

A Framework for Regulating Digital Lives in the Context of Digital Etiquettes and Responsibilities

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: The utilization of digital technology has evolved tremendously over the period of time. At the same time, the misuse of technology has also erupted as a major challenge for policymakers and educators.

Methodology: To formulate a framework for regulating digital lives in the context of digital etiquettes and responsibilities, an in-depth literature review was required. Relevant research publications were collected to analyze what concerns has been raised regarding digital lives in different societies and how those recommendations or applications can be implemented in society such as Pakistan. For this study, primary school students were focus group and the framework suggested in this study was based on how students engage with technology in their daily lives.

Findings: The study found that acceptable agreement can work as a foundation for the school systems, policymakers, digital experts, and parents for sensitizing the students regarding the digital citizenship responsibilities and etiquettes. All stakeholders need to undertake serious efforts to create a conducive environment where students can realize the importance of behaving in a digitally responsible manner. If the appropriate measures are not taken at the right time, it can pave the path for many potential negative consequences. Therefore, in order to effectively implement a digital citizenship program, what is required is a clear vision, code of conduct, teachers' training programs, effective engagement of parents, and sensitizing students towards digital regulation.

Conclusion: The paper suggests a framework for academicians, sociologists, parents, and information technology experts in the light of the relevant literature to sensitize the youth towards responsible and productive use of the technology. This framework is initially designed for school-going children and is based on two important themes, including Digital Responsibility and Digital Citizenship Etiquette.

Keywords: Digital Technology, Digital Etiquette, Digital Responsibility.

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Introduction

Digital Technology has enhanced the chances of seeking and expressing ideas across cultural, physical, and social boundaries (McQuail, 2010). Technology can facilitate teenagers towards better comprehension and utilization of the opportunities offered by the modern world from an early age (Orth & Chen, 2013). The ability of the digital media to convert its consumers to producers and vice versa, especially with respect to social networking, makes it much more fascinating to school-going children (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010). The usage of digital technology by the students for both academic and personal purposes accounts for a significant amount of their daily time, which is spent on the internet (New York City School Library, 2016).

Although the easy access of technology has rapidly increased its number of users simultaneously, it is also posing severe side effects for teenagers (Hughes & Thompson, 2013). In the absence of proper guidelines, teenagers have become much more vulnerable in the digital era (Orth & Chen, 2013). The correlation between heavy usage of digital technology and behavioral changes has been emphasized, especially with reference to brain development and attention span (Grose, 2013). A more comprehensive and contemporary code of conduct is required to ensure digital responsibility because the possibility of altering identities has made it easier for children to initiate or participate in unethical practices. The schools can incorporate digital responsibility and etiquette in their curriculum to ensure that students become familiar with safe online practices from a very young age. Along with the school curriculum, the involvement of parents should also be ensured to supervise children's digital activities right from the beginning (Orth & Chen, 2013).

Ribble & Bailey (2004) and Ribble, Bailey, & Ross (2004) proposed nine themes of Digital Citizenship with reference to the appropriate use of digital technology. The themes included Rights, Digital Responsibility, Digital Etiquettes, Security, Safety, Access, Communication, Commerce, and Education. All these nine elements were strongly related to each other and cannot be understood in isolation (M. Ribble & Bailey, 2011). Digital citizenship majorly caters to the concept of responsibility at many different levels. Some digital citizenship issues might be more strongly related to technology experts while others to teachers and still others to parents (M. S. Ribble & Bailey, 2004). The core question is that who should be entrusted with the duty of teaching digital ethics? The digital citizenship approach argues that both teachers and parents should play their respective roles in instilling digital ethics in children (Bennett, Aguayo, & Field, 2016). The quality of what we learn largely depends on how we learn it (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010)(Center, 2010).

The study at hand has focused on proposing a framework in the light of the related literature. The framework is based on two significant elements of digital citizenship, including responsibility and etiquettes. The framework can be preferably incorporated in the school curriculum and delivered by teachers. Digital Citizenship is further explained as respecting others, respecting yourself, respecting the privacy of others, respecting your privacy, digital netiquette (useful and harmful digital behavior), assessing websites, intellectual property, creation of text, digital footprint, diversity of views, and perspectives (New York City School Library, 2016). In order to fully comprehend the digital etiquettes and responsibilities, the following questions need to be investigated.

- a) What is the basic code of conduct that students can follow for their digital activities?
- b) To what extent are students able to realize that how their use of digital technology is affecting others?
- c) How can students be made better aware of their digital responsibilities?

Literature Review

On a global level, digital technology has evolved at an unprecedented pace during the last few decades (Gu, Zhu, & Guo, 2013). Digital technology users are now enabled to share and develop content in an

innovative and timely manner. Scholars and academicians believe that in the 21st century, the landscape of formal education will be revamped through the latest techniques of e-learning (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010). Digital content is different from traditional media content in many aspects. It can be swiftly replicated, reproduced, disseminated, archived, and difficult to completely remove once uploaded or made public (The Ministry of Education, 2015). The extensive and convenient access to technology is a pivotal part of adolescent behavior, which paves the path for developing digital technologies through dynamic interactions (Hughes & Thompson, 2013).

2.1 Responsibilities of Digital Citizenship

In the current age sensitizing adolescents regarding the responsibilities of Digital Citizenship is one of the most significant areas of childhood development (Orth & Chen, 2013). Adolescents are the most vulnerable part of the population in the digital age as the advantages of using digital media are accompanied by many potential challenges and risks. As per The Ministry of Education (2015), some of the potential challenges of the digital era can be broadly classified as follows:

- a) Cyber safety majorly involves behavioral aspects
- b) Cybercrime refers to crimes conducted through the use of some form of information technology
- c) Cybersecurity majorly refers to the unauthorized access of information data.

Digital citizenship can help children and adolescents develop an effective and safe attitude for becoming active participants of the digital world (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2016). Schools have prioritized the awareness regarding Digital citizenship on their agenda list (M. S. Ribble & Bailey, 2004) by empowering the students to comprehend their rights, responsibilities, and long-term implications of their actions. It is pivotal even for individual users to be able enough to understand, access, and evaluate digital media content (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010). “Unintentional negligence towards digital usage and experiences of children has a profound impact on their emotional, social and physical development (Orth & Chen, 2013)”. “Digital Age Literacy” has evolved as an essential framework for the 21st century (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010).

2.2. Etiquettes in the Digital Age

Etiquettes in the digital age refer to a set of accepted norms of behavior that can be employed while using different facets of digital technology (McGilvery, 2016). As the usage of digital devices and android gadgets has increased tremendously, students are considered to be more diverted than ever. A student tends to check his device an average of 11.43 times during a classroom session for non-academic happenings (Schaffhauser, 2016). Students frequently engage themselves in an instant messaging through different apps during the class. They also seek influence from fellow students from the way they make use of digital technology (M. Ribble & Bailey, 2011). The up-gradation of technology has provided the users with endless options to catch up with the changing digital trends (M. S. Ribble & Bailey, 2004). In the recent past, it was considered the responsibility of family and parents to instill etiquette in their children even before they commence their formal schooling. Still, in the contemporary digital era, schools are also expected to incorporate and digital etiquettes through their curriculum (McGilvery, 2016).

2.3. Digital Technology and its Effects

An important aspect of digital technology is its capacity to impart comprehension of essential concepts collectively and collaboratively. Virtual models have especially proven to be extremely helpful in generating simulations and providing hands-on training with respect to problem-solving skills (Mareco, 2017).

By incorporating digital technology in the classes, especially where people from different regions of the world come together, the gaps in learning can be reduced. In this regard, India can be taken as an example which has a population of more than 1.37 billion with a literacy rate of about 67 percent and ranks 49 out

of 66 with respect to the Quality of Life ranking (Review, 2019). The deployment of infrastructural changes and educational aid in a Pan-Indian context was a near to impossible task. The then Indian education minister tried to overcome the challenging situation by ensuring the availability of educational resources across all digital platforms. This was also an example of reaching out to the maximum target audience at the minimum cost. Digitally Integrated teaching methodologies can also help teachers impart individual attention to students while maintaining a collaborative class environment. The digitally integrated teaching methodologies can also facilitate customized learning for students across the globe (Mareco, 2017).

Interaction with subject experts from across the world is also made easier because of digitally integrated teaching methodologies. Advanced learning also helps Students in better decision-making in both personal and professional capacities (Mareco, 2017). Technology is considered to be the pen and paper of contemporary times. (Cha, Park, & Seo, 2020) suggested that incorporating technology in their curriculum should be the priority of educational institutions.

The instances where the inappropriate usage of digital platforms has negatively hampered the students' progress are also numerous. Some scholars have probably pointed towards the assumption that machines can work like humans in the future rather than the real challenge lies in the notion that machines will start acting like humans (Binnig, Baatz, Klenk, & Schmidt, 2002). Therefore, in order to ensure that students use digital technology in a responsible and safe manner, an all-encompassing code of conduct needs to be devised and implemented.

Research Method

To formulate a framework for regulating digital lives in the context of digital etiquettes and responsibilities, an in-depth literature review was required. Relevant research publications were collected to analyze what concerns has been raised regarding digital lives in different societies and how those recommendations or applications can be implemented in society such as Pakistan.

For this study, primary school students were focus group and the framework suggested in this study was based on how students engage with technology in their daily lives. For this purpose, notion of agreement for the use of digital technology was adopted to understand the basic requirements for the students to use technology.

Similarly, to recommend and formulate basic guidelines for digital responsibilities we reviewed previously published literature so that those recommendations can be incorporated in Pakistani society.

Results and Discussions

The need to educate and aware students regarding the safe and productive usage of digital platforms has become all the more pivotal in the current times (Al-Zahrani, 2015). The dominant ideology behind this framework is the notion that students' digital lives also require the same or maybe a greater amount of guidance than is required in their actual lives (Orth & Chen, 2013). There are certain areas of students' lives that can be more adversely affected due to inappropriate digital interactions, including the academic performance of students, behavioral issues within the school environment, and the personal lives of students outside the school environment (M. Ribble & Bailey, 2011). Behavior is usually operationalized as the overt part of the personality, which is based on our actions (Potter, 2012).

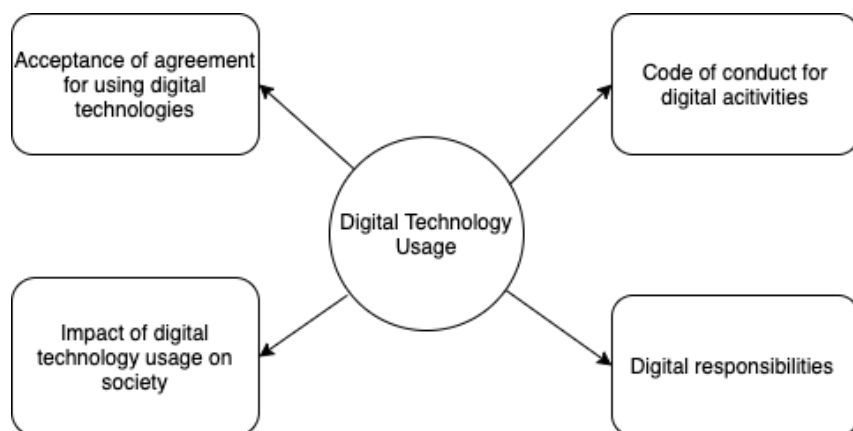


Figure 1: Framework for Using Digital Technology

To facilitate academicians and technology experts for developing and implementing the code of conduct for digital interaction, an Acceptable Agreement for the use of Digital Technology needs to be implemented at school. To formulate this Acceptable Agreement, the following fundamental questions need to be entertained:

Question 1: What are some of the features of the basic code of conduct that students can follow for their digital activities?

The regulation of online behavior is complex and much more challenging than regulating the behavior of traditional media consumers (McQuail, 2010). Regulation of digital behavior is also more complicated because of the diversity of digital media consumers (Lessig, 2009). The evolution of technology in the coming decades cannot be fully predicted. Still, as socially responsible citizens, we need to remain aware of the fact that future generations cannot be left on their own with respect to managing and navigating through the complex world of digital media (Orth & Chen, 2013). Some of the salient notions which can be incorporated in the Acceptable Agreement for the Use of Digital Technology include the following:

- a) Students while using digital technology should abide by the culturally and socially acceptable behavior
- b) Students should have a sound knowledge of the legal implications of violating copyrights, especially with respect to intellectual property.
- c) Students must be made aware of the legal and social repercussions of developing and disseminating obscene content
- d) Students should be sensitized about the careful selection of words and language on digital platforms. It should be inculcated in students that their random selection of words and trolling on the internet can become a serious cause of disruption in society.
- e) Students should be specifically informed about the legal implications of sharing and creating defamatory content
- f) Students should abstain from involving in illegal activities like digital impersonating and hacking
- g) Students should be fully sensitized about the potential hazards of engaging in frivolous online interactions
- h) Students should be able to own complete responsibility for their digital conduct and its consequences

Question 2: To what extent are students able to realize that how their use of digital technology is affecting others?

It is the relative use of digital technologies that can make it good or bad (M. Ribble & Bailey, 2011). People use interpretive procedures and technological artifacts while engaging in digital technology (Zillien & Hargittai, 2009). The usage of digital technology can also give rise to specific issues, especially when the digital users lack the capacity to think nominal terms. If the basic conduct of digital citizenship is inculcated in children from an early age, it can help develop a more holistic and productive approach in children for safe digital participation.

Question 3 - How can students be made better aware of their digital responsibilities?

When an individual takes responsibility for one's actions with respect to digital usage, it refers to the fact that the individual has accepted the ownership for the thoughts, actions, and content that he has shared through digital platforms (Brockett, 1994). The responsibility can assume the form of legal codes of conduct and cultural sanctity. Identifying the salient factors associated with the user's perception of digital technology is considered to be a significant and pertaining matter (Park, 2009). Some of the possible steps that can help students in becoming digitally responsible are as follows:

- a) Students should always refrain from revealing their own and others' personal and sensitive information through any unverified public domain.
- b) Students should not act as perpetrators or become an instrument of executing malicious activities; rather, they should self-regulate their online behavior.
- c) Students should exercise extreme caution in case of sharing personal videos and pictures. In the cases where others are also involved, they should always seek prior permission from the concerned individuals.
- d) Students should proactively identify and report instances of any potentially offensive material meant to target any particular individual or group
- e) Students should respect and practice a certain level of secrecy while interacting online. They should abstain from revealing irrelevant information that can become a source of distress in the longer run.

Acceptable Agreement for the Use of Digital Technology

The real-life of students is extensively dominated by certain features of the virtual world, which in turn can also leave lasting effects on the perceptions of these young minds (Grose, 2013). Parents and Academicians need to closely monitor the conduct of students to avoid any long-term adverse effects. The basic purpose of the acceptable agreement is to ensure that awareness regarding safe digital interaction is instilled in the students from a very early age. The contemporary times require that children should not only be taught about the responsibilities and etiquettes of society, they should also be equipped with the necessary skill set to effectively pursue the digital responsibilities and etiquettes (M. Ribble & Bailey, 2011).

Overall, the strategy for regulating the students' digital interactions can be classified into three major aspects, which include Learning, Guidance, and Protection. In the learning phase, students must be sensitized about maintaining the digital safety of others and themselves. At the guidance level, the schools should deliver the rules and safety protocols through their curriculum. In the third phase use of technologically sophisticated methods can be employed to monitor digital activities (The Ministry of Education, 2015).

Some of the salient features of the Acceptable Agreement Use of Digital Technology can be summarized as follows in the light of the relevant literature:

- a) School's role is paramount in the vigilance of student's usage of digital technology

- b) Schools need to focus on the online character building of students
- c) Detailed Orientation sessions regarding digital responsibility should be held at the time of commencement of academic sessions.
- d) Students should be sensitized about the retrieval of their digital footprints and its legal implications
- e) Students need to be sensitized about the fact that the information that they post on different digital platforms can be deleted at their end, but it cannot be permanently erased even after deleting; therefore, extreme caution needs to be exercised
- f) Schools should ensure that students realize the importance of ethical and cultural boundaries.
- g) Importance of limiting the amount of time that students spend on digital interactions should be of primary importance as it can adversely affect the human brain and its functions
- h) Schools, over a period of time, also need to determine the extent and amount of information that students require.
- i) The concept of self-regulation should be deeply instilled in the students' ethical decision-making procedures so that they can be made more aware of their social responsibilities.
- j) Students also need to be made aware of the fact that they need to seek permission for using content that has been posted by others.
- k) Students need to be sensitized about the social and legal implications of their digital activities, along with securing access to their digital equipment.
- l) The school management must block all access to explicit content
- m) An intentional and collaborative effort needs to be asserted by teachers in order to safeguard the digital behavior of students
- n) The schools should engage students in the decision-making process so that a mutual and more comprehensive strategy can be developed and implemented.
- o) Access to the code of conduct, including the policies and procedures devised for digital interaction, should be made available to the students.
- p) The schools should adopt the digitally integrated teaching methodologies for incorporating the acceptable agreement through their curriculum.
- q) In case a student is found violating the agreement, the case should be dealt with like a disciplinary matter

Conclusion

The Acceptable Agreement can work as a foundation for the school systems, policymakers, digital experts, and parents for sensitizing the students regarding the digital citizenship responsibilities and etiquettes. All stakeholders need to undertake serious efforts to create a conducive environment where students can realize the importance of behaving in a digitally responsible manner. If the appropriate measures are not taken at the right time, it can pave the path for many potential negative consequences. Therefore, in order to effectively implement a digital citizenship program, what is required is a clear vision, code of conduct, teachers' training programs, effective engagement of parents, and sensitizing students towards digital regulation.

Limitations

This study was conducted based on literature available for digital lives in the context of digital etiquettes and responsibilities. So the first challenge appeared was related to data collection as it was not possible to

review a large number of research papers. Which likely impact the elements included in the suggested framework. Similarly, another limitations appeared in form of focused issue as in this paper we focused on digital etiquettes and responsibilities but there some more pertinent issues can also be studied closely such as impact of digital literacy on digital lives.

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Conflict of Interest

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