



AN ANALYSIS ON THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MEDIA DEVICES ON CHILD SOCIALIZATION IN SRI LANKAN SOCIETY

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Communication, the most powerful creation of humans, has taken the direction of today's world on a digital path, and digital media has intervened in all social processes and human affairs. The purpose of this research was to analyse the impact of digital media devices on the socialization of children in Sri Lanka in such a situation. The research problem was that digital media devices have an impact on children's socialization. Conceptual and theoretical study of the concepts of digital media devices and child socialization, and analysis of children's behaviour in the digital age were the objectives of this work. One hundred eighty children and parents were randomly selected for the study covering urban, semi-urban, and rural areas of the three districts of Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara. Data were collected through questionnaires, observations, and semi-structured interviews with experts including academics. Qualitative data obtained through observation and interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, while SPSS statistical software was used as the tool for analysing quantitative data collected through questionnaires and analysed under descriptive analysis. According to the findings, the existing socialization process is changing due to the child's screen-centric actions and interactions from early childhood. Especially toddlers are addicted to smartphones and YouTube kids due to colourful content. Due to the increasing amount of time children spend with digital media devices, the child lacks understanding of their socio-cultural identities and value systems, and real social connections are minimized. By adapting the physical, mental, social, and spiritual make-up to a digital environment, the child enters a transitional state of creating a human category that can no longer be defined as a social human being, creating a human being with a dependent personality. The conclusion from the results of this study is that digital media devices have impact on child-socialization 28% in a negative way and 47% in a positive way. Controlling children's media use consciously and under parental guidance for social and personal advancement has the potential to decrease negative situations. It is also important for the child to be exposed to real-world social groups, including family and neighbours.

Keywords: child, child's socialization, digital media devices, society

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the world's population, including children, use smart devices for everyday activities, and the time spent in front of a screen has increased over the past decade (Rajapakse and Wijenayake, 2020). Therefore, today's social time of the child, who carries the cultural values of the society from generation to generation through the process of socialization, is reduced, and the forms of child socialization have changed. Lutfey and Mortimer (2003); emphasize socialization as learning organizational norms, values, beliefs, and language characteristics. A child born in a certain society naturally absorbs the culture of that society. The child learns the religion, language, and customs of his society from his parents, other elders, teachers, and friends. These become forces that shape their own life (Senarath, 2018). However, due to spending time with digital media devices such as smartphones, laptops, tablets, etc., the child's interaction with social forces is reduced. Digital screen devices were used by 96% of preschool-attending children, and over 60% used them for more than the recommended daily upper limit of one hour (Rathnasiri et al., 2022). According to the Digital Outlook Sri Lanka - 2021 report, children in the age group of 13-18 years have unlocked their mobile phone screens at least nine times per hour (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing [APIDM], 2021). Although the child starts using digital screens as an unconscious process through motivation at the beginning, the child's mental chemical process of early imagination is overridden by the screen and the programs broadcast on the screen, affecting the mental development of the child's cognitive process senselessly. This motivated behaviour change in the child stabilizes as a daily routine and then stabilizes in the mind and ID as a conscious process. In such a situation, this research was conducted with the aim of analysing the impact of digital media devices on children's socialization. The objectives of this study were to conceptually and theoretically identify the concepts of digital media devices, and the socialization of children, to investigate the culture built in society through the use of digital media in Sri Lankan society, to study how the modern social and family context has changed with today's digital use, and to identify its positive and negative trends. This research will contribute to filling the gaps in the literature review in studying the impact of digital media devices, and digital media platforms on the socialization of children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sigmund Freud's developmental theory on psychosexual development

When focusing on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, psychosexual developmental stages can be recognized as a key concept he introduced. Sigmund Freud has shown that from the child's childhood, they operate according to a certain emotional pattern. He divides the period from the birth of the child to the age of 18 into several main stages. These are the oral stage, the anal stage, the phallic stage, the latency stage, and the genital stage (Athukorala and Athukorala, 2003). The main causal factors that affect the child's emotions during these stages inevitably affect their future adult behavior. The basic foundation of creating a social human being is done through these stages of psychosexual development, and these stages are directly linked with child socialization. During these stages, the child learns the characteristics of his group's norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors by dealing with social institutions.



Social Learning theory

Social learning theory developed by researchers such as John Dollard, Neil Miller, and Albert Bandura is based on behaviorist principles. This theory points out that by engaging in an observational learning method, one's own behavior is adjusted by intelligence, reasoning, questioning, and understanding due to the influence of environmental stimuli and responses. Behavioral patterns embodied by family, school, peer groups, and other communication channels from a child's childhood can be positive or negative (Luthans, 1995). In social interaction, all learning phenomena occur as a result of direct experience on the analogical basis of observing the behavior of others and, their responses (Bandura, 1969). Albert Bandura pointed out that a learning process takes place through the media messages that the individual constantly interacts with. That is why the media is named as a tertiary socializing agent. The child learns things by observing behaviors. With growth, the person who accepts himself as important becomes his model.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

One hundred and eighty parents and children were selected as the sample of study through the random sampling method to cover the urban, semi-urban, and rural areas of the districts of Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara in the Western Province. The Western Province was selected as the sample due to having the highest digital literacy and the highest use of household digital tools in the country (Department of Census and Statistics [DCS], 2021).

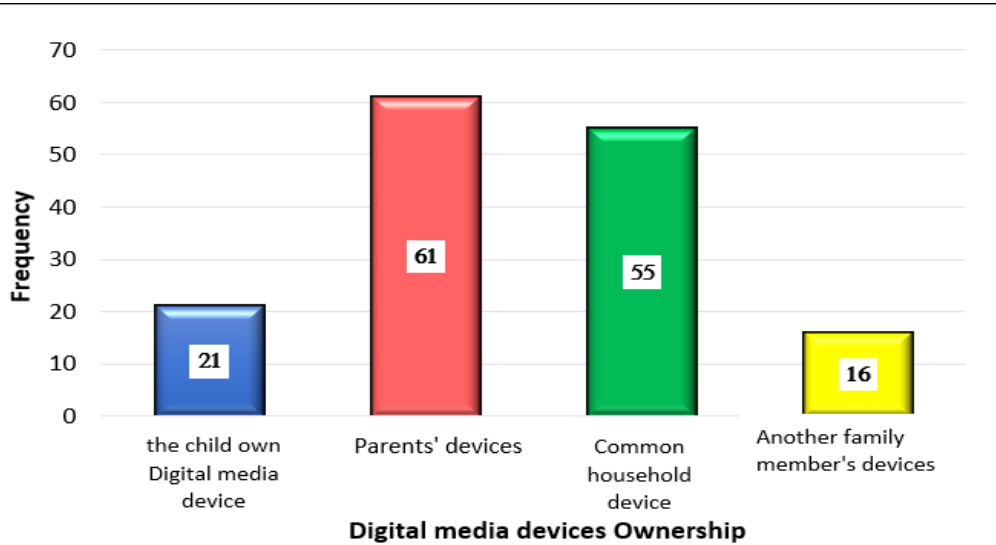
Data collection methods

Primary quantitative data were collected by administering structured questionnaires to ninety parents in three districts; SPSS statistical software was used as a data analysis tool, and data were analysed under descriptive analysis. Questionnaires were given to parents due to the difficulty of obtaining information from toddlers about their use of digital media devices. The parents who answered the questionnaire were parents of children aged between 6 months and 2 years, 2-5 years, 6-12 years, 13- 15 years, and 16-18 years. 43.3% are parents between 25 and 35 years old. 43.3% between 36-45 years old, 12.2% between 46-55 years old, and 1% over 55 years old also indicate a valid percentage of a parent. 71.11% of respondents were female and 28.89% were male. Data were collected by observing another 90 children, emphasizing qualitative data. To improve the quality of the research, interviews were conducted with university lecturers and scholars in the fields of Psychology and media through the semi-structured interview method. Qualitative data collected through semi- structured interviews and observations are analysed using the thematic analysis method and grounded theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

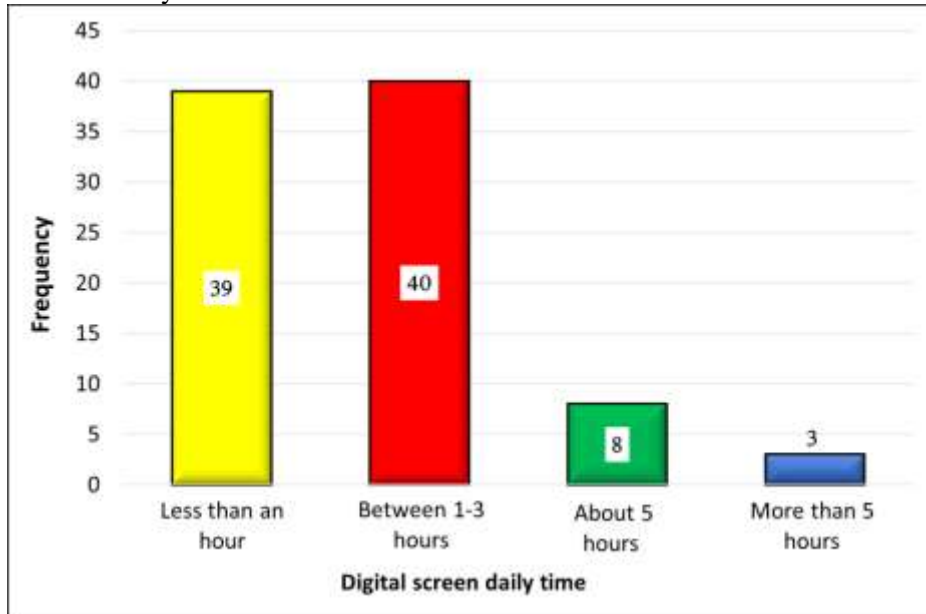
Data analysis shows that 97.8% of parents are digital media users. 84 of them access digital media daily. When parents spend time on the digital screen, they have less time to spend with their children, and the social tasks that parents should do for their children are missed. 88% of parents indicated that using digital media with their children has motivated the child to turn to digital media. According to Figure 1, The most commonly used digital tools in data contributors' homes are smartphones (32.2%) and computers (25.9%). 39.9% of children access the digital space from their parents' devices and 35.9% use digital tools commonly used at home. It is clear that children are using digital tools with the knowledge of parents or an adult at home

Figure 1. Digital media device ownership



Source: the author developed based on survey data, 2023.

Figure 2. Children's daily screen time

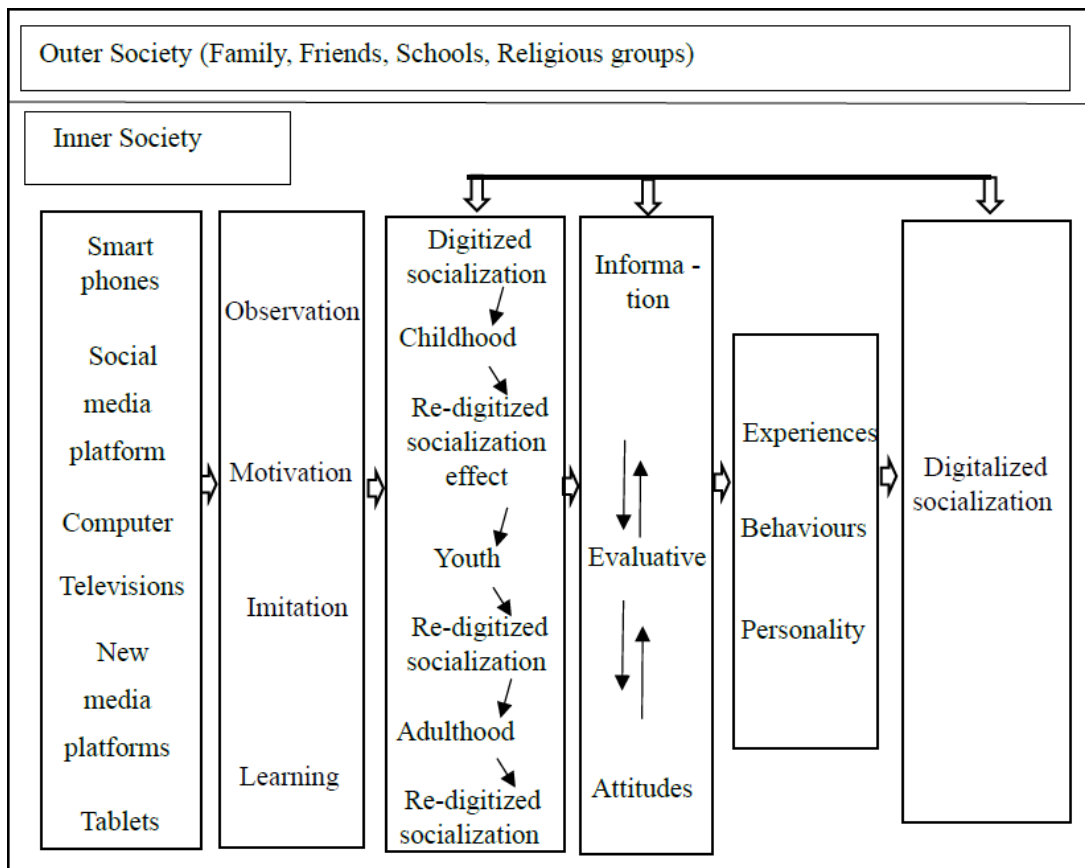


Source: the author developed based on survey data, 2023.

According to Figure 2, considering the daily screen time of the child, 53.3% of children interact with digital screens for one and three hours, and the number of children who spend more than one hour with digital media per day is higher. Therefore, the child has less time to spend with family and society. Therefore, the child has less time to spend with family and society. A percentage of 25.25% indicates that the relationship between the child and the parents and the family is decreasing, 39.4% indicates that the relationship between society and the child is decreasing, and 35.5% indicates that the child prefers to be isolated. The majority of children under the age of eight have accessed YouTube, kids' YouTube social media applications through smartphones, and are tempted to watch children's songs and cartoons. It is observed that this process has become a daily habit due to the interest in viewing content with creative colourful images and videos. Young children's interactions with the digital space elicit impulsive behaviour when the smartphone is taken away from them. By dealing with content on digital devices for a long time, the child loses the ability to learn and

recognize the cultural principles of their country's religion, history, and race. As a result, the social human born with a cultural root is not born. Due to engaging with digital media for a longer period, children who are distant from their relationship with social reality are abstracted from the basic social institutions of their environment, including family members and peer groups. Worldview and historical consciousness are nurtured through children in accordance with digital content. By imitating digital media content, the child is socialized in accordance with virtual social factors in a digital environment. Therefore, the process of children's socialization through social agents does not take place properly. Accordingly, the born child is formed as one who has withdrawn from social life. Media assimilates reality as a social reality. Accordingly, a new socialization model can be introduced based on the gradual transformation of the socialization process into a technological process. It is confirmed in qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

Figure 3. Proposed Child's Digitalized Socialization Model



Source: Author developed based on data analyse, 2023.

In this model, social agents such as family, friend groups, school, etc., who do the functions of adapting the child to society, are in the child's outer environment. The inner environment of the child is created in a digital environment by gradually reducing the relationship with the family and other social agents and internalizing the digital tools into his own inner environment. Smartphones, computers, tablets, social media, and new media platforms become members of the child's inner environment. Although the child lives in a real-world household, his entire functioning, including his mind, takes place in accordance with virtual cultural elements. The child's experiences and behaviours are built through the imitation and learning of the content concepts, personal images, and information of the associated digital texts, and the personality is created accordingly. This digitized socialization process is cyclical throughout human life. What we are seeing in society at the moment is the transition period of a child's digitalized socialization.



CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the data analysis, 47.78% stated that digital media has had a positive effect on socialization, 23.33% had a negative effect, and 28.89% had no idea about the effect, it was concluded that digital media devices have an impact on Sri Lankan child's socialization. By constantly dealing with digital media, the child internalizes the characteristics unique to the digital media and builds a dependent personality, and as a result of deprivation of social relationships, Children are born with less development of social skills as well as intellectual skills and without a healthy personality. Parents should prepare the environment for the child to develop the relationship between the family and the society by minimizing the exposure of the children to digital media in childhood including infancy. It is necessary to use digital media with self-discipline and self-control while recognizing the limitations of digital media. Teachers and social groups at the school level should work to develop not only the child's digital media literacy but also critical thinking.

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