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Parents’ Notions of the Internet Information Aimed at Children

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Abstract
The article describes the results of the study aimed at analyzing the content of the internet information which in parents’ eyes is harmful for their children’s health and development. The survey embraced 230 parents of 0-6s, 6-12s, 12-16s, and 6-18s. Among the notions associated with dangerous online information there is content involving sex, violence and cruelty, inability to control their child’s access to the internet, the internet advertising and information products provoking negative emotions. The authors also revealed differences in parents’ notions of what is dangerous in the internet information, and this differentiation depends on children’s age.

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Keywords: the internet, dangerous content, inappropriate online advertising, semantic field.

1. Introduction

The modern stage of Russia’s society development is characterized by a fast growing advance of new information technologies. The result of it is that reception, storage, processing, dissemination, use of information and knowledge together with technical potentialities of communication play a crucial role in people interaction. Technological progress in all spheres of human activity provokes modifications of co-operation, transforms communications and social networks. It is the internet that serves as a catalyst in society informatization and people relationships. As the case stands, the internet penetrates all the multi-dimensional social space and represents an absolutely different (in its meaning and quality) facet where various social fields meet. The world witnesses that manifold human activities interfuse, the internet technologies have made their presence felt in every sphere of our life, be it economy, society, culture, politics, education, as well as everyday life and leisure. Sociological aspects of the Internet study and society virtualization have been documented in the works of M. Castells, R. Klind, N. Luhmann, philosophic aspects have been considered in the works of G. Barlow, E. Drexler.

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G. Andrews, and also of A. Vasyutin, V. Novak, E. Saburov, V. Tarasenko, V. Terin, L. Tiraspol’sky; psychological aspects have been explored by S Levinson, K. Olafson, B. O’Neil, V. Donoso, J. Suler, Y. Babaeva, E. Belinskaya, A. Voiskunsky, V. Nesterov, O. Smyslova. However, in the field of psychology there exist few papers devoted to the study into positive/negative effects on children’s development as perceived by adults [1].

The rise in digital competence means the formation of corresponding digital culture which nowadays has become a part of everyday culture. This culture should not be subject only to legislation and taboos but also to ethic behavior and safety norms worked out by the digital society members. Those adults who have not mastered digital culture themselves have to absorb and to shape it in collaboration with children who have already adopted it but still need parental aid and support [2]. Metropolis schoolchildren have been used to surf the internet for information and communication. On the one hand, it provides a wide range of opportunities for teenagers to develop and express themselves. On the other hand, it brings about new challenges [3].

«It is opinion of many that nowadays in Russia a certain “Pepsi” generation is sustainably being formed. Its motto is “take everything from life” (you deserve it!), the generation for whom a brand value of sparkling water, cellular phone or toilet water equals the value of a scientific breakthrough, a master-piece or healthy life style» [4]. U. Parfyonov, a coordinator of Safe Internet Centre, brought to notice a shortage of positive online content. Enticing, perceptual and useful content of positive character could and should act as “threat-substituting” one. “The content we have now does not catch children attention since vast knowledge and considerable funds are required to achieve this. There is lack of incentives to create positive content which might be capable of distracting kids from any free surfing <…>As for the struggle against illegal content dissemination its alliance with information-educational activities can be observed in the tendency to make up so-called “white lists”, i.e. the creation of danger-free cyber space for children. The greatest challenge of these “white lists” is that we have nothing to fill them in: there is physically no child-oriented useful content” [5].

Poly-content nature of the internet demonstrates that its information-telecommunication space is dynamically divided into certain user groups, communities, clubs, etc. «Personal relationships are not institutionalized, hence their sensitivity to environment changes and fluctuations in regarding others as among “theirs”» [6]. The internet children-users enjoy several identities and they create groups on the basis of relevant opportunities for identification. Thus, in the course of this there occurs communicative institutionalization of identification and intra-group differences ignoring.

2. Method

The goal of the study is to define the internet information products detrimental to children’s health and development. Methods of empirical data collection: questionnaire, free associations technique (a “go-word” is “content dangerous for Your child”). The results obtained were processed with the help of factor analysis. Factor analysis was carried out with the use of centroid method, varimax rotation and “SPSS 11.0” package. The sample: parents with children of the following age groups: a) 0-6s; b) 6-12s; c) 12-16s; d) 16-18s. The survey was administered to 230 adults, 120 males, 110 females, with higher education. The parents age (average age is 45,12; standard deviation 6,24 years). The respondents had to satisfy these requirements: 1. Diploma of higher education; 2. The internet use frequency – every day, almost every day; 3. Competent internet users in their own opinion.

3. Results

The most common associations with the word combination “online content dangerous for Your child” were the following ones: “pornography” (33% of respondents), “dirty adverts” (26%), “violence” (24%), “social networks” (24%), “sects” (22%), “shooter games” (18%), “nationalistic literature” (17%), “accidents and
violence sites” (15%), “multiplayer online games” (15%), “aggression” (11%).

In addition, supplementary analysis of the respondents’ associations gave the opportunity to single out notion groups related to dangerous information products. Among these groups the principal ones are:

1. **Sex-associated content** (pornography, erotic magazines, indecency, porno-sites, sex-pictures, propaganda of sex minority lifestyle) – 34% of all associations;

2. **Violence and cruelty – oriented content** (violence, violent scenes, aggression, vandalism, war, wounds, dead bodies, extremism, gangsterism, murders, accidents and violence sites) – 29% of all associations;

3. **Information products related to inability to control children’s appropriate behavior online** ( uncontrollability, the internet environment, discretion to act in the internet, parental guidance (no), the uncensored – 15% of all associations;

4. **The Internet advertising** (dirty ads, sex products ads, extreme sports advertising, aggressive political advertising) – 8% of all associations;

5. **The internet content provoking negative emotions** (bluntness, boredom, mud, stupidity, negative stuff) – 5% of all associations.

Therefore, parents see as extremely dangerous their children’s online exposure to the following groups of inappropriate content: 1. Abundance of sex-related products; 2. Violence and cruelty – oriented content; 3. Inability to mediate their children online behavior; 4. The internet advertising; 5. Low skillfulness of information piping.

The analysis of the notion “dangerous information products” based on the score mean values was extended and supplemented by factor analysis. It was prompted by the fact that for the given survey’s purposes it was necessary to determine not only dominant, hierarchical relations between the associations expressed and their appropriate allocation according to their meaning (vertical axis) but also their semantics allowing us to group them into separate blocks and factors. To achieve this associations factoring was carried out, which made it possible to identify inner differentiation and semantic structure of dangerous information products in the respondents’ consciousness.

Considering associations of parents with children of different age (0-6s, 6-12s, 12-16s and 16-18s) the first place in all the groups is given to “pornography”, then comes “violence” and finally – “dirty online advertising”.

Table 1. Associations with the notion “content hazardous to Your child”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents of 0-6s</th>
<th>Parents of 6-12s</th>
<th>Parents of 12-16s</th>
<th>Parents of 16-18s</th>
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<td>Pornography</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dirty online adverting</td>
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<td>Violence</td>
<td>Social networks</td>
<td>Social networks</td>
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<td>Violence scenes</td>
<td>Shooter-games</td>
<td>Sectarians</td>
<td>Nationalistic literature</td>
</tr>
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<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Multiplayer online games</td>
<td>Accidents and violence sites</td>
<td>Erotic magazines</td>
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<td>Cruelty</td>
<td>Violence scenes</td>
<td>Prohibited sites</td>
<td>Astrologists and mentalists</td>
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<td>Indecency</td>
<td>Murders</td>
<td>Sex products advertising</td>
<td>Vandalism</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The internet environment</strong></td>
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| Note: Associations in bold type are typical of these particular age groups. The sample: parents with children-the internet users |
The older a child is, the more differentiated the risks of internet content become in parents’ opinion. While parents of 0-6s describe online dangers in general terms (aggression, cruelty, indecency), with years not only a child’s activity as an online user grows, it also gets coupled with parents’ range of fears amplification.

**Parents of 0-6s**

In the course of factor-analytical processing of associations obtained in the 0-6s’ parents group 6 significant factors were singled out. The first factor with 26,26% of total variance is made up of the following associations: “aggression” .99, “ambiguity” .99, “indecency” .99, “cruelty” .99, “violence” .99. The content of the factor makes it possible to treat it as “Danger to shape inadequate social stereotypes”. The second factor (21,39% share of total variance) presents these associations: “violence scenes” .99, “dead bodies” .99, “wounds” .99. This factor content allows us to interpret it as “Savoring death images”. The third factor accounting for 16,55% of total variance includes these associations: “negative stuff” .99, “the uncensored” .99. This makes it possible to name it “Negative information”. The fourth factor (12,73% of total variance) embraces the following associations: “spam-windows” .98, “pornography” .72. The factor’s content enables us to interpret it as “Sexual fixation”. The fifth factor with 8,16% contribution to total variance includes these associations: “accidents and violence sites” .80, “social networks” .75. The content of the factor gives the opportunity to name it “Social web-based networking and web-chat”. The sixth factor, a bipolar one, with 6,89% of total variance is represented by the following association: “modern movies” .72. The opposite pole of the factor has the association “freedom to operate online” -.75. The content of the factor makes it possible to treat it as “Freedom to operate online”.

![Fig. 1. Semantic field of associations with the notion “content hazardous to Your child”.](image)

**The sample:** Parents with children of 0 to 6 years old

The semantic field (see Fig 1) formed by the combination of the two leading factors “Danger to shape inadequate social stereotypes” and “Savoring death images” sets perception realm of information products which 0-6s’ parents consider hazardous to their children’s health and development. “Real danger zone” appeared to be empty, which speaks of immediate risks’ absence in parents’ view. In contrast, “Potential risks zone” is full of associations (“pornography”, “violence”, “negative stuff”, “dirty online advertising”, “social networks”), which testifies to the fact that parents are aware of potential risks facing their children in future.

**Parents of 6-12s**

Factor-analytical processing of associations obtained in the 6-12s’ parents group resulted in marking 3 significant factors. The first factor with 44,57% of total variance is made up of the following associations: “shooter games” .97, “multiplayer online games” .97. The content of the factor makes it possible to treat it as “Multiplayer online games”. The second factor is a bipolar one, with 23,99% share of total variance. Its positive pole presents these associations: “social networks” .65, “modern movies” .65, “violence scenes” .65. The
opposite pole includes: “murders” -.81, “violence” -.76. This factor content allows us to interpret it as “Violence and cruelty”. The third bipolar factor contributes to 16.11% of total variance. Its positive pole embraces the association “pornography” .88. Its opposite pole has these items: “erotic magazines” -.80, “cartoons with fights and violence” -.64. The factor’s content enables us to interpret it as “Sexual fixation”.

The location of associations in the semantic field demonstrates the dimension of associations triggered by the notion “content hazardous to Your child” as perceived by parents of 6-12s. As shown in the figure 2 “Real danger zone” made up by factors “Multiplayer online games” and “Violence and cruelty” embraces such associations as “shooter games”, “multiplayer online games”, “violence scenes”. It means that in terms of risk parents put their children’s urge to play online games and web-chat first. “Potential risks zone” is filled with such associations as “Pornography”, “erotic magazines” and “violence”.

Parents of 12-16s

As a result of factor-analytical processing of free association method findings obtained in the group of parents with 12-16 old children 2 significant factors were identified. The first factor is a bipolar one (57.93% share of total variance), its positive pole involves this association: sectarians .99. The opposite pole is made of Rambler -.99, sex products online advertising -.99, the internet environment -.99. The content of the factor makes it possible to treat it as “Cyber bulling and mystic manipulation”. The second bipolar factor accounting for 35.72% of total variance includes these associations in its positive pole: social networks .84, accidents and violence sites .84, pornography .57. The opposite pole of the second factor has these associations: dirty online advertising -.91,
prohibited sites - .91. This factor’s content allows us to treat it as “Danger of exposure to negative content” such as sites about drugs, hostile attitude sites, suicide sites.

Semantic field (see Fig 3) analysis shows that in the “real risk zone” formed by factors “Cyber bulling and mystic manipulation” and “Danger of exposure to negative content” “pornography”, “social networks”, “accidents and violence sites” are placed and connected with each other. The association “sectarians” also appears in this zone. “Potential risk zone” hosts such associations as “sex product online advertising” and “the internet environment”.

**Parents of 16-18s**

In the course of factor-analytical processing of associations obtained in the 16-18s’ parents group 5 significant factors were singled out. The first factor with 35.69% of total variance includes these associations: “erotic magazines” .98, “surrogate motherhood propaganda” .98, “sex-pictures in the internet” .98, “propaganda of sexual minorities lifestyle” .98, “porno sites” .53. The content of the first factor allows us to treat it as “Shaping of false attitudes and values”. The second factor accounting for 26.44% of total variance is made up of the following associations: “sites on ingenious arms making” .99, “violence” .98, “suicide sites” .98. This factor content makes it possible to see it as “Danger of being taught to particular techniques and methods of asocial behavior”. The third factor with 19.06% share of total variance has these associations: “vandalism” .97, “the uncensored” .97, “gangsterism” .97. Conditionally this factor can be named “Asocial orientation”. The fourth factor, a bipolar one, constitutes 11.18% of total variance. Its positive pole has the following associations: “nationalistic literature” .65, “pornography” .65. The opposite pole is represented by these associations: “glamour” -.90, “extremism” -.64. The content of this factor enables us to interpret it as “Motivational superinducement”, which involves “to-take-without – giving-in-return” attitude, high-living, pseudo-religiousness, criminal beliefs. The fifth bipolar factor with 7.60% share of total variance embraces such an association in its positive pole as: “sectarians” .65. The opposite pole includes the following: “astrologists and mentalists” -.89, “dirty online advertising” -.73. This factor can be interpreted as “Cyber bulling and mystic manipulation”.

“Real danger zone” (see Fig 4) consisting of «Shaping of false attitudes and values” and “Danger of being taught to particular techniques and methods of asocial behavior” factors proved to be empty, which can be the evidence of “apperceptive blindness” towards danger, a very important matter ignoring. Total denial and suppression of probable exposure to danger online can speak of either repressive mechanism of psychological defense, or of complete trust of 16-18s’ parents in their children. At the same time “Potential risks zone” is filled
4. Discussion

The results of the survey conducted give us the opportunity to draw the following conclusions:

1. In parents’ view dangerous information products include: abundance of sex-associated information products; information products demonstrating violence and cruelty; inability to control their children’s internet use and behavior; online advertising and unskilled online content management.

2. Parents of 0-6s do not see the internet as a pressing threat and immediate danger, however, they consider the following forms of the internet content to be potentially hazardous to their children’s health and development: Shaping of inadequate social stereotypes; Savoring death images online; Negative stuff; Sexual fixation; Social web-based networking and web-chat; Freedom to operate online; Aggression, cruelty and indecency.

3. Parents of 6-12s perceive the following types of threats to their children’s health and development: Multiplayer online games, shooter games; Violence and cruelty in the internet; Social networking. These parents see pornography and sexual fixation as potential threats.

4. Among parents of 12-16s two forms of online information products are seen as potentially dangerous: Pornography; Social networking.

5. For parents of 16-18s the internet use does not seem to be really hazardous in terms of their children’s health and development. It can be explained either by their low awareness or by confidence in their children’s ability to cope with difficulties once they come across them.

Still, parents indicate potential dangers to their children’s health and development as follows: False attitudes and values shaping; Danger of being taught to particular techniques and methods of asocial behavior; Asocial orientation; Motivational superinducement; Bullying and mystic manipulation; Nationalistic literature; Vandalism, extremism, gangsterism.

Thus, as perceived by parents the information products disseminated via the internet is full of content-associated risks, and children of all age groups are likely to be exposed to them. In parents’ view, all forms of online product are risk-bearing: social networks, online games, blogs, etc.

References