

Internet and Children: Revisiting the Relation on an Old Paper

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The late 90s were when Internet studies started emerging in Turkey. Until then, television had been the subject of many academic studies and, as the unique exciting new media, was related mainly with academicians in Communication Faculties. Television was regarded as mass media and examined within the context of family relations. “Digital” was not a word until TV channels moved to the digital broadcasting system. Therefore television has played a rather humble role in entering the new era of digitalization. Television was not a “trick” but rather a “treat” and we have come to use the word “threat” for the medium of the Internet, not computers.

For this issue of *Addicta*, I wanted to reflect on my first study on *Internet and Children* (1999), an oral presentation which, as far as I am aware, has the very first use of the words internet and children together in an academic conference or study.

I am an academician in the field of Computer Education and Instruction Technologies (CEIT), established in 1998 within the Education Faculties of Universities in Turkey. I started my academic track in 1987 with an MA in English Language Teaching and continued with a PhD in Educational Technology. I have always preferred teaching to technology and working with children to adults, so whenever I have encountered a technology, I have researched its benefits for children. When I became liberation as an academician, I had no more supervisors or juridical requirements; I decided to work with and for children in terms of my field of CEIT. Thus, this 1999 presentation is the first product of this decision of mine.

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The Presentation: Internet and Children

The presentation was delivered in Eskişehir Anadolu University in a symposium between April 13-15, 1999. The symposium was called “The Child as an Individual in the Communication Media;” all presentations and opening remarks by the Rector and the Dean have been published by Anadolu University under the same name as the symposium. I will try to summarize the information given in this presentation under its main headings alongside my current reflections.

The Abstract

The most current communication technology, Internet, presents some defective uses for children. Inappropriate language or images may harm children who work with the Internet. This article tries to outline the hazards for children and recommendations for avoiding them.

Current reflection. I would use neither the word defective (to be more politically correct) nor presents, as now I understand that the Internet does not present but rather contains. My idea to outline the hazards as a first step remains the same, as do my recommendations. I have never relied on just listing the hazards without advising anything to overcome them. I also have never given credit to the opinion that the Internet is not the problem but the parents or teachers who take it too pessimistically.

Definition of Internet

Internet is a technology that seems to underline the 20th century. Far beyond being a global library, it is a medium of study, communication, broadcasting, and commerce.

Current reflection. I would also emphasize entertainment, considering its use now. In fact, this selfsame issue has been my main consideration over the past years. As for as I am concerned, if you take entertainment in the child’s life from being an outdoor activity to being the “In”ternet, you will lose the child. Both children’s physical and psychological wellbeing rest in outdoor activities, which should naturally be their source of entertainment throughout their life.

The Advance of Internet

The Internet does not give any clue about how it will progress. Because it has no central control or governance, countries should work to protect and preserve their language, identity, culture, and values.

Reflection. I still believe the same. However, I also desperately feel that 19 years of Internet use in Turkey have not provided much value or culture-added benefit, especially regarding children. Turkish content seems to be increasing, though just in quantity not in quality.

What Are the Threats for Children?

The threats the Internet has for children are no different than any other media. Television programs and newspapers may also deliver violent or inappropriate content to children.

Reflection. The threats the Internet carries are *different*; television and newspapers are editorial media, whereas Internet is an interactive and uncontrolled medium. TV programs and newspapers cannot reach out to children and direct them. Recent news on the *Internet of Toys* and the Blue Whale Challenge are enough to become fairly alarmed for children. Meanwhile, parental control is weaker regarding the Internet due to its potential anywhere and anytime.

Who Should Guide Children for a Safe Internet?

The primary protection should come from educators and families.

Reflection. This statement was correct for 1999, when computers and, as such, the Internet began being in schools. We even advised that children should be seated in pairs in computer labs for efficient peer control. Now, only parents should be the ones to bear this responsibility, as the parents are the ones who decide to buy a smartphone or get an Internet connection and give it to the child.

Conclusion

Now, only 1999 seems to have been possible for presenting such a broad topic as Internet and Children! This is akin these days to presenting a study call *The World and Children*. The Digital Age has come with many facets, as does any age. However, this age carries less-clearly defined aspects, of which the Internet is a good presentation. Anymore, academicians should be concerned with many questions, such as:

What is truth? Who holds the truth?

Who is consent for? Children or families?

What is a right? What is freedom?

What is safety? What does censoring do?

What is protection? What is being provided?

What is the Internet? What is the world?