Teenagers and Their Addiction to Computer

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Abstract

Computer addiction of the teenagers seems to have become an important issue over the last 15 years in Romania, and it is still insufficiently analysed in our country. Our objective was to identify the incidence of computer addiction in a group of teenagers from a high-school in Bucharest and to pinpoint a series of characteristics. We gathered general data on our subjects: their background economical situation, health condition. The investigation methods were: CIDC and the 20 Items Scale, Draw-a-Tree, Draw-a-Person and Raven’s Progressive Matrices tests. Our subjects who accepted to participate to our study do not manifest the characteristics specific for the psycho-pathological personality. There is however a high risk of developing such an addiction when speaking of pupils, but still latent.

1. Introduction

In Romania, for the past two decades, the techno-scientific and socio-economical events have evolved at an incredibly high speed. Changes, generated by the new global socio-economical context, have been often adopted without a careful examination of all the repercussions. Several improvements, that needed almost 50 years to be implemented in the USA, entered the lives of the Romanians in less than 15 years, the Romanians proving able to obtain similar performances. From this point of view, computers surely represent a good example.

It seems that social pathologies are beginning to surface in cyberspace – roughly called technological addictions. We have quite little empirical evidence that computing activities are truly addictive. There is,
however, an indication that the typical "addict" is a teenager, usually male, with little or no social life, and little or no self-confidence.

Also, problems related to lengthy Internet use should be considered within the conceptual framework of addiction. Howard J. Shaffer Ph.D. says: “It is argued that empirical support for the construct validity of computer addiction has yet to emerge, that defining the construct as a unique psychiatric disorder is therefore premature, and that, in most cases, excessive computer use may be symptomatic of other, more primary disorders. Greater caution and rigor are urged in investigating and treating problems related to intemperate computer use.”[1]

Thus, the computer addiction of the teenagers seems to have become an important issue, insufficiently analyzed in our country, so far. Avoiding it, or at least minimizing the computer addiction, becomes a must in the educational progress of youngsters, especially from the psycho-pedagogical perspective. [2]

Our objective for this micro-study is to identify the incidence of computer addiction in a group of teenagers from a high-school in Bucharest and to pinpoint a series of characteristics, common to those presenting such an addiction.

Computer addiction cannot be considered simply as a relationship between an individual and the plastic box of the computer, it has to be understood as an inter-relation between a subject and the content of the topic conveyed through the computer. Moreover, several other aspects should be taken into consideration: family background (including economical status, family relations, presence of both parents into the life of the teenager, IQ scores of the parents and their education, etc.), data concerning the adolescent (school records, IQ score, temperament and personality, presence or lack of friends in his/her life, physical appearance, educational environment, etc.).

Anyway, before even speaking of a computer addiction, our adolescent has to have at least sufficient financial means to get a PC at home, along with an internet connection and the possibility to be online without being questioned by his parents or the person who takes care of him. In many cases, parents missing from home a long period of the day (due to their long work program) offer the adolescent enough space to do what he/she wants to do. Starting with a new game, (usually boys) teenagers find themselves quickly immersed in this cyberspace, where the only ability asked for is the ability to work with the keyboard. From there on, our teenager might consider himself the best fighter, or whatever else – his real abilities do not matter anymore.

That is why the most frequent problems are related to internet (social networks, games, on-line shopping, etc.).

In brief, we tried to realize a presentation of the informational materials referring to: addiction to computer, to the on-line community, to sex in the virtual space, to virtual relationships, to informational overloading and pathological gambling. Needless to say, all aspects should demonstrate once again that all features specific to addiction must be present in this case too, as an addictive personality is first and foremost a vulnerable personality, with needs far beyond what reality could offer.

Our study is based on a static descriptive examination of the facts (we used SPSS) and also a qualitative review of the content.

We also built a special test, to be given to our subjects (CIDC) and two projective tests: The Draw-a-Tree Test and Draw-a-Person Test (DAP).

With the help of CIDC we obtained general data on our subjects, information concerning their background economical situation, health condition, elements on their leisure time as well as a scale of 20 items that concern the subjective experience of time [3] (Ruxandra Rășcanu, 2003).

2. Objectives

- Proving the existence of a relationship between the addiction and the time spent in front of a computer, given the family situation;
- Observing the relationship between the hobby and the computer addiction;
- Identifying the relationship between the gender of the subject and the time spent in front of a computer.
3. Hypotheses of our research:

- We consider there is a positive relationship between the addiction phenomenon and the time spent in front of a computer.
- We consider there is a negative relationship between the hobby and the computer addiction.
- We think there is a positive/negative relationship between male/female gender and how both genders choose to spend their time in front of a computer.
- We suppose there is a connection between the economical situation and the family background versus the computer addiction.

4. Methodology

The number of subjects we studied: 33 high-school students, from the “Iuliu Maniu” Technical College in Bucharest, 17 boys and 16 girls. The number of subjects might seem small, but they were the only students from that high school who accepted to participate to our study. It is the main reason that prevented us from extending our results to the entire population of students and pupils, as the sample is too small. However, our study can be considered a small exploratory research.

The investigation methods we used were: CIDC and the 20 Items Scale used to observe the subjective experience of time, Draw-a-Tree (DAT) test and Draw-a-Person (DAP) test [4], the Raven’s Progressive Matrices.

The 20 Items Scale we used (the CIDC test) could not be validated for the entire Romanian population, since the number of subjects was too small, not to mention that a validation process requires a set of actions that we were not able to take at that moment. What we needed was an instrument to obtain some concrete data that could be used in a further research study. Our test was a condensed anamnesis.

Raven's Progressive Matrices (often referred to simply as Raven's Matrices) or RPM, is a nonverbal group test typically used in educational settings. It is made of 60 multiple choice questions, listed in order of difficulty. This format is designed to measure the IQ scores. It comprises five sets (A to E) of 12 items each (e.g., A1 through A12), with items within a set becoming increasingly difficult, requiring ever greater cognitive capacity to encode and analyze information. Initially easy, the difficulty of the items increases gradually, in the end the items need abstracting operations and dynamic syntheses to be solved. We chose this test for our study since it is an intelligence test valid for the Romanian population, easy to be applied to groups of subjects.

5. A Short Interpretation of the Study

Our hypotheses were investigated through the tests we administrated to the subjects and we obtained the necessary data to have a final solution.

Both projective tests we used (DAT and DAP) offered an image of the personality of our subjects, due to a list of items other studies might investigate further:

- Forms used in the drawings;
- The lines – stronger or thinner;
- The content, to be classified according to a scale;
- Reproductive imagination – as recording through restructuring of the prior elements;
- Creative imagination – as innovation of forms, for what is unknown, or as anticipation of what is supposed to be;
- Emotional saturation of the image;
- Explanations offered by the subject.
We must emphasize that the results obtained following the two projective tests were qualitative results, not quantitative ones, no percentage results being possible – our group had less than 100 subjects.

6. Results

Thus, according to our hypotheses for the female subjects, we obtained confirmation as follows: a hobby seems not to be an essential factor for starting or supporting the computer addiction (for 13 subjects); and for our male subjects the confirmed hypothesis is the one concerning the relationship between computer addiction and time frame (16 subjects).

For our subjects the economical status of the family members, family background and hobbies are used as an indicator for social insertion, competitiveness and group membership and computer addiction might be a secondary effect (for 30 out of the 33 subjects, economical standards of the family were high and the social insertion was also a good one).

Strictly speaking of the classical computer addiction, our subjects (33 high school students, 17 boys/16 girls, aged between 16-17) do not manifest the characteristics specific for the personality profile given in DSM IV TR [5], but here is a high risk to develop such an addiction when speaking of pupils, since it may be considered latent for now, depending on a set of factors and our group of study does not allow such a generalization.

Moreover, many of our subjects were highly intelligent adolescents (IQ scores between 83% and 98%), with good school results, interested in various domains, skilled with all kinds of new technological devices, more integrated in the reality of nowadays life that one would expect. Quick response to stimuli was another gain for these teenagers. We also noted that our subjects, most of them intelligent, prefer to play games that need the activation of the intellectual content rather than dexterity. As we all know, there are three types of games on the internet: strategy, shooter and general knowledge. Most of our subjects (30 out of 33) admitted to play strategy games (mostly the boys – 16 out of 17) and general knowledge games (mostly the girls: 14 out of 16).

From the subjects’ responses to CIDC we conclude that 30 subjects out of the 33 spend at least 5 hours a day in front of the computer, on normal days (when they also go to school in the morning or in the afternoon) and even more at the end of the week or in vacation.

From our data it results that, even if parents admonish their children, trying to make them spend less time in front of a computer, those addicted to games or other activities on-line do not accept this addiction and they are proud of their results (IQ scores and school performance).

Thus, all questions concerning the entire population of Romanian teenagers remain unanswered and further researches would have to take into consideration this subject – we should keep in mind that teenagers have great difficulty in choosing the right paths, since their personality is hardly a completed one.

7. Conclusions

Investigating computer addiction present even in a latent form to the high school students may present itself as one facet of the research, from a psycho-social perspective.

A deeper investigation, conducted on larger groups of teenagers is necessary in order to observe the dynamics between how they chose to spend their time and how immersed they are in the activities offered by a computer.

If we take into consideration the girls, our micro-study represents a “flash” of the necessary information on the lack of hobbies as risk factors for developing computer addiction.

As for the young students, relevance of the information we obtained is related to anticipating the computer addiction as secondary effect of the social competition.

Temptation to use the computer does not generate, as a rule, a change of the personality, as in developing addiction, but the technical gains induce not only “performances” but also a deep knowledge of the bio-psycho-socio-cultural development of the teenager.
Drugs addiction, alcohol addiction, sex addiction, food addiction, smoking, work addiction – later, alongside these well known addictions, computer addiction has come to pressure again the vulnerable youngsters, even if their families do not encourage such deviations from the normal behavior. Again, a perfectly safe habit could become a weapon that triggers another addiction, as Serban Cristian also noted in his study. [6]

References


