
	f %	6.7	6.7	6.7
Self-expression (e.g., selfies)	f	13	5	18
	f %	3.0	1.3	2.2
For when there are no friends to hang out with	f	4	5	9
	f %	0.9	1.3	1.1
Because it is popular	f	1	0	1
	f %	0.2	0.0	0.1
Total	f	431	389	820
	f %	100.0	100.0	100.0

As the table shows, more than half of pupils use MPs for communicating with each other. Other reasons for using MPs are less common. The result of the χ^2 -test shows a statistically important difference between the most common use of MPs

based on gender ($\chi^2 = 34.380$; $P = 0.000$). Both boys and girls state communication as the primary reason for using MPs; however, it is more frequently stated by girls. Using MPs for fun, to kill time, or because there is no one to hang out with are reasons more commonly offered by boys. The girls, on the other hand, stress self-expression and the effort to be popular.

Feelings connected to MP

The absence of an MP can create negative feelings among young people, so the issue was researched. The question was raised of how pupils feel when they forget their MPs at home.

Table 3. The number (f) and structural percentage (f %) of pupil's feelings about the absence of MPs

If I forget my MP ...		Gender		Total
		Girls	Boys	
It does not affect me	f	223	250	473
	f %	51.7	64.3	57.7
I feel like something is missing	f	159	90	249
	f %	36.9	23.1	30.4
I am nervous	f	31	28	59
	f %	7.2	7.2	7.2
I am relaxed	f	18	21	39
	f %	4.2	5.4	4.8
Total	f	431	389	820
	f %	100.0	100.0	100.0

A good half of pupils claimed that forgetting their MP at home did not affect them. Almost a third of pupils admitted to feeling bad, as if something was missing, and one-tenth of pupils described themselves as nervous and restless. The result of the χ^2 -test shows a statistically important difference in pupil's well-being and feelings based on gender ($\chi^2 = 18.943$; $P = 0.000$). When forgetting an MP at home, boys tend to list more neutral or positive feelings, whereas girls stated they more often felt as if something was missing.

Concerns related to MPs

Nomophobia can be defined as a constant concern about mobile unreachability (García et al., 2013; Yildirim et al., 2015). Hence, the research topic further explored what pupils fear in relation to MPs or what they worry about.

Table 4. The number (f) and structural percentage (f %) in concerns related to MPs.

Concern related to MPs		Gender				Total	
		Girls		Boys			
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Losing a phone	f	399	32	330	59	729	91
	f %	92.6	7.4	84.8	15.2	88.9	11.1
Forgetting it some- where	f	400	31	318	71	718	102
	f %	92.8	7.2	81.7	18.3	87.6	12.4
No network signal	f	248	183	150	239	221	599
	f %	57.5	42.5	38.6	61.4	27.0	73.0
No Wi-Fi access (free Wi-Fi)	f	148	283	73	316	213	607
	f %	34.3	65.7	18.8	81.2	26.0	74.0
Empty battery	f	131	300	82	307	398	422
	f %	30.4	69.6	21.1	78.9	48.5	51.5

The data shows that pupils, regardless of gender, are concerned about losing their MP or forgetting it somewhere. We were interested in whether there exists a difference between girls and boys in the concerns expressed in relation to MPs. Girls were more likely than boys to express fear in connection with all five statements. Girls are more often afraid of losing their MP than boys are ($\chi^2 = 12.423$; $p = 0.000$), forgetting their MP ($\chi^2 = 22.960$; $p = 0.000$), absence of a signal ($\chi^2 = 29.438$; $p = 0.000$), not having access to Wi-Fi ($\chi^2 = 25.185$; $p = 0.000$), and a dead mobile phone battery ($\chi^2 = 9.226$; $p = 0.002$).

Discussion

MPs play an important part in youth culture (e. g. AITameemy, 2017). The research shows an increasing use of MPs among youth (Cvek, 2019; Geser, 2006a) and increasing number of younger generation of user (e. g. Cvek, 2019; Gkiomisi et al., 2017; Mascheroni and Olafsson, 2014). The use of MPs does not have advantages only; it brings many risks and hazards in youth lives (Cvek, 2019; Hardell, Carlberg and Hansson Mild, 2010; Vasudev et al. 2012; Lee et al. 2017). Not enough attention is paid to it; the youth are either not critical enough towards MP use or misinterpret it. Based on the facts, there is a need towards early awareness raising about critical and responsible use of MP that is based on characteristics of its use. In Slovenia, many aspects of MP use among youth are insufficiently systematically

researched. This gap is filled by our study since it shows new findings that can be used in wider space.

According to the research results the main reason for having an MP, as stated by Slovenian pupils, is to stay connected. Staying connected, the need for belonging and social identity (Walsh et. al., 2009) are expected outcomes based on the pupils' developmental stage. According to our research, an important reason for having MP is also availability. Geser (2006a) warns that constant availability is a result of powerful and high MP involvement in one's life. MPs are available to young people 24 hours a day, which means they can use these devices even at night. Surveys show that excessive MP use can affect youngsters' sleeping, (Herada, Marikuni, Yoshii, Yamashita and Takeuchi, 2002; Lee et. al., 2017), can lead to health problems (Hardell et. al., 2010; Khurana, Teo, Kundi, Hardell and Carlberg, 2009; Vasudev et al. 2012) or addiction (Choliz 2012; Hong, Chiu and Huang 2012; Lee et al. 2017; Salehan and Negahban 2013). Baig (n.d.) warns that excessive use of MPs can be a compensation for other activities such as reading and direct human contact, which is an alarming fact. It is essential to raise awareness about moderate, thoughtful use of MPs, including the risks and dangers of non-substance addiction.

Research shows that communication and connection with others, e.g., friends, is an important and useful aspect of MP use among pupils in Slovenia. These findings correspond to results of other surveys (Ashiq, Mahmood and Siraj, 2013; Gkiomisi et. al., 2017; Vacaru et. al., 2014; Walsh et. al., 2009). Other common reasons for using MP are fun and boredom. Boys tend to use MP as a tool for killing time more commonly than girls. Killing time or boredom is one of the possible reasons for cyberbullying (Kowalski, Limber and Agatston, 2008; Slonje, Smith and Frisé, 2013; Varjas et. al., 2010) and one factor that can lead to MP addiction (Ashiq et. al., 2013). The problem of potential MP addiction also point out Niklová, Zošáková and Novocký (2020). Usually, not enough attention is paid to this by pupils, hence, it is adults' duty to familiarize youngsters with these dangers and educate them about safe and responsible use of MPs. Furthermore, research shows that the reason for using MPs is having no friends for 1% of pupils. Those are pupils who are excluded from the circle of peers; this can have negative consequences that can be reflected in learning success and pupil behavior; therefore, paying attention is of major importance.

Based on our research, one encouraging fact is that more than half of pupils remain unaffected if their MP is left at home. However, more concerning facts are that almost one-third of Slovenian pupils feel as though something is missing; one-tenth of pupils reported anxiety and restlessness if the MP was left at home.

This data speaks for itself and calls for intervention to prevent possible addiction. The survey showed that girls tend to be a risk group, rather than boys, since they experience negative feelings more often when an MP is forgotten at home.

Furthermore, based on the research results, we can state that nomophobia is present among pupils in Slovenia in the constant concern of mobile unreachability (García et al., 2013; Yildirim et al., 2015). Our study among Slovenian youth shows nomophobic behaviour due to experiencing fears. Slovenian pupils are mostly afraid of two related aspects: losing their MP or forgetting it somewhere. Girls are more likely than boys to experience fears associated with multiple dimensions of MP use. Although some research (e. g. Nawaz et al., 2017) suggests that nomophobia can be characteristic of both men and women, our research showed girls manifest a higher rate of nomophobic behavior. The latter data coincide with the research conducted by Yildirim et al. (2015). Since Spitzer (2014) warns that life-long use of MP can lead to mental and physical handicaps, a justifiable question can be raised: what are the long-term consequences of MP use for pupils?

Conclusions

The research did not only reveal some aspect of MP use among youth, but also showed some hazards and risks connected to it. Uncritical use of MPs can cause issues that intensify over the years; hence, conscientious awareness and consistency are needed in stressing the potential dangers and risks of MP use. Although the results cannot be generalized to the entire population, they are valuable, since they reveal some negative aspects of MP use among young people in practice, issues to which parents, teachers and other authorities should pay particular attention. Based on these results, it would be advisable to organize workshops and lectures in schools that do not already have such programs for pupils. The experts holding the workshops would base them on pupils' practical skills. Pupils would be educated and informed about dangers of using MP (e.g. non-substance addiction, nomophobia) and the importance of having and keeping real life contacts, friendships and socializing, all of which can prevent and protect youth from the negative consequences of uncritical MP use. Such activities could be implemented in homeroom classes as well, where pupils would be included in activities (e.g., preparing projects, making posters, attending lectures on responsible and safe MP use). These workshops would also be beneficial for teachers.

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