Zhai Nan and Zhai Nv: An Emerging Sub-Culture

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A B S T R A C T

The technological revolution has changed the conventional landscape of socialization, values and belief system of young people. The availability of internet and increase usage of mobile and laptops has given an upsurge to the phenomena of Zhai Culture. Zhai lifestyle describes the group of people who are engrossed in an online world to an extent that it affects their well-being. Thus, the growing phenomena are of major concern and need an exploration to avoid any psychological and physical problem in near future. Based on the evidence focused literature review, the paper examines the origin of this subculture, its impact on mental and physical health.

INTRODUCTION

We are living in the era of globalization where the traditional boundaries of the world have disappeared. The advancement in technology has made the world interconnected by affecting the socialization process, values and belief system of young people (Ihmeideh & Alkhawaldeh, 2017; Mustaffa, Ibrahim, Mahmud et al., 2011). The development has made human life around the globe much easier by incorporating the use of technology in our daily life, but the phenomenon has affected the values of mainstream culture. Over the past five years, there has been a huge increase in media use among young people, home Internet access has extended from 74% to 84% among young people; the percentage of a laptop has grown from 12% to 29%, and Internet access in the bedroom has hopped from 20% to 33%. The quality of Internet access has enhanced as well, with high-speed access growing from 31% to 59%. (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Further, children spend their leisure time playing video games, surfing the internet and listening to music as compare to gregarious activities (Pandey & Singhal, 2017).

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With the advancement of technology and the easily available internet access has changed the way people live before (Zhang 2014). One of the prominent revolutions in our social environment is the saturation of our culture and daily lives through media (Ray & Jat, 2010). Zhang (2014) argues that the technological revolution has introduced the new lifestyle that is Zhai phenomena. This is an alarming situation as our future is dependent on these youth but they lack the social skills of face-to-face communication (Zhang 2014), and according to the reports, about 26 percent of the world is under 15 years of age (Statista, 2017).

The contemporary subculture of Zhai Nan" is gaining a lot of popularity. Dibeijing (2011) in his blog states that Zhai Nan and Zhai Nv are the Chinese words which have become mainstream in recent years. The meaning of Zhai is "home" and for that, the Zhai's are defined as those girls and boys who prefer to stay within their confined boundaries. Further, Zhang (2014) emphasized that Zhai phenomena have become a new way of living and represent the modern consumer culture. According to the estimates, Zhai lifestyle will become mainstream in coming five to ten years as it. Although the group is still in minority but still have an impact on the economy (Song & Hird, 2013).

Pandey et al. (2017) shed light on the issue by highlighting that utilization of media is not erroneous but excess indulgence results in insalubrious lifestyle which causes exasperation and aggressiveness. It has become consequential for the caretakers to observe that how children are observing the information as media provides them with astronomical information regarding every aspect of life. This changing scenario of our society is a motivation to find out the origins, the stereotypical perception, and the changing notion of this sub-culture.

Conceptualizing Zhai Nan and Zhai Nv

The "Zhai" culture was originated from the Japanese "Otaku(Zhang 2014) (Song et al., 2013) and came into the Chinese language from the popular culture of Taiwanese (Song et al., 2013). "Otaku" in Japanese is related to "geek" or the person who have an obsession with any particular subject specifically anime and manga (GEMS, 2012).

The Zhai lifestyle is different from Otaku. As in Otaku culture, people are fascinated by anime and manga. But Zhai lifestyle in more towards the obsession of surfing the internet, playing computer games, internet chat rooms, or even watching films and dramas online (Song et al., 2013). Further, Li (2016) describes them as the indoor men and women cherish the love for communication technologies that provides simulation for outdoor activities.

In China, Zhai Nan means "indoorsman "and Zhai Nv means as "indoor women". Zhai's refers to those people who can stay happy in the virtual world rather than the real world. Zhai's have their own way of living and they prefer to stay out of interpersonal communication (Song et al., 2013; Zhang 2014). Further Song et al. (2013) highlighted that Zhai Nan has become a trendy term and the negative connotation has shifted to neutral and even symbolize the preferred lifestyle among urban youth.

A small-scale qualitative research was carried out to explore the characteristics and personality aspects of the Zhai Nan and Zhai Nv. Purposive sampling was employed to reach respondents. The researcher interviewed five respondents who prefer to stay at home and can stay in their confined boundaries for hours (Moony, 2012). Based on the analysis of the interviews, the researcher found out that respondents were very contended in their virtual world and they love to stay at home after school. Further, the researcher found that Zhai's have an obsession with their virtual life as their online world facilitates them by a single click. Moreover, the researcher concluded that Zhai's are known for expertise in dedicated fields and they adore their online community identity. Interesting factor that emerges from the study was the Zhai's are keen on searching and sharing information on the internet (GEMS, 2012), which is a matter of concern as studies concluded that Shi (2010) Zhai's are educated people who lack the social skill; always connected with their online world; highly Involve in online communities; Interested in technological advancement and customizations; obsessive-compulsive and self-centered.

Zhai's Social and Cognitive Development

Erikson (1998) has argued that socialization is a challenging process, Erikson (1998) divided the human life into eight different stages and according to his views human learns new things and exposed to various experiments in each stage. The first stage in the life progression is infancy, where babies learn the basic

phenomena of trust and mistrust. According to the research, the new parents are busy with their technological gadgets and at this stage of trust vs. mistrust child does not get enough attention (Gorrindo, Fishel, & Beresin, 2012) and this is the reason Zhai's phenomena is becoming popular because from the very early age children are accustomed to playing with the technological products as the informal evidence proves that this year most of the kids below six years have got the mobile phones as their Christmas gift (Clarke, 2006). This reveals that how Zhai's phenomena are reinforced in the children lives because instead of any toy to play or to share with friends the parents prefer to give them something with which they can stay at home and remain happy. It is a high time for parents to realize that digital format lacks the self-generated acts, as technologically based games, are limited by actual design (Gorrindo et al., 2012).

Parents recall their childhood freedoms to play outdoor, but they cannot allow their children because of the safety issue and concerns (Livingstone, 2007). In the present virtual environment, the nature of play and exposure have shifted from paper and pencil to information and communication technology (Clarke, 2006). Coloring books are replaced by mobile phone and tablets, children playing in the ground and having real-life exposure has changed to becoming part of online communities. All these activities engulfed students so much into the virtual world that gradually it affects the real-life social skills. The researcher has shown the concern by highlighting that human cognitive and intellectual skills enhance with each relationship that has physical element involve because of the chemical process that activates during face-to-face communication (Griffin, 2010). The study further revealed that children who play more computer games rather than the arithmetic stimulated activity, their brains stimulate only the part associated with the vision and movement as adding up simple number can activate both sides of the brain (Sigman, 2012). This reveals that Zhai's lifestyle only activates the one aspects of the brain while the part that is related to critical thinking is not stimulated research found a drop in cognitive and higher level of thinking among adolescents because of the excess use of media (Sigman, 2012).

In the later stage of adolescence, teenagers experience the challenge of gaining identity versus confusion (Erikson, 1998) where they are completely engrossed in the technological world. Technology has embedded in each of their behavior and action, they do not only use the internet for the purpose of entertainment but for homework and socialization as well (Gorrindo et al., 2012). That is how the Zhai

has made the lines blur between the real world and digital world but research claims that the fundamentals of interpersonal skills cannot be learned through this medium (Gorrindo et al., 2012).

One of the concerns discussed by the researcher is the emergence of bedroom culture that is facilitating the Zhai's lifestyle. Research acknowledges that due to the availability of multiple media at home it is no more considered as a scarce resource to be shared by entire family in the living room. This change in the family environment is facilitating the young generation for flexible social life where they can enjoy their growing independence from family (Livingstone, 2007). It is the most alarming situation for the Zhai, as at the stage of young adulthood people gain insight of dealing with the challenge of intimacy and isolation (Erikson, 1998) but Zhai culture has made the virtual interaction a substitute for real-life interaction (Gorrindo et al., 2012). Over the last twenty years, face-to-face communication is replaced by eye to screen contact (Sigman, 2012) which will ultimately affect the Zhai real-world social skills as technology does not provide the physical contact that benefits well-being (Griffin, 2010).

Zhai's Lifestyle and its Impact

In today's connective world, most of the youngster is involved in indoor activities at the cost of outdoor play (Brown, 2013). The routine followed by most children after eating and sleeping is to go online, and this obsession is affecting their mental health as it confines them to their room and they are not left with any time (GEMS, 2012). Research reported that young people interest has shifted to the network environment that is affecting the healthy day to day activities (Wang, Li, & Zheng, 2014). Like playing with siblings, exploring the nature, spending time with grandparents, taking part in community services, joining sports or health club (Ray et al., 2010). The growing Zhai's phenomena are affecting people belonging to different age groups and social classes. Thus, it is important to understand the negative aspects of this emerging sub-culture so that our generation can benefit from the positive elements of this lifestyle which can give them the competitive edge in the society as the technical skill can only give success to certain level, it is the people skill which makes them the unique and help them to move above that certain point.

The researcher is concerned about the technological development and its access to children. Researchers at various occasions are highlighting that technology is competing for children's time at the cost of their health and wellbeing [22]. Further researchers have reported on bases of the results that eyestrain, backache and upper limb disorder are very common in children and these diseases are the results of excessive use of the internet [23]. Another report was discussed with the support of literature that the increased screen time leads to diabetics, weight gain, autism and cardiovascular disease in children [19].

The negative impact of Zhai's lifestyle is not limited to physical health, but it is also affecting the mental health as most of them are depressed and lack basic interpersonal skills (Zhang 2014). Solitary nature of the computer-related interaction is based on "electronic friendship" with the machine, some researcher argued that this will affect the social involvement and psychological well-being (Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, Kraut, & Gross, 2001). Further results revealed that individualism is rising in the society due to the excess use of the internet, which adversely affects social involvement (Vriens & van Ingen, 2017) as it cut them from the genuine social relationship, as Zhai's are communicating with strangers through the improvised medium (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark et al., 1998).

The study concluded that those scoring high in neuroticism reported using the internet for a sense of belonging and their desire to escape from loneliness (Amiel & Sargent, 2004). Zhai's spent most of them in the virtual world as this is the best way for them to live the life as this give them an escape from their shortcomings in terms of their communication and enduring traits. The study found that agreeableness is negatively associated with the usage of internet as the people who do not get along with others spent more of their time on the internet as the demand for agreeableness is lowest (Wilson, Fornasier, & White, 2010). Zhai's keep them connected from the entire world in their virtual life and for that, they are inclining towards that lifestyle because it has minimum rules for which they don't have to show the attitude of agreeableness to others. The study has also found that people recorded low on consciousness are also related to the high use of the internet as there are limited rules and regulation on the internet to abide (Wilson et al., 2010).

Zhai's feel intrinsically satisfied with their attitude and way of living they are happy in their own virtual world (GEMS, 2012), but this phenomenon will affect their personal development. Mead (2009) has

argued that self-concept is comprised of "I" and "Me". And the" Me" is developed with the interaction with the world, these interactions help them to develop the perception of their own. Zhai's interaction will only be limited to the virtual world. The excess use of media will take the children towards the isolation and affect their personality as their interaction with the world will not have a physical gesture in it (Ray et al., 2010). The research concluded that Zhai lifestyle is not good for physical and mental health (Zhang 2014). A 1998 Carnegie Mellon study found that Web use over a two-year period was linked to blue moods, loneliness, and the loss of real-world friends. (Dokoupil, 2012)

Research discusses that people are motivated to engage themselves in an activity which is more enjoyable as compared to those which are not enjoyable (Ramayah, Jantan, & Ismail, 2003) Zhai's get the reinforcement from their intrinsic satisfaction as their urge for communication is being satisfied with the online communities (GEMS, 2012; Moony, 2012; Zhang 2014) and they are very contented with their lifestyle. Results revealed that the intrinsic motivation has a positive relationship of internet usage with perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment (Ramayah et al., 2003). The need to remain connected apparently seem quite normal but experts believe that the old phrase fits technology that was previously used for alcohol addicted people that the cause and solution of all problems. (Dokoupil, 2012).

Skinner (1938) hypothesized that human behaviors were controlled by rewards and punishment and that their behaviors can be enlightened by principles of operant conditioning. Zhai's reinforcement is shaped by their success as they are highly educated, and this has led to the Bandura (1989) vicarious reinforcement for the others. Bandura (1965) argues that the many cues that inspire behavior, at any point, none is more common than the actions of others as the theory of differential association has a firm belief that all the behaviors are learned, in fact, if the behavior is considered to be deviant(Sutherland, 1939). People are using this technology because of the short-term rewards every time they respond to a ping, they get a mini-reward in a form of a squirt of dopamine, these rewards recharge the compulsion engine, scholar Judith Donath recently told Scientific American. "Cumulatively, the effect is potent and hard to resist"(Dokoupil, 2012)

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

Literature acknowledged that technology plays a vital role in each developmental and it has become part of everyone's life, detaching from it is nearly impossible. Human has become accustomed to all forms of media and this has made possible for a social animal to fulfill their desire for interaction through these media, which is what Zhai's lifestyle is that they have found a solution for all their need in their own room.

Zhai's lifestyle is growing around the globe and children from all walks of life are affecting negatively by this new phenomena because unfortunately, parents do not have a proper knowledge of this new world and the indulgences of kids to the extreme level creates problem for them in terms of physical, social, cognitive and moral development and at large it is a frightening issue for the entire society as the world is dependent on these youth to join the economy and business activities.

It is alarming that youngsters face a lot of risk in today's world, which is not conducive to the development of social, moral and cognitive skills. By keeping the adverse concerns in mind, literature has proposed that it's a right time for parents and caretakers to devise strategies that could minimize the risk coming from the excess use of Information and Communication technologies. Therefore, it is suggested that the parents should delay the premature exposure to media (Šmahel & Blinka, 2012). Further, parents and caretakers are advised to have check and balance at the time spent on different media (CanadianPaediatricSociety, 2017; Sigman, 2012) for minimizing the negativity and benefitting from positive aspects.

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