

Re-considering how technology virtualizes our children

Opinion

The new millennium, recent decades and more particularly recent years have strongly been marked by a continuous and unprecedented permeation of digital media and networks in almost every single aspect of our daily lives. These new technologies have seemingly become part of tremendous broad-based changes to how people engage in knowledge production, communication and creative expression (David Buckingham 2008), most of which are produced and interacted virtually. In this sense, information technology is now omnipresent and ubiquitous in the lives of billions of people around the world.

Because digital media and new technologies –androids, tabloids, smartphones, personal computers and other online/offline electronic devices –are now commonplace and available to a wide range of individuals and institutions in most countries of the world, this has made new media technologies more pervasive than before. Subsequently, this pervasiveness has metamorphosed the human being. In a similar vein, Cadell Last, a researcher at the Global Brain Institute, claims that mankind is undergoing a major ‘evolutionary transition’. This transition may be seen as soothing for many people while it is considered as threatening for many others, especially anthropologists, psychologists and humanistic scientists.

Having stated above that in most countries around the globe new technologies and access to internet have become available to a significant number of people, one has to add that among these people to whom internet and technology are accessible, young people represent the greater part being interested in and even inseparable from these new technologies. By being indissoluble from their electronic devices, many young people eventually become dis-identified and dissoluble from the mainstream society. On this issue, a myriad of research has been produced and published to explore and closely examine how new technologies affect young people. Most of the literature related to this area investigates the many changes new information technologies (IT) brought to education, the learning process and the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the classroom. However, I strongly believe that more attention should be given to the way these technologies permeate into the inner consciousness of young people. More precisely, more emphasis should be put on the effects that the extensive use of electronic devices and constant access to internet have on the self-identification and self-perception of the younger generation. Also, another critical question to be posed is ‘how young people who have been *virtualized* identify themselves?’

It is by no means inarguable that the last few decades have witnessed an extraordinary advancement in high technology. The latter has become an integral part of the majority of people’s daily lives around the globe. People get all different types of news through various websites and digital newspapers. They pay bills, send and

¹Are we evolving into a NEW type of human? ‘Different’ species will have evolved by 2050, scientist claims”. Dailymail. 2017.

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receive mail, and find information all on the Internet. It is about a new technologically driven life that is shaped by to the constantly developing and affordable technology available in most countries of the world. As more people are becoming increasingly more reliant and absorbed by technology, it is no surprise that today’s teenagers have become the most enthusiastic users of these new technologies. It may sound interesting to see that laptops are being developed for children as young as five. Smart phones are now in the hands of children as young as ten. However, as more children continue to become so immersed in media, many researchers, parents and educators have begun to wonder whether or not this exposure to such a high amount of electronic media is good or evil.

If we should consider the first pro that many of us cannot deny, one may contend that technology is preparing children and youngsters for the ‘real world’ that they will have to enter into remembering that most jobs and professions have become technology-related. However, many scholars and researchers argue that children using technology are becoming socially stunted, ungrateful, and ridden with health related issues. Therefore, it is high time parents, researchers, educators and pedagogues re-questioned the role technology plays in the life of young people who are in the process of *becoming*. According to Sherry Turkle, a PhD at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, naming technology as either good or bad will not solve the issue. “I’ve tried to get across that computers are not good or bad – they’re powerful... I think we’re getting ourselves in a lot of trouble thinking there’s an Internet or a web that has an impact on children” (American Psychological Association). In this respect, it has become more than necessary and urgent to re-think, not the internet existence and proliferation in every corner of our daily life, but its use, impact and repercussion. A corner stone in this re-consideration must be the questioning of how children and teenagers are absorbed by and in the virtual world.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflicts of interest.