Nurturing Social Inclusion among Children through Social Media: Exploring Stories of Mothers from Sargodha

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood connections of children have a big impact on their grownup lives. Social media and peer relationships are two aspects of early life that have rapidly grown in recent years. Social media have been significantly impacting young learners over the past few years. In order to better understand how social media can foster social inclusion in early childhood and connect with peers, our study examined the experiences of twenty mothers. Stories of social connections at home and at school emerged from interviews with mothers whose children attended private schools in Sargodha city. Working within the qualitative paradigm, the data received from mothers was analyzed. Initial coding derived us to surface categories and themes. Based on the study's findings, it was revealed that using social media responsibly and positively can foster social inclusion for establishing peer connections in the early years of childhood. Social media promote social interaction, social involvement and collaboration among children. The study further revealed the influential effects of social media on children's social inclusion with respect to communication, self-confidence, and feelings of togetherness in distanced spaces to overcome social isolation.

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1.   Introduction

Social media websites are a group of technologies and applications that enable the person to interact, share and exchange ideas. It consists of blogs, wikis, sharing tools and networking platforms like Facebook, What's app, YouTube, Google, and Twitter. It provides an opportunity to share digital objects like pictures, audio-video clips, and text anywhere around the world (Karaca, 2015). Social media websites enable individuals to create and maintain social relationships. These websites allow its users to interact, communicate, cooperate and collaborate with others in the society (Zach & Agosto, 2009). Today, social media has become a major part of children's life. Children's use of social media is increasing rapidly and they use these sites through laptops, tablets, and smartphones (Lauri, Borg, & Farrugia, 2015). Due to increasing evidence of social media usage by children the current study points out that social media social as a source of fostering social inclusion for children and its influence on children's well-being. Social inclusion means social relationships and social involvement or social interaction with others in society. Social inclusion encourages social relationships in society such as personal relationships, communication and enhanced participation in society. It encourages human relationships and social integration (Currie et al., 2009).

Social inclusion also offers social services for individuals like enhance social capital, increase self-confidence and satisfaction (Lourey, Plumb, & Mills, 2012). The early childhood period from birth to eight years of life is the most important time for the development of the child. In this limited period, rapid change occurs in children's physical, cognitive, and social development. The environment child perceives in their childhood has an important impact on

the life of children. In which context they experience the world has a powerful impact on the kid's well-being (Heckman & Mosso, 2014). It is essential to properly understand the outcomes of social media and its influence on children's well-being (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). Well-being is described as the determinant of physiological, cognitive, and social health of the individual (Fegter & Mock, 2019). If the child spends too much time on social media websites it enhances the positive as well as negative influences of these activities on their overall well-being (Goh, Bay, & Chen, 2015).

2. Rationale of the Study

Early childhood is the most important period in children's life. In this period of rapid development, children learn several social skills through interaction with family, culture, community, and peer group, etc. 'Social Media' is a modern-day component that is gaining popularity as a potent instrument that influences how children socialize (Parente, Swinarski, & Noce, 2009). The current study intended to explore the mother's perspective about their willingness/unwillingness of the use of social media for their child, the purpose of using social media among their children and impact of social media on the children's social connections. Moreover, the influence of social media on their children's well-being because the tendency of using social media is rapidly growing and it's become a most common activity of today's children which has a powerful influence on children's physical, cognitive and social activities. In their early childhood period, children are not fully aware of the dangers of these sites on their well-being. To protect children from these harmful impacts a child needs to be under the observation of his / her parents while using social media. The objectives of the study were:

- To explore the perception of mothers on the purpose of using social media among their children
- To analyze the role of social media in fostering social inclusion among school students
- To explore the influence of social media on school student's well-being
- Based on the objectives, following of the research questions were formulated:
- Why children frequently use social media websites?
- What is the extent of usage of social media among children?
- How Social media impact social interaction among school students?
- How the social media helps to overcome social isolation?
- How social media help in the social adjustment of school students.
- How social media usage affect a student's learning collaboration?
- How using social media effects on student's health?
- How social media in putting impact on the self-esteem of school students?
- How social media impact communication skills of the student?

3. Methodology

The narrative research design was used for the understanding of mother's perspective regarding social media usage and its influence on their children's well-being. Narrative studies focus on understanding lived experiences and perception of experiences (Patton, 2002). The narrative study can give us an understanding of the complicated phenomenon under investigation as this type of research design researcher concentrated on the personal experiences of the participant to know how and why a particular phenomenon happened (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The population of this study was mothers of private primary school students from district Sargodha and the sample of 20 mothers were purposively selected. The purpose was to involve those mothers who have awareness about social media and its consequences.

The survey was conducted to know the mother's perspective about the purpose of using social media by their children. Semi-structured interview was used because the semi-structured interview technique was appropriate to study the individual's perspective and views. Semi-structure interview was consisting of 10 open-ended questions. Interviews were audio recorded for later transcription and analysis.

Data was analyzed by thematic analysis process of Braun and Clarke (2006) which involve following steps 1) familiarizing data by transcription 2) generate initial codes 3) search for themes 4) reviewing themes 5) defining and naming developed themes and 6) producing the report.

4. Analysis of Data

The data obtained were analyzed covering three activities, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The first is data reduction, namely the process of selecting, classifying, and organizing test and interview data so that conclusions can be drawn. The second is data presentation, which is a narrative compilation of a collection of information and the results of data reduction so that conclusions can be drawn and further action is taken. The data presented in this study are the results of teacher candidates' answers which indicate aspects of critical thinking. In addition, the results of interviews are also presented the third is drawing conclusions or verification, the process of giving meaning to the data presented to conclude. Conclusions were verified during the study. The activity carried out is to test the truth and suitability of the meanings that arise from the data found.

Data were analyzed through developing categories and through initial coding that ultimately provided sub themes and themes. The first theme of the study which was extracted from the interviews was "Purpose of using social media by children" As mothers' elaborated purpose of usage social media website during the interview. Few Sub-themes are following: Entertainment: *She said my child uses social media websites mostly for entertainment, for watching cartoons and poems, etc. (M6). He plays online games on these websites (M16).* Communication: *She said he uses social media for communication with his peers. He has a class group on what's app. They communicate with each other in the group and share academic material and different other things (M5).* Learn Knowledge: *She also uses it to learn knowledge when she finds any difficulty in her lesson she uses to search on Google and knows many things about her lesson (M10).*

The second theme was "Parent's monitoring and time limits" This theme also focuses on the limited time framework in which children are permitted to use social media websites because excessive use of social media is harmful for their health and not good for their other activities. As mothers describe causes of monitoring and time limit on usage of social media by their kids during the interview some of the examples are: *Social media have both positive and negative aspects as well. It is important to take check because we can't give them free hand to use it because there is a lot of distraction on it, so we have to check it what they have learned from it or what type of activities they have done on social media (M1).* For time limit she said: *"She fixed time table for her child to use social media only half an hour or sometime 45 minutes (M3). I try to restrict him as much as I can but he uses around two hours every day (M1).*

The third main theme was "Positive Influence on learning" As mothers illustrate the positive influence of social media on their children's learning during the interview, the examples which were extracted from the data are the following: *She said it can help in their study they gain knowledge, different concepts and ideas about different things (M11). She said it has a great influence on the child's learning. Even when children are not in school going age then they learn a lot of things like poems, alphabets, color names, etc. In this way, it has a great influence on a child's learning (M19).* Enhance communication skills: *She said it is enhancing child intelligence and her communication skills are becoming very well she learns a lot of vocabulary worlds and her pronunciation becoming good through using social media (M5).* Enhance intellectual abilities: *"According to him social media enhance intelligence level like there are a lot of Games and Video quiz on the basis of their syllabus and it helps to enhance the capability of learning different things from it (M2).* Learn Mannerisms: *According to him social media has the influence to power the children's learning. She learns ethics, values, mannerism, how to interact with the elders, how to ask something to the elders and how to seek permission (M3).* Develop Confidence: *According to him of course children gain self-confidence by using social media like their speaking skills are better enough now and they are able to understand and speak international accent which is very necessary to communicate (M2).*

The fourth main theme was "Promotes Social inclusion" and the examples of sub-themes were: Promote social interaction: *One of the mother explained as: "through social media my child interacts with her friends and relatives and knows what happen around the world, she remains up to date about the activities and incident which happening in our country and around the world" (M10).* Collaboration with Peers: *"According to him, of course, it is helpful for students to collaborate and communicate with peers in different classroom activities and projects related to their studies (M2).* Promote norms and values: *"According to him, she noticed that her*

children learn norms and values of society through social media they teach from each other's different good things, rules and regulations, and good principles to live like a good citizen (M7)."

The fifth main theme was "Concerns regarding social media" and the examples of sub-themes were: Wastage of time: *Most of the time children are busy playing games or communicate with others through social media, in this way they waste a lot of their precious time and communication gap increases between family members through it (M11).* Damage Health: *It has a negative influence on their eyesight, their health (M8).* Deprive of physical activities: *"She said due to excessive use of social media they deprive of their physical activities and become a cause of aggressiveness in the children (M15).* Destroy values: *She said the type of media our children and the children of my home are using most of them being controlled by the western managers, and the type of movies or tutorials whatever it has it's not particularly related to our norms and our own culture. So, in this way, it destroys our own norms and values (M18).* Academic achievement: *"If they are overusing it for 4 to 5 hours or searching such kind of stuff which is not necessary for them it will cause of terrible results. It is not good for their social health and decreases their academic performance (M15)."*

5. Findings

Most of the children use social media websites just for entertainment like they watch videos, cartoon movies, play online games, and listen to poems or watches short stories on YouTube. Children also use these websites for communication with others like they communicate with their friends, family members and also communicate with their peers to discuss the classroom activities, etc. Children also use these sites for educational purposes. When they find any difficulty in their lesson they search about it, learn words meanings and also find out answers to the questions. Even those children who were not going to school also learn from these websites like they learn alphabets, poems, counting, names of colors and about different shapes, etc.

Majority mothers observe their children while using social media websites because it has both positive as well as negative aspects. In childhood access to everything is not good for them. So, parents check and balance is necessary for their well-being and almost all mothers fix a limited time for the children's use of social media websites. Majority mothers were not allowing their children to use social media more than 2 hours. Some mothers allow their children to use social media websites only on weekends or holidays.

Social media has a great influence on a child's learning. They were learning lot of new things through these sites and becoming creative and motivate to learn and their intellectual abilities enhance by doing different activities. They play games and quiz which are related to their curriculum and enhance their mental capabilities. These sites help children to enhance language and communication skills as well. They learn when they watch English cartoons and stories. It improves their accent or pronunciation and also enhances their vocabulary. They also learn mannerisms through these sites. They learn how to behave, how to interact with the elders, how to seek permission, how to behave in a certain situation and how to share with others. Children gain self-confidence by using social media websites because when they are more knowledgeable or well-informed and have something to expose to others about the world, they automatically become more confident. Children also become creative and self-learner by these activities.

Social media promotes social inclusion through social involvement and social interaction of the children in society. They have much knowledge about current affairs, the latest games and movies, current activities of the society. A child also becomes socialize through these sites they interact with friends and peers, learns many things to others and do a lot of activities there. This is the best channel of socialization of the children. It also helps alto to communicate and collaborate with peers in different activities and school projects. They discuss school projects with peers and getting ideas of equal level of mind, getting the skills of leadership and teamwork, and getting the skills of how to accommodate, behave with others and how to bear.

Mothers who have mixed feelings regarding social media promote the norms and values of society or not. Few mothers have the view that social media children learn ethics, values, behavior pattern they teach from each other's different good things, rules and regulations, and good principles to live like a good citizen, they are well mannered and have learned so many

good values from social media. But at the same time, some mothers have the view that social media is distorting or hampering the norms and values of our society. Sometimes children are communicating with the person of other religions; they have their own values, customs, and traditions. Sometimes children try to follow these values because of their immature age, its effects on the child's brain and their mental development. We have our own norms and values so we should focus on that.

Mother concerns regarding social media are: "children waste a lot of their precious time on social media websites, due to the excessive use of social media children deprive of their physical activities and they become more intro-world and self-centered, it's become a cause of aggressiveness in the children and it also damages their eyesight, health, mental health, and physical health and academic performance".

6.   Conclusion

We concluded that children mainly use social media websites for the purpose of entertainment, communication with friends, and sometimes they learn and get lot of useful information as well. Social media was promoting social involvement and social interaction of the children. Listening the stories of mothers prompted us to determine that children using social media were more social and updating themselves as far as current affairs, the latest games, movies, and current activities of the society are concerned. They interact with friends, peers and collaborate with them in their school activities and projects. Children also used to discuss school projects with peers and get ideas of equal level of mind, learn the skills of collaboration and teamwork, and learn how to behave with others and how to tolerate.

According to mother's perspective, social media websites has a great influence on their children's well-being. They learn mannerisms, become creative and motivate to learn and their intellectual abilities enhance by doing different activities. Also language skills and communication abilities were also becoming strong by watching cartoons and stories. It improves their accent or pronunciation and also enhances their vocabulary. They also gain self-confidence by using these sites. Analysis also revealed that social media promotes norms and values of the society but equally dissolving our own values due to global impact.

Mothers were scared of negative influence of these websites so they keep observing children while using social media websites and fix the time limit for the use of these sites because children waste a lot of their time on social media websites. The mother were afraid of lessening children's physical activities due to excessive use of social media that consequently deteriorates health. Although, mothers' stories also shadowed a little dark side of using social media but overall we get the impression that social media websites have more positive influence on children's social inclusion that knit peers together under the guidance and supervision of parents.

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