

MOBILE PHONE USAGE TRENDS AMONG TEENAGERS: A USES AND GRATIFICATION PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Cell phones have become an integral part of everyone's life. Children, adolescents and adults have been using smart phones for communication, entertainment and also for learning new things. It is evident that the Covid 19 pandemic has accelerated cell phone usage and internet access considerably. Today, smart phones have become a small portable computer that can be carried and used easily. Teens across India use cell phones for entertainment, to connect with others and also to learn and explore new things. Smart phone addiction among teenagers is a growing concern among parents. Students use cell phone for playing games, texting and calling each other even when the classes are in progress. There does not seem to be any gender difference in the usage of cell phone. In fact, some studies reveal that girls use cell phone more than boys. The current study conducted using interview and group discussion method on the cell phone usage pattern among teenagers in schools in the semi-urban areas in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India, corroborates that there are no significant gender differences in cell phone access and usage among boys and girls. Also, the study reveals that teenagers are aware of the harmful effects of excessive cell phone usage. The study further revealed that irrespective of the family income or parents' education level, teenagers had access to cell phones and they knew how to use it.

KEYWORDS: cell phone usage, cell phone addiction, uses and gratification, teenage media consumption.

INTRODUCTION

Cell phones have become an integral part of people's life. Smart phone is an inevitable part of today's life and it helps in understanding people's behaviour (Tawade, 2019). Today, smart phones have become a small portable computer that can be carried and used easily. The Covid 19 pandemic has taken cell phone use and internet access to next level. Mobile phones, laptops and tablets were extensively used during the pandemic. Parents who denied mobile phone access to children and teens had to relent and provide them smart phones as the world survived on it then. Mobile devices have replaced laptops and computers as primary devices and also children and teens entrust high level of security in mobile phones (McAfee, 2022). As per the study, smartphone use in India among children and teens of ages 10-14 is 83 per cent, which is 7 per cent higher than the international average of 76 per cent. A significant percentage of them are engaged in private conversations with people without knowing their actual identity. In another study, it was found that excessive mobile phone usage may also cause severe physical and mental health complications such as depression, anxiety, OCD, reduced physical fitness, pain and migraines, alcohol use disorder, ADHD, reduced cognitive control, and changes in the brain gray matter volume among adolescents and young adults (Wacks & Weinstein, 2021).

Teens across India use cell phones for entertainment, to connect with others and also to learn and explore new things. India has emerged as a growing market for mobile phone use among the teens. Parents are a determining factor of support to purchase mobile phones (Ahad & Anshari, 2017). Teens receive their first phone mostly from their parents at a young age. Researchers have pointed out that teenagers have had their first phone as early as at the age of 11 (Dayani & Anshari, 2017). Smart phone addiction among teenagers is a growing concern among parents. Students use mobile phone for playing games, texting and calling each other even when the classes are in progress. Studies have revealed that gender differences are not to be found in mobile phone usage pattern and cell phones are most predominantly used to connect with others (Vaidya, 2016). On the other hand, a study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2010) on teen cell phone users revealed that girls used mobile phones more than boys for connecting with other people. Similarly, in another study, teen girls spent more time on their phones compared to boys, showing significant difference in pattern of mobile phone usage (Taywade & Khubalkar, 2019). High usage of mobile phone among adolescents is an indication of public health concern too (Gangadharan et al., 2022). Excessive usage of mobile phones can harm physical and mental health of its users. It is important to recognise and identify early the harmful effects of inappropriate use of mobile phone among young users (Nikhita et al., 2015). Stakeholders such as teachers, mentors, and government institutions should create awareness among parents and students regarding the etiquettes and addiction potential of mobile phones (Patel, 2021). Many studies have identified mobile phone usage and pattern among teenagers using Uses and Gratification theory (Ahmed et al., 2021; Kunene & Tsibolene, 2017; Ahad & Anshari, 2017). On similar lines, the current study has been conducted through the theoretical framework of Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory to find out how teenagers use smart phones and what gratifications they seek from smart phones.

USES AND GRATIFICATION THEORY

Uses and Gratification theory is an age-old theory that discusses how people use media for various needs and feel satisfied when their needs are fulfilled. The theory was originally formulated in early 1940s by Katz and Blumer (Liu, 2015). This theory conceives audience as active, unlike other theories wherein audiences are conceived as passive in nature. Several previous studies on teenagers and their cell phones usage have applied U&G theory to support their findings (Tsibolane & Kunene, 2017; Ahad et al., 2017; Hostut, 2010; Ali et al., 2020). U&G approach is an audience-centric theory; however, it is not necessarily conservative as it simultaneously caters to the needs of the audience and also brings into view the variety of needs and interests encompassed by the media (Katz et al., 1974). The emergence of computer-mediated communication has re-established the importance of U&G theory and it is still relevant in analysing new media trends such as social media (Ruggiero, 2009; Bahfiarti & Arinto, 2022). Media dependency theory is an extension to the U&G approach. This theory states that the more dependent an individual is on a media for having his or her needs satisfied, the more important that media will be to that person. Several previous research studies on mobile phone usage and pattern among adolescents and teenagers have analysed their findings based on this theory too (Dilip & Javalkar, 2018; Nikhita et al., 2015; Yadav et al., 2021). The present study has kept U&G and Dependency theory as frames of reference for its analysis.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cell phone is an essential gadget that has become a global phenomenon. Various research studies have been conducted on how cell phone has become important to children and teenagers. Some of the key findings from the previous research conducted are as follows:

Gender and cell phone usage

A study on mobile phone usage among youth (Vaidya, 2016) discussed how college going students between the age of 18 and 25 years in the Pune city used mobile phones. Among the 97 per cent of the students who used smartphones, the majority of them used it at night and 52.33 per cent checked their phones when a notification appeared. No gender differences were found as males and females were equally avid users of mobile phones. The study used questionnaire to collect the data.

Another study (Perry & Lee, 2008) stated that males were heavier users of text messaging than females. The study also stated that gender did not influence the addiction behaviour exhibited among the university students.

Cell phone usage among Taiwanese children showed only a small gender difference (Chiu, 2014). The cross-sectional study examined mobile phone usage pattern among children and possible health symptoms in Taiwan. Children showed a small gender difference and an evident geographical difference in their mobile phone use. Private school children used cell phones more than public school children. However, 27.6 per cent students said that peer pressure for use increased with age. Children were prone to more lifetime exposure to radiofrequency electromagnetic field as compared to adults. Thus, this study suggested restricting the access and usage of mobile phone among children.

A study by Tawayde & Khubalkar (2019) found that females were avid users of social networking sites, entertainment applications and security functions on smart phones. In their study, the authors found that males and females had significant differences in their mobile phone usage patterns. The study used purposive sampling and questionnaire method to elicit data from the samples.

A study by Digital Empowerment Foundation in 2021 revealed that gender plays a vital role in determining mobile phone access among teenagers (Dhar, 2021). This study found that in Haryana girls did not have easy access to mobile phones like boys and in Maharashtra among those who had easy access to mobile phones, 93 per cent were boys and 7 per cent were girls. Southern states fared better in impartial access to mobile phones among boys and girls.

Another study revealed that South African University students used mobile phone primarily for socialising, and also for safety and privacy purposes (North et al., 2014). The study also found that usability and price emerged as the top purchasing factor and female students had more interest in using mobile phones compared to their male counterparts. Female students also showed signs of addiction to mobile phone usage and used it significantly for security and socialising and to pursue their interest in brands and trends. Students also used mobile phones for setting alarm clock, listening music, clicking pictures and to keep diary and phone book.

Lenhart (2009) found that girls and boys from different races and ethnicity showed no difference in mobile phone ownership. However, girls between the age of 12 -17 had used phone for voice calling more than their male counterparts. Similarly, more than half the girls with cell phones talked daily on their cell phone, while 47 per cent of cell phone-owning boys reported the same. Sixty nine per cent parents of the girls checked their daughters' mobile phone content, compared to 59 per cent boys' parents.

In their study, (Lenhart et al., 2010) concluded that girls used mobile phones extensively compared to boys. Girls primarily used it for socialising and staying connected. However, parents of girls (56 per cent) said that they restricted the time their daughters spent on mobile phone, compared to 48 per cent of boys' parents. The study conducted through survey method also advocated that mobile phones may help bridge the digital divide in the US by providing internet access to less privileged teens.

Teens and mobile phone addiction

Mobile phone addiction is a serious issue that children, teens and adults face today. Studies have found that older teens who are more depressed are at a higher risk for smartphone addiction (Lee, 2018).

According to a study, about 50 per cent of teenagers felt that they were addicted to mobile phones. Also, 59 per cent of parents surveyed believed that their children were addicted to their devices (Common Sense Media Report, 2016). A report by Pew Research (2018) revealed that 45 per cent of teens used their phones almost constantly and they said they felt the urge to check and respond to every notification immediately. Yadav et al. (2022) revealed in their study that high mobile phone dependence has an unfavourable effect on the behaviour of teenagers and it also reduces their academic performance. This descriptive correlational study was conducted among adolescents in selected schools in Rishikesh, India. The study also suggested programmes to improve teens' mental health. On the other hand, Nikhita et al. (2015) suggest that the early diagnosis of mobile phone dependence (MPD) can prevent major public health concern among secondary school adolescence. This study determined that MPD is an emerging public health concern that needs to be addressed immediately through MPD surveys. It also discusses the significance of creating awareness, planning educational and treatment interventions.

In their study, Li & Lin (2019) identified four typical symptoms of smartphone addiction among young Chinese workers: withdrawal, salience, conflict and phantom phone signals. Another study found that youth were addicted to and easily distracted by their smart phones (Ahad et al., 2017). The study documented that youth's smartphone adoption was influenced by society and smart phone usage had both intended positive and unintended negative implications on the youth. Yet another study pointed out that addictive usage of technology among teenagers influenced academics, social relations, sports and it also created emotional difficulties (Rajanna et al., 2016). The study asserted that teenagers were addicted to video games, mobile phones and internet.

Mobile phone usage and health

A commentary on effects of mobile phones on children and adolescents has discussed the adverse effects of mobile phone usage on children and adolescents. Children have smaller head and thinner skull-bone and their brain tissues have higher absorption of radiofrequency radiation (Hardell, 2017). The study said that the children who were exposed to mobile phones had disturbed sleep, attention deficiency, sensitivity to stress and increased irritability, among many other serious conditions.

Mobile phone usage pattern

A descriptive cross-sectional study (Mathiaz et al., 2018) on mobile phone usage among youth in selected colleges in Mangalore, found that youth used mobile phones primarily for paying bills, messaging and calls. They also used it for banking, shopping and MMS services. Ahad & Anshari (2017) studied the U&G of mobile phone use among young smart phone users. The study discussed intended positive and unintended negative effects of mobile phone use and also how socio-economic and cultural values influence the youth in a society that is bound by Malay Islamic Monarchy concept. The data gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions stated that the tendency to own a phone was from the family. Youth used smart phones mostly for entertainment and for sharing information. They see it as a stress-reliever as it kills boredom and also as an affordable alternative to computers and laptops. They felt that to a great extent, smart phones had influenced their social and cultural values - particularly social lifestyle and clothing.

Kunena & Tsibolane (2017) examined how and why high school learners used mobile phone in Western Cape Province of South Africa. The study discussed the reasons to use mobile phones, mobile phone usage pattern and purchasing and behavioural factors. It was found that teenagers used mobile phone for entertainment, socialising and for sharing non-school related information. About 56 per cent of them opposed phone ban in schools.

Another statistical study on the impact of mobile phones on student life discussed about rapid adoption of mobile phones among young people and how parents perceived their children's mobile phone use (Nawaz, 2012). Sixty per cent of respondents wanted to upgrade their phones and they also saw it as a status symbol. They thought that mobile phones could help them to socially connect and become easily accessible for others. Sociability, reassurance and relaxation were the strongest reasons why students use mobile phones (Hostut, 2010). Younger students were more likely to use mobile phones compared to others. This study also found that the primary motivating factor in mobile phone usage was relationship building among Turkish students and not gaming or multimedia. The effects and motives of mobile phone use were more social and psychological than innovative or technical needs.

Maheswari (2021) conducted a comparative study on mobile phone usage pattern among urban and rural youth. The result indicated that youth used mobile phones mostly for entertainment and the least for social media. The factors that affected buying of a phone was mostly internet while the convenience of calling was the least priority.

In summary, some of the previous research studies indicate that gender influenced mobile phone usage among teenagers. However, there are several other studies that suggest gender had no role to play in determining teens' mobile phone usage. Teenagers from lower economic background were more likely to have mobile phones than computers. Mobile phone addiction is a major concern among teenagers and excessive usage of mobile phones led to stress, irritability and other serious health issues. Teenagers used their mobile phones predominantly for entertainment, socialising and relaxation.

OBJECTIVES AND METHOD

The primary objective of this study is:

To find mobile phone usage and pattern among teenagers in semi-urban areas of Thiruvananthapuram.

The secondary objective is:

To find if gender influenced teenagers' mobile phone usage pattern.

Operational Definitions

Smart phone addicts: Smartphone addicts are described as wanting to be in constant communication with other people even when there is no absolute need (Chang-sup, 2012).

Addiction: A compulsive, chronic, physiological or psychological need for a habit-forming substance, behavior, or activity having harmful physical, psychological, or social effects and typically causing well-defined symptoms (such as anxiety, irritability, tremors, or nausea) upon withdrawal or abstinence: the state of being addicted (Merriam-Webster.(n.d).

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study has interviewed 25 teenagers who had access to mobile phones. Teens who participated in the study were between the age 15-17 years (10th - 12th class students). These particular age groups were chosen as they were the older teens in the school. Teenagers who shared their phone with parents or siblings were also counted. The researcher conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) among these 25 students. The sample was taken from a CBSE school in the semi-urban area of Thiruvananthapuram district. Interviews and discussions were conducted in Malayalam language (mother-tongue) as teenagers could express their thoughts and ideas clearly in Malayalam. The same was later translated for this study.

The analysis was done on a thematic basis in five major themes: a) Education and Information; b) Personal Identity; c) Social Interaction and Relationships; d) Diversion and Entertainment; and e) Mood Management. These were identified from the data with reference to the U&G of mobile phone usage. Several previous research studies have integrated thematic analysis to understand Uses and Gratification from various media (Salihu et al., 2016; Baustista & Trisha, 2017; Lonsdale & North, 2010). Points mentioned during the FGD were also noted and analysed. Coding was done manually based on the transcripts of the interviews and discussions. The questions were open-ended and some other probing questions were also asked to elicit more information from the sample. Some of the questions asked were on issues such as: frequency of smart phone use; time spent; most frequent activity; awareness regarding harmful effects of mobile phone usage; addiction; identity; usage of mobile phone during meal time and the like. Students were asked to speak about their mobile phone usage in general and the researcher also asked questions that were prepared in advance.

DATA ANALYSIS

There were 13 female and 12 male students in the sample chosen. Eight respondents had family income less than rupees 20,000 per month and seven of them had more than rupees 50,000 per month. Parents of eight of them were graduates and parents of six of them were pre-degree holders; others had only higher secondary education as their highest education.

Mobile phone usage pattern

Ten respondents received their first phone as early as when they were 12 years of age. Mobile phone was introduced to teens by their family members. One of the teens said, "I got my first phone as a birthday gift and I was excited to receive it." Another one said, "I got it as a gift when I scored well in the board exam." Two of them got access to their mobile phone at the age of 10 and one of them at the age of 14. The majority of them in this study used their phone for sending messages (17); and only 8 of them used it more for making calls more than messaging. About 15 of them used their phones several times a day. They were always available on their phones after school hours. Phones were not allowed in schools, so none of them carried their phone to school. Three of them used their phones only when a notification popped up. About half of them used their phones mostly for entertainment purposes. They used it for watching movies, playing games and listening to music. About 13 of them checked their phones upon waking up in the morning. However, 17 of them kept their phone away from their bed while sleeping and none of them checked their phones in the middle of the night. Mobile phones were mostly used for making calls and texts, followed by entertainment such as watching movies, playing games and making Instagram reels. Only four of them used their phones for school work and assignments.

As regards the smart phone dependence, one of them said, "I usually use my phone to watch movies and chat with my friends. Although we meet at school every day, chatting over phone and discussing about the events that happened at school are quite entertaining." Another teen added, "My mom keeps asking me what is that you have to talk so much with your friends over phone? Don't you all meet at school?" Another respondent said, "My mobile phone is something that I value a lot in my life. I feel helpless if I don't carry my phone."

Respondents were also asked to speak about how they used their mobile phone for diversion from negative emotions. Teens considered their mobile phone as an excellent entertainment tool. Some of the responses were as follows: "Mobile phone is an excellent instrument for pastime. I use my phone to de-stress and divert from my routine life." "I play games on my phone and also just scroll down on my social media accounts to feel good and better. Sometimes it helps me forget my problems." "I love to watch movies on my phone. I can carry it anywhere I go. However, I hate getting notifications while I watch movies."

Although teens did not consider mobile phone as a status symbol, they believed it reflected one's personal identity. One of them said, "Mobile phone is a common thing and you can't judge anyone from the phone they use." Another said: "Mobile phone cannot be considered as a status symbol. It is just a gadget like another device". Others said: "I am so fascinated when I see people roaming around with an iPhone. Only rich people can own an iPhone. But, I know that it cannot be considered as a status symbol". "Knowledge about games and other apps on mobile phone help me identify myself with my peer group. If we don't know anything about that then we may be left out". However, a few of them said, "Mobile phone is like someone's personal diary and it reflects their identity. They might have much personal information on their phone." Another teen girl said, "I am okay to share my phone only with my close friends and mom; I don't like to share it with others as it contains my personal details. I share my phone only if I trust the person". Some of them also

accepted that their phone was their most precious asset. Some responses were: “My phone is my most precious possession”. “What is there in someone’s phone actually reflects who they are”.

With regard to social interaction, some of the responses were: “Mobile phone really helps me in preserving relationships. I can talk to my family and friends easily”. “Sometimes when I am sad and I am unable to talk openly, I text what I really feel. Mobile phone helps in maintaining healthy relations. Moreover, my parents can contact me easily when I am away”. Another teen said, “I can keep in touch with anyone at any time and it is easy to change plans and coordinate with friends”. Another had quite a different response: “I am an avid social media user; my phone helps me connect with people”. All the respondents said that they used their mobile phones for social interaction and also to stay connected with others. Most of the respondents said that they used mobile phone for seeking educational information. Surprisingly, none of them used it to read news. Some responses were as follows: “I don’t read news online on my phone; I don’t like it. To be honest, I don’t read news at all”. “I use mobile phone only to seek the information I need, and it is mostly school related work”. “I don’t use my phone to get information on current affairs. I follow only the news that I am interested in and in that case mobile phone is very useful”. “Without my phone I cannot work on my school assignments. Mobile phones are so easy to carry and it is easy to work on it”

Parental Control

Fifteen teenagers surveyed reported that parents controlled their children’s mobile phone use, monitoring the time they spent on the phone and also took their phone away as a punishment. A great majority of them didn’t have any objection to their parents checking their phones. One of them said, “Parents should check children’s phones as parents could save them from falling into any sort of danger”. However, another teenager was of the opinion that parents shouldn’t check their phones as they were intruding their privacy and security by doing so. Thirteen of them said that they were aware that their parents checked their phones. Twelve of them said they did not know if their parents checked their phones. Parents of girls were keener on checking their phones frequently than parents of boys.

Mobile phone dependency and addiction

Although more than half of the respondents checked their phones as soon as they woke up, 17 of them put their phones away before going to bed. Three respondents said that their friends and parents often told them that they were always fiddling with their mobile phones. Sixteen of them said they never used their phones during their meal time. They said that their parents never encouraged doing so. They would love to use their phones while eating if their parents had allowed. Others watched short films, accessed social media and chatted with friends during their meal time. One of the respondents said, “I like to watch some videos while eating, but my family has a rule that we shouldn’t use any gadgets during meal times”. Twenty four of them said they had secretly wished to limit their mobile phone use. One of the teen girls said, “Actually, I secretly wish to limit my phone usage, but every time I get a notification on my phone, I have this irresistible urge to check and reply immediately. I also expect others to reply to my message instantly. Twenty respondents also thought they were safe and secure when they carried their mobile phone as they could call their parents if there was an emergency. Eighteen of them said that they never considered mobile phone as a status symbol. “Mobile phone is a common thing and everyone has it today. So, I don’t see it as a status symbol,” added one of the respondents. However, i-phone holders were considered special and wealthy among others. About 20 teens were irritated when a message or call interrupted while studying or watching a movie, but had an urge to check their phones immediately. Meanwhile, 22 respondents couldn’t think of a day without using their phones. When asked if they suffered smart phone addiction, one of the teens said, “I don’t think so, but I think my parents believe so, especially if I say that I have a headache; instantly they associate my headache to my phone usage”. Another teen confessed, “Yes, I am addicted to my phone and I feel helpless when I don’t get to use my phone.” A significant number of respondents (22) was aware that they were addicted to smart phones and they secretly wished to limit their smart phone usage.

Parents’ education and family income

All the respondents had access to smart phones and they were avid users of cell phones. Parents’ education and family income had not influenced the mobile phone usage pattern. Parents had given their children mobile phone for educational and entertainment purposes. Teens themselves figured out how to use mobile phone and never asked their parents for any guidance. They said they discussed with their friends if they needed to know about any new application or technology in the phone. One of them even said that he helped his parents to use various applications on phone.

Harmful effects of mobile phone usage

The teenagers in the study reported that their parents and teachers often educated them on the harmful effects of mobile phone usage. Eight of them said they felt really irritated when their parents and teachers repeated about the same. Teens interviewed said that excessive usage of mobile phone could cause headache, depression, brain disorders and eye strain. “I leave my phone on the table when I go to bed; my teachers have told me that radiation from these gadgets is harmful”. Severe headache and eye strain were the most common health issues they faced when they used mobile phone for longer hours. They had also felt extremely tired after using the phone for longer hours. Some of them were also of the opinion that addiction to these gadgets could also drain their energy levels and lead to depression and loneliness. “I feel so drained out when I use my phone for long hours. Sometimes I also feel low and depressed,” added one of the respondents.

Gender and mobile phone usage

Mobile phone use pattern of both the genders showed a similarity. Thus, there was no gender difference in mobile phone use pattern. However, boys said that they mostly did not attend any calls from unknown numbers, but girls said that they attended unknown calls. They said that they were curious to know who was calling. Both the genders had received prank calls and pranked others also. "It is so much fun to make prank calls. I often do it and I also have been pranked many times." said one of the girls in the study.

DISCUSSION

In the current study, teenagers considered their mobile phones as a precious asset and most of them received their first mobile phone as early as when they were 10 years of age. Everyone received their phones as a gift from their parents for excelling in academics or as a birthday gift. Previous studies (Tawade & Khubalkar 2019; Dayani & Anshari, 2017) had said that the age of receiving smart phone access was decreasing with time and mobile phone ownership and usage were influenced by their parents and also their peer group. This study too confirms the same.

Teens from higher socio-economic background frequently accessed computers (Koivusilta et al., 2007). Everyone in this study had access to mobile phones; however, only a few had computers/laptops at home.

Teenagers in the current study said that they had experienced mobile phone addiction at least once during their time of usage. They thought they were safe and secure when they carried their mobile phones. Almost all of them couldn't think of a day without using their mobile phones as they were bored and lonely without their phones. However, some of them were of the opinion that excessive usage of mobile phone also caused loneliness, eyestrain, headache, fatigue, anxiety and boredom. Some of them also said that the overuse of mobile phone drained their energy levels. This corroborates what some of the previous studies have shown. Teenagers are addicted to and are easily distracted by smart phones (Ahad & Anshari, 2017). Heavy users of mobile phones experienced severe addiction symptoms such as losing control, receiving complaints, experiencing anxiety or cravings (Leung et al., 2007). Excessive time spent on mobile phone can cause behavioral changes among adolescents (Yadav et al., 2021). It has also been noted that a day without using mobile phone would be a boring and lonely day (Dilip & Javalkar, 2018). Although the teenagers in the study are avid users of mobile phones, they are also aware about harmful effects of mobile phone usage. Their teachers have played a vital role in informing and educating them about the harmful effects of mobile phone usage.

This study has shown that gender has no significant influence on the mobile phone usage pattern among teenagers. Boys and girls shared similar usage patterns of mobile phones. Nevertheless, numerous past studies have discussed contrasting findings. A study by Tawade & Khubalkar (2019) stated that girls spent more time on their phones. Nikita et al. (2015) found that teen boys were found to have almost twice the risk of mobile phone dependency compared to girls. Teens in the present study reported that their parents frequently checked their mobile phones for safety and security reasons. This complements the findings of Lenhart et al. (2010) who found that parents checked the contents in their teens' mobile phone and also used it to monitor their child's location.

In this study, teenagers have associated mobile phones with personal identity. Teens said that mobile phones had helped them identify themselves with their peer groups. However, most of them did not consider it as a status symbol. Some previous studies have also discussed something similar. For example, mobile phones carry a lot of personal information; one's bank details, conversations, memories and thus it is a private thing (Tawade & Khubalkar, 2019). In contrast, Ahmad (2012) suggests that teenagers saw their mobile phones as a status symbol. Another study discovered that youth considered mobile phone as a trendy device in their social life (Ahmad et al., 2017).

Teenagers in the present study were more comfortable texting than making calls. Many of them said that when they were emotionally moved they preferred to text a message rather than making calls. Ahmad et al. (2017) affirmed in their study that teenagers were more comfortable texting than making calls. SMS has become a preferred method of communication for young adults irrespective of their psychological traits (Leung et al., 2007).

In this study, teenagers have used mobile phones as an instrument to connect with their friends and families. They said that smart phones were an excellent tool to socialise and enrich relationships. Earlier studies on teenagers support these findings. Mobile phone enhanced personal relations with families and peer groups among teenagers as it provided a channel for direct communication (Kalogoraki et al., 2010; Hostut, 2010). Mobile phones have become a popular communication and relationship facilitator for teens and young adults (Leung et al., 2007). In this study, teenagers used mobile phones to complete their school assignments and also to seek information. Although none of them used their phones to read news online, they used it to read on subjects that interested them online. They also said that they felt safe and secure when they carried their phones.

Teenagers further used mobile phones predominantly for entertainment and diversion purposes. They watched short-videos and movies, listened to music, and chatted with their friends and family for relaxation. They also used it to ward off negative emotions. Similar findings were discussed in some of the past studies as well (Dayani & Anshari, 2017; Tsibolane & Kunena, 2017; Hostut, 2010).

This study has identified mobile phone usage and pattern among the teenagers surveyed. Entertainment and diversion were the most common reasons why teenagers used their cell-phones, followed by social interaction, information and education.

CONCLUSION

Mobile phones have become a must-have gadget for most people today. The majority of the teens received their phones from their parents only. Studies also suggest that the first influence of smart phone access among teens is from their own family members (Ahad & Anshari, 2017). During the pandemic, children and teens increased the time they spent on their

mobile phones (David, M. E. & Roberts, J. A., 2021; Li et al., 2021). Mobile phone can be a boon as well as a curse. So, it is the responsibility of parents and other stakeholders who are associated with teenagers to guide them on how to use mobile phones effectively. Adolescents need right motivation for the better usage of mobile phone (Dilip & Javalker, 2018). In this study, teens used cell phone for academic purposes, entertainment, socialising and also to improve relationship with family members. Entertainment and diversion was the most common reason why teens used their mobile phone, followed by social interaction, information and education. Pandemic, perhaps, was an aberration. However, that aberration has led to greater dependency on mobile phones for things that are not necessarily useful for academics. The majority of them related mobile phone to their identity. However, only a couple of them associated it to their status symbol. They considered it as an excellent entertainment tool and used it for diversion. Statements such as “I use it when I am low”, “It helps me feel better” clearly reflect this development. Mobile phone plays a vital role in teens’ social interaction. They use mobile phone to connect with their friends and family. Most of them began their day checking messages on WhatsApp and they have many common WhatsApp groups. Teens in this study used mobile phone to seek information and education also. During the pandemic, they used mobile phones amply for educational needs. They used their phones to prepare for examinations and also complete school assignments. Surprisingly, none of them used their phones to read news online. They preferred to read newspaper or watch television news channels This study also finds that teenagers are dependent on mobile phones and they feel secure and safe when they carry their phones. However, in this study, most of them kept their phones away while they studied or engaged in other activities. The current study has confirmed that teenagers are dependent on their mobile phone and they gain gratification from using it. While limiting it to just a few interviews was a limitation of this study, there is scope to increase the sample size or use a more comprehensive survey to further explore the mobile phone usage among teens in different parts of the country in future studies.

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