

**Teenagers' Use of the Internet – A Case Study of Selected Children in Addis Ababa**

**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Addis Ababa University in Partial  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and  
Communication**

**By**

**Tefera Teklu**

**ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

**NOVEMBER, 2008**

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## **DEDICATION**

**I dedicate this thesis work to  
my beloved mother, Abaynesh  
Abuhay, who passed away  
in 2004, about two months  
after I completed my first degree  
studies. God rest your soul!**

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## ABSTRACT

Since its introduction in 1997, the Internet in Ethiopia has been mainly accessed by the elite minority who reside in major cities. But in concerted efforts made by the Ethiopian government and some non-governmental organizations, this is now changing slowly through the provision of the Internet in the ubiquitous Internet cafes, public libraries, schools, government offices, and homes. Among the beneficiaries are Ethiopian middle-class Mission school children in Addis Ababa who have home-based access to the Internet. *“Digital Technology: High School Children’s Use of the Internet– A Case Study of Children in some Selected Schools in Addis Ababa with Home-Based Access”* tries to examine how and why the children specified above try to make use of the Internet. The participants, comprising 18 grade 11 students, were selected from three of the specified schools. The students participated in focus group and individual in-depth interviews and reported on the following thematic issues: Internet Access, Perceptions about Parents and Teachers, and Internet Usage.

The findings of the study show that the use of the Internet by these children has impacted their social relationships: between these children and those without access, between these children and their parents and their teachers. The children almost exclusively use the Internet at their homes for different reasons: not paying, privacy, and convenience. They usually go online in the evenings when the connection is relatively faster. They actively engage themselves in using the Internet for diverse purposes which made them feel savvier, unlike their parents who tend to use it for work-related purposes. Their purpose-directed activity, which was manifested in many ways, is considered as the basic tenet of the uses-and-gratifications theory and which provides the theoretical framework for this study. It was also evident that these children were attracted to the Internet because they get everything they want all at once - texts, pictures, and sounds. Their teachers do not encourage them to use the Internet as a source of information due to their concern over plagiarism. They abide by some of the rules their parents devise while they reject some others. According to the findings, the children in this study have adopted the Internet relatively late. They only access sites that are produced outside of Ethiopia since local sites are non-existent. Finally, the findings confirmed that the children in this study do not access pornography materials intentionally.

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

AAU- Addis Ababa University

CD-ROM- Compact Disk “read only memory”

ETA- Ethiopian Telecommunications Authority

ETC- Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation

FDRE- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

ICT- Information and Communications Technology

IP- Internet Protocol

ISP- Internet Service Provider

PC- Personal Computer

TVET- Technical and Vocational and Educational Training

WWW- World Wide Web

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## *Chapter One*

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

I was a third year undergraduate student (2003) when I first started using the Internet. I used it only for exchanging e-mails with my British friends, whom I was corresponding via the post. It was an enlightening experience which made me feel part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century generation. The other thing I cannot forget about it was how it made me feel superior to those who did not care to use it, even though our campus provided a free access with a very limited number of computers. In one particular case, I started teasing a friend of mine for not using the Internet telling him how the message reaches its intended destination in the twinkling of an eye. To show off, I also tried to exchange e-mail addresses with some friends when we departed for the two months vacation. It was a truly thrilling revelation for a young boy from a small town called Bahir Dar!

Our world has witnessed many kinds of technological development in the last century. Some of them have caused disastrous destruction for humans and nature, for example nuclear weapons. And some of them have made life on earth a lot easier, for instance, the advancement of medical technology. But we know that many countries use nuclear energy for other constructive purposes as well. And it is obvious that medical technology could be manipulated to carry out some malicious activities, too.

Digital technologies are among the wonders that we are witnessing, and at the heart of each and every aspect of human life as we are overwhelmingly becoming dependent on them. With the way these technologies are being exploited for different purposes, it is difficult to predict what the future world would look like. Consequently, older forms of communications seem to become obsolete as we embark on e-commerce, e-governance, online parties, chatting and the like. In terms of governance, for instance, “The main potential of digital technologies for government, cyber-optimists suggest, lies in

strengthening policy effectiveness, political accountability, and to a lesser extent, public participation” (Pippa Norris, 2001: 112-113).

Although many people believe digital technologies have a lot of positive contributions, a good many of them have their own suspicions. Those who have reservations are called, by media scholars, as sceptics and cyber-pessimists (Norris, 2001:26). The pessimists argue that these technologies are widening the gap between the rich and the poor within and between nations or the existing North-South divide (Norris, 2001:9). This is mainly because the third world is unable to exploit these technologies due to rampant poverty and corruption, lack of educated manpower, and tight government control. Even if the South is trying to make use of the Internet, Norris also claims that “multiple burdens of debt, disease, and ignorance” and the rapid sophistication of this technology has forced it to lag behind “the digital world” (Norris, 2001:5).

The Internet is one of the most influential digital technologies of our time. In most African countries, it is possible to say that it is still under government scrutiny or control. Governments can take action in censoring or banning web pages that are critical of them. This can discourage democratic deliberations that give citizens the chance to participate in promoting good governance and accountability. It is also possible to argue that the absence of market competition has also made the expense of Internet affordable only for the rich minority- leaving the majority ignorant of the Net's potential, even the basic uses like sending e-mails. Although, in general, children are assumed to be avid users of the Net, children in the West have much more opportunity to exploit it to the fullest. Leslie Simon et al. have put this as follows: “Children living under repressive regimes are not going to know what the real Internet is. They will have access only to a sanitized corner, a bowdlerized subset of the truly World Wide Web” (2002: 2).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

It is undoubtedly true that children can benefit a lot from the Internet. They can build sound knowledge, they can entertain themselves, they can meet and socialize with cyber-friends, et cetera. But the thing that we should not forget is that they can also expose

themselves to dangers of many kinds. For instance, they can go astray in developing behaviour that is out of the norms of the society. They can also get involved in some criminal activities or end up as victims, physically or mentally. While chatting online, they can exchange information about sex freely, which could influence their behaviour positively or negatively. This can be unthinkable, for some children due to their shyness, to talk about sex in face-to-face communication situations. So they exploit the Net, for Net-mediated behaviour “is relatively uninhibited and nonconforming” (Reid 1993: 64). Besides this, they can be exposed to online social isolation, violence, pornography, predators and commercialism ([www.nsb.org](http://www.nsb.org)).

Children in Ethiopia could also be affected positively or negatively because of their exposure to the Internet. Although many Ethiopian children are out of touch with the Net, city dwellers especially in Addis Ababa are trying their best to make use of it. Children, especially those who go to top private schools and Mission schools, take Computer classes starting from the early stages. Using their knowledge from their schools, they try to get acquainted with the Internet and its multifaceted purposes. Those who do not have home-based access can go to the ubiquitous Internet cafes to use it. There, they are supposed to pay 20-30 cents per minute to use the Internet, which is usually incredibly slow.

The presence of the Internet entails opportunities and danger as mentioned above. The researcher believes that every child has the right to use it and children’s curious nature could be the driving force behind exposure, in some instances at an early stage. The researcher further believes that a systematic understanding of high school teenagers’ (between the ages of 17-18) use of the Internet in Addis Ababa is crucial to find out how and why they try to use it and other related issues. I assumed that these age groups are the ones who may have access to the Internet and capable of participating well in such studies, in the Ethiopian context. My study included 18 school teenagers who have home-based Internet access.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to examine how and why Ethiopian high school teenagers in Addis Ababa, living in their particular socio-political context, use the Internet. In addition, it attempts:

- 1) to find out the impact it has on their social relations;
- 2) to identify which kinds of sites they frequently use and avoid;
- 3) to find out where they usually access it and why;
- 4) to find out how much time they spend on it;
- 5) to find out their overall interaction with the Internet, and so on.

### **1.4 Methods of the Study**

The study employed a qualitative method of data collection. In order to obtain thick descriptions of teenagers perception and experience of the Internet, the role it has on their lives, their tendency on what kinds of sites they visit, their ways of accepting messages, their reaction to some messages compared to others, et cetera, it was necessary to employ qualitative study. Therefore in-depth and focus group interviews were used to gather the necessary data. These approaches are encouraged by media scholars “who adhere to critical and interpretative forms of social scientific enquiry” (Gunter, 2000:99).

The study also employed purposive sampling to select the interviewees, particularly snowball sampling technique, whereby “initial contacts suggest further people for the researcher to approach, who in turn may provide further contacts” (Deacon et al., 1999: 53). This was used mainly because participants that should be included in the study must have the exposure in the first place. According to Gunter, “One of the fundamental questions asked about the media by researchers is to what extent are they used? How often or how much are audience members exposed to media? The question of media exposure is vital for a number of reasons” (2000:93). The researcher assumed that some of the teenagers in the schools that were selected would have a greater chance of home-based access. The data was finally analyzed and interpreted by systematically breaking down interviewees’ responses.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study, I believe, could contribute in the recent interest to understand Ethiopian children's global media exposure based on the context they live in. For instance, it is possible to mention the following dissertations- "Disney Kids: A Study on the Reception of Global Media Giant by Ethiopian Children in Addis Ababa" by Tewodros Workalemahu and "An Investigation into the Appropriation and Use of Bollywood Movies by Ethiopian Youth from a Poor Family Background in Addis Ababa" by Dilalew Million. More specifically, it could give ideas on how and why Ethiopian high school teenagers use one of the most hyped up new media technologies, the Internet.

The influence digital technologies have on children has been given great importance in the West and has been studied by many scholars. Although their reach in the Third World countries is still scanty, their influence on those children who have access could be speculated. Thus, this particular study could contribute in giving guidance for further studies that will revolve around this area. It could also be taken as a platform for devising policies, rules and/or regulations to further assist the growth (or the prohibition of some aspects) of Internet usage by children at the national, school or family level.

### **1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

Studies on Internet use could focus on specificities or demographic characteristics such as education, age, profession, social class, gender, geography, and many more others. This particular study is limited to grade 11 Mission school students of both sexes from Addis Ababa who are between the ages of 16-18. Although interviewing the children was not a very tough challenge, there were some setbacks like meeting them simultaneously according to my schedule. Some of the principals insisted that I should change my schedule to meet the students after examinations or after classes are over. Besides, in some of the schools it was very difficult to find quiet venues to conduct the interviews. The toughest of the limitations was interviewing parents due to their busy work schedule. It was also very challenging to get hold of relevant material to give a very good account

of what the situation looks like in relation to the Internet and teenagers in Ethiopia. Hence, I was forced to rely on a few sources for my discussion in relation to this.

### **1.7 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of six chapters. This chapter gives an introduction on background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation of the study. The second chapter reviews the literature that is related to children and the Internet. It also discusses the uses-and-gratifications theory that is the theoretical framework for this study. The third chapter presents discussions on the methodology employed to conduct this study and the reasons why the researcher opted for qualitative methodology with details of procedures on how he went about the research.

The fourth chapter, the social context of the study gives a general historical and geographical overview of Ethiopia, when and how the Internet came to existence in Ethiopia and its sole provider the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation and the Ethiopian youth current status. The fifth chapter discusses the analysis and presentation of the data. This chapter discusses how and why school children use the Internet in light of the major theoretical backbone of the study, which is the uses-and-gratifications theory. It therefore, tries to discuss the teenagers' access and uses of the Internet and their perceptions towards their teachers and their parents in terms of this technology. Finally, chapter six concludes this thesis work with a summary.

## *Chapter Two*

### **Literature Review**

#### *Children and the Internet*

##### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will discuss literature dealing with the nature of teenagers' use of the Internet and concerns, hopes or potentials that this new medium sparks. More specifically, I will explore why teenagers use the Internet, how they use it, and how they manage to realize their expectations for going online. In addition, I will discuss the uses-and-gratifications theory as a relevant theory for a study of media use.

The first section of this chapter provides a brief overview of the history, nature and functions of the Internet. Here, I will discuss the main bodies behind its coming into existence and how it all started, some of its distinctive features that could make it different from older media and the services it renders. After that, follows a discussion on the concept of 'digital divide' and the role of the Internet. In this discussion I have attempted to present arguments of the three opposing groups on the role the Internet plays. And then, I will try to look at the predominant content on the Internet and the need to have media literacy to cope with some of the challenges posed by the Internet. The next section deals with teenagers' media use and how much of their time they spend online, parental rules and regulations, and so on. Following that, the uses-and-gratifications theory will be examined as thoroughly as possible and different scholarly perspectives will be discussed to show why this theoretical approach was chosen for this study. And finally, a summary and concluding remark will be given in the last section.

## **2.2 Internet - its History, Nature and Functions**

Many scholars state that the inception of the current Internet goes back to the late 1960s (Gurak, 2001:65 and Whittaker, 2004:19). Manuel Castells states that the Americans' fear of Soviet Russia's conspiracy to take control of or a nuclear attack against American communications during nuclear war, were among the possible reasons for the birth of the Internet (Castells, 2006:6).

Therefore, as one might guess, it was not a venture of a certain for-profit organization or a technology aficionado but rather arose out of American military defence needs. According to Everett M. Rogers, "the USA congress established Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) in the Pentagon" from which the Internet got its christening name ARPANET (Rogers, 2001:98). When ARPANET started work as a network in 1969, Jason Whittaker says that it "remained the preserve largely of scientists and computer engineers, but the introduction of the personal computer in the late 1970s, signalled the potential for those networks to form the backbone of a mass medium" (Whittaker, 2004:19).

It has since become a commercial medium. Some concerned writers (for example, John Battelle) state that there are a lot of advertisements on the Internet nowadays, in different kinds (animated, pop-up, moving, fixed, et cetera). It could be inferred that the reason why the Internet is not yet accessible to the majority of people in the poorest nations is their widely perceived incapacity to buy advertised goods and services. John Battelle takes this position on the commercial nature of the Internet and says: "On the Internet, it can be argued, all intent is commercial in one way or another, for your very attention is valuable to someone, even if you're simply researching your grandmother's genealogy or reading up on a rare species of dolphin" (2005:30).

The lack of accountability or anonymity (in some circumstances) of the sources of information on the Internet means, "its message content is very difficult or impossible for governments, parents, or other gatekeepers to control" (Rogers, 2001:98). However, many claim that the Internet has made life easier a lot more than other systems of

communication. Rogers argues that “e-mail via the Internet” is better in many aspects, than postal mail and the World Wide Web is easier than books to get information, on condition of access (Rogers, 2001:97). David Croteau and William Hoynes argue that new media are distinctly different from old media because it is possible to use them for “interactive communication” (2003:321). They also state:

In essence, digital media technologies provide citizens with the technical apparatus to do more than just receive information. They can respond to messages they receive, select which images they want to receive, or even send out their own messages. (2003:321)

On the issue of how the Internet functions, Chris Mann and Fiona Stewart say that the core thing that makes the Internet works is, “a suite of software ‘protocols’ or rules that enable all of the computers on the Internet to communicate with each other” and, in effect, “enable us to access web pages via our web browsers, to download files, and to send and receive e-mail” (2004:8).

Among the many functions that the Internet has, these are the most common ones, summarized from Evjen and Bjornebekks’ (2000) research report:

- *World Wide Web*: Using a point and click hypertext system of control, the exchange of almost any kind of information is possible. A WWW browser is used to send text, graphics, sound, animation and video directly onto the Internet. The majority of this information is available solely by using a cursor, the mouse.
- *E-mail*: Using this function, one can send messages to anyone with an email address and an Internet connection. E-mail is fast, cheap and efficient and many types of media can be exchanged as attachment files.
- *Search Engines*: A search engine systematically searches for information (usually a phrase supplied by the user) on other Net servers and indexes the results. Search engines often offer categories of media such as pictures or text.
- *Internet Relay Chat*: Using a WWW browser, Internet users can sign in to public ‘chat rooms’ and exchange instant typed messages with each other. With instant messaging the same principle applies, but Internet users can chat only with one of a list of contacts they have added on a specially installed software programme (2000:164-166).

### 2.3. The Digital Divide and the Internet

With the rapid sophistication of technology, the phrase ‘digital divide’ is gaining much prominence. Scholars and researchers are not always in agreement as to what the term refers. With regard to Internet access Pippa Norris writes:

The term “digital divide” has quickly become so popular as an instant sound bite that it has entered everyday speech as shorthand for any and every disparity within the online community. In this study the concept of the digital divide is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing three distinct aspects. The *global divide* refers to the divergence of internet access between industrialized and developing societies. The *social divide* concerns the gap between information rich and poor in each nation. And finally within the online community, the *democratic divide* signifies the difference between those who do, and do not, use the panoply of digital resources to engage, mobilize, and participate in public life. (2001:34)

Leslie David Simon et al. have also defined it as: “...a gap between information haves and have-nots that was threatening to spread inequality not only within countries but between the richest and the poorest countries” (2002:6).

Amidst fierce criticisms over its monopoly by big conglomerates and heavy-handed governments, it may be possible to say that the Internet is taking centre stage in the struggle to secure social, economical and political progress in our globe. And according to Jason Whittaker, nowadays access to new technologies “is a major concern for those who see the Internet as a potentially universal service that can influence economic and political outcomes” (2004:264). But this is strongly opposed by people who do not have faith that the Internet can play a positive role in driving common global development goals forward.

The three opposing groups, one which claims that the Internet exacerbates the digital divide, the other which claims that it ameliorates it, and the third which argues that the hopes and fears are exaggerated are dubbed by media professionals as ‘cyber pessimists’, ‘cyber optimists’ and ‘sceptics’. Norris has put their attitudes towards the Internet in relation to the North-South divide as follows:

Optimists hope that the development of the Internet has the capacity to reduce, although not wholly eradicate, traditional inequalities between information-rich and-poor both between, and within, societies. In contrast, pessimists believe that the digital technologies will reinforce and exacerbate existing disparities. Sceptics suggest that both the fears and hopes are exaggerated, with technologies adapting to the social and political status quo, rather than vice versa. (2001:26)

Presumably the bleakest stance in terms of the barriers to access has been taken by Frank Njubi, a Kenyan assistant professor of Africana Studies at San Diego State University, who attacked Western capitalism with a barrage of criticism for perpetuating the age-old divide between the rich and the poor nations. He explicates his ideas as follows:

Yet the lack of access to these technologies among the vast majority of poor and people of colour in the world suggests that the problem goes deeper than a simple lack of access. The problem is the political and economic hegemony of Western capitalism. This system has kept people of colour at the bottom of the totem pole for over five hundred years and used technology to maintain the racial hierarchy that was established by the Atlantic slave trade. Without fundamental change to this system of racial inequality, technological innovation will always benefit the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor. (2001:126)

It could be argued that the Internet could end up being an agent for both these views depending on access. Those who have the access could prosper beyond imagination while those who do not have access trail through their already existing quagmire. However, it is important to look at this problem in terms of Internet diffusion. Although a significant number of the world's population is not connected, especially the Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, according to Norris (2001:5), many believe that the Internet is spreading across the globe in spite of its relative "infancy" (Ross and Nightingale, 2003:161-162). Thus, Rogers writes: "Since 1989 the Internet has been the most rapidly diffusing innovation in the history of humankind" (2005:97). Similarly Castells argues that projecting two billion users of the Internet with one billion connected computers before 2010 may not sound unthinkable (2000:376). Futurist Ray Kurzweil is also assertive of this idea, in response to a statement by Philippe Van Nederveelde "...but the digital divide is getting worse." He responds:

I know that people keep saying that, but how can that possibly be true? The number of humans is growing only very slowly. The number of digitally

connected humans, no matter how you measure it, is growing rapidly. A larger and larger fraction of the world's population is getting electronic communicators and leapfrogging our primitive phone-wiring system by hooking up to the Internet wirelessly, so the digital divide is rapidly diminishing, not growing. (2005:95)

But some scholars argue that the mere facilitation of access would not guarantee the chance to alleviate this problem. Rogers says: "Perhaps the 'have-nots' have a physical disability or cannot communicate in English. Approximately 69 percent of all web pages are in English. Thus, even if the 'access-divide' were eventually bridged, a 'racial-divide', a 'rural/urban divide', and other divides would still cause disparities" (2001:101). Norris for her part says, although the dominance of the English language may come to an end at some stage in the future as people from all corners of the world go online, "in the meantime those who can read English are greatly advantaged in the digital world" (2001:60). It is also well recognized that there is a divide along lines of sex and age. According to Ulla Carlsson younger people are much more skillful and savvy than elderly people when it comes to using new media technologies (2006:12). Sonia Livingstone says that: "Domestic access is often more or less equal, and there are few gender differences in motivation for Internet use" (2003:155) However, quoting McName (1998), Livingstone states that: "boys may control their sisters' access to ICT (Information and communication Technology) in order to express, and so reproduce, their masculine identity" (McName (1998), as cited in Livingstone, 2003:155). The ensuing section tries to explore Internet content and literacy.

#### **2.4. Internet Content and Literacy**

It is possible to say that before the arrival of new media, the major concern of most parents was whether their children were spending their time with books, while disregarding or giving scant attention to the idea of scrutinizing what the content was. With the advent of the Internet "it is not clear how far the public recognizes or feels empowered to respond to the expanding array of content on offer. It is likely that these newer, more interactive media pose a challenge not only to regulators but also to ordinary families" (Livingstone and Hargrave, 2006:22).

It is now commonplace to hear people talking about the idea of how the Internet is full of harmful and offensive content alongside its remarkable services. But according to Livingstone and Hargrave: “While harmful and offensive material is, in principle, distinguished from that which is illegal (obscenity, child abuse images, incitement to racial hatred, etc), it is not easy to define the boundaries in a robust and consensual fashion” (2006:21).

Even though they find it difficult to define harmful and offensive content on the Internet, they have come up with ways why it could be an easy prey for malpractice. They state: “The widespread accessibility of the Internet, along with its affordability, anonymity and convenience, is seen by many to increase the likelihood of media harm and offence” (Livingstone and Hargrave, 2006:26).

Compared to research on the content of older media (especially television), while the issues are still violence, pornography and stereotyping, the new media are facilitating instant and suitable access (including to children) beating blocking mechanisms (Livingston and Hargrave, 2006:41). Mark Griffiths argues pornography web sites are “‘undisputed kings’ in selling advertising space” (2000:174). Furthermore, he states:

One of the main reasons why the pornography industry has such a vested interest in this area is that in the online world the buying of most products is hassle-free and anonymous. However, buying pornography in the offline world may be embarrassing or stressful to the consumers particularly if they have to go to venues deemed to be “unsavoury”. (2000:174)

It is possible to say that accessing this content could either be intentional or inadvertent. For those labelled as media savvy parents, guardians or children who are cautious of the potential harm or offence that could be caused by content mentioned earlier, there is a lot of software which they could use to block or filter them. But according to Livingstone and Hargrave this software is not used widely (2006:42). They additionally say that this is not because of lack of concern. “Rather, it is because people lack the knowledge and awareness of how to choose, install and use access controls or they feel such mechanisms are not necessary within their own families” (Livingstone and Hargrave, 2006:42). Livingstone and Hargrave suggest that there may be a difference between children who

navigate to pornography web sites and those who access them by accident (2006:42). They say: “However, for both adults and children, some research suggest that, irrespective of whether content is found accidentally or deliberately, harm may still result (especially from violent pornography)” (Livingstone and Hargrave, 2006:42).

Many people feel that media literacy is the other crucial skill that children and adults should acquire. Ulla Carlsson defines media literacy as follows:

*Media literacy* means understanding how mass media work, how they construct reality and produce meaning, how the media are organized, and knowing how to use them wisely. In short, it is seen to empower people to be both critical thinkers and creative producers of an increasingly wide range of messages using images, sound and language. (2006:15)

She goes on to say that it bolsters “the critical abilities and communicative skills” to make people’s lives meaningful and to let them “use communication for change, while promoting a well-oriented, democratic knowledge society” (Carlsson, 2006:15). More specifically, Laura Gurak defines Internet literacy as being more than just a user and “voicing an opinion about what these technologies should become and being an active, not a passive, participant” (2001:27-28).

The idea of media literacy not only in children but also in parents seems to be gaining ground due to extensive research conducted on children and on the infinite content of the media (especially the Internet) that renders children vulnerable. According to Carlsson, research shows that a multitude of parents do not know the nature of their children’s exposure to the media or the content that is made available, especially by the more interactive media like the Internet (2006:16). But it could be argued that this lack of understanding about what children are doing with the Internet, its worth to them and perceived dangers in relation to it in some households has caused negative attitudes towards the Internet, hence severely limiting some of its possible opportunities for children who may have different aspirations. Livingstone states the following from her 2001 research report:

For many families, the Internet is still a fragile medium, experienced as unfamiliar, confusing, easier to get wrong than right, far from taken-for-granted. Parents are developing strategies to manage and regulate the Internet within the

home, framed by educational aspirations for their children; meanwhile children prefer online entertainment centred on fandom transferred from already established media- music, celebrities, sports, television programmes. (2003:149)

According to the above statement, many families worry that their children's exposure to the Internet could lead them astray and could get in the way of their educational excellence. To the plight of such families, children nowadays have taken the Internet as a fundamental part of their daily life using it virtually on a day to day basis. And it is possible to say that it has become a hot topic of discussion for becoming either a challenge to the traditional learning and teaching process on the one hand and an element that could complement it, if properly and wisely used, on the other hand. And below, a brief discussion on children's media use follows.

## **2.5. Children's Media Use**

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Internet is becoming the leading defining technology of adolescents' lifestyle. And according to Livingstone, "children value this new medium for information, entertainment, relieving boredom and their preferred activity, communication (chat, e-mail, instant message)" (2003:149). Chat, e-mail, and instant messages are regarded as very important ways for young people to get new friends and to keep existing relationships. The nature of anonymity also gives a chance for children to pretend to be someone else (Karin Larsson, 2003:116).

These and other opportunities made possible by the Internet along with those dangers posed (for instance, pornography) have alerted parents to warn their children not to give email address, not to go to chat rooms, and so on while treating children "as objects of instruction" and discouraging discussion (Andrew Burn and Sue Cranmer, 2007:80). This stance by parents on online relationships of children could seem in conflict with both their children and their idea of the benefits of the Internet (Livingstone, 2003:153). Livingstone states: "On the one hand, they see children becoming expert, confident learners in the new information age; on the other, they worry about the loss of traditional skills, competencies and values" (2003:153). So parents try to devise rules to supervise children's Internet use and:

Such rules can polarize parents' and children's perspectives, for while anonymity and playfulness, privacy and deception, have always been vital to childhood and are therefore crucially what children value about the Internet, it is precisely these issues that give rise to fears for children's safety. (2003:155)

Contrary to some parents' and some concerned citizens' fear quoted above, studies on children and the media are no longer taking children as helpless victims but "as a competent and selective media user" (Birgitte Tufte, 2007: 94). And it is possible to argue that if they are not properly dealt with, these opposing views could lead to some sort of conflict between parents and children.

According to a study by Burn and Cranmer on young people's Internet use in the UK, home use is more extensive than school use and at school "they use the Internet for schoolwork through information retrieval" (2007:81-82). They state:

One likely reason for this is over-regulation of the Internet by schools, and the research provided evidence of widespread regimes of rules and prohibitions which can be assumed to produce discouraging and negative elements in the schools' Internet culture. (2007:82)

Burn and Cranmer's finding states that school use appears to prevent overt discussion which could "lead to learning, critical awareness and deeper engagement" (Burn and Cranmer, 2007:83). Nevertheless, home use entertains open discussion and students are inclined to consult their parents rather than their teachers (Burn and Cranmer, 2007:83).

## **2.6 Summary**

The above section discussed how the Internet came into existence, its overall nature and how it works in general. It also talked about the different views and controversies that are aired on how the Internet is shaping the current world we are living in. Besides, it tried to explore the content that is very common on the Internet and the concept and the need to acquire Internet literacy. And the last portion presented the nature of children's exposure to the Internet drawing examples from around the world. The section below discusses the theoretical background of the study, the uses-and-gratifications theory.

## 2.7 The Uses-and-Gratifications Theory

Some earlier theories, like the magic bullet, “considered the audience as relatively inert, passively waiting for the media to transmit information which was then perceived, remembered and (presumably) acted upon more or less uniformly” (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1989:187). Contrary to this theory, the ‘uses-and-gratifications’ theory or approach was the first to uphold the idea of audience activeness which steered the focus away from “what the media do to people” to “what people do with the media...” (Ross and Nightingale, 2003:31). In light of this, Baran and Davis state:

Our level of activity might vary by time of day and by type of content. We might be active users of the World Wide Web by day and passive consumers of late-night movies. What the uses-and-gratifications approach really does, then, is provide a framework for understanding when and how different media consumers become more or less active and what the consequences of that increased or decreased involvement might be. (2006:271)

According to McQuail, some of the primary assumptions of this approach at the time of its rediscovery (in the 1960s and 1970s) are:

- (a) media and content choice is generally rational and directed toward certain specific goals and satisfactions (thus the audience is active and audience formation can be logically explained);
- (b) audience members are conscious of the media-related needs that arise in personal (individual) and social (shared) circumstances and can voice these in terms of motivations;
- (c) broadly speaking, personal utility is more significant determinant of audience formation than aesthetic or cultural factors; and
- (d) all or most of the relevant factors for audience formation (motives, perceived or obtained satisfactions, media choices, background variables) can, in principle, be measured. (1997:70-1)

After pioneering studies in the 1940s, the approach had two revivals from which the first took place in the 1970s partially as a response to the insignificant and overqualified findings of ordinary effects research (Baran and Davis, 2006:268). They state that its second revival “is the product of the relatively recent development and diffusion of the Internet and World Wide Web, most specifically because of the interactivity these digital

media allow” (Baran and Davis, 2006:269). In relation to the Internet, Baran and Davis have quoted Thomas Ruggiero who argues that “uses-and-gratifications has always provided a cutting-edge theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communications medium,” (Ruggiero as cited in Baran and Davis, 2006:269) and identifies three features of computer-mediated mass communication that “offer a vast continuum of communication behaviours” for uses-and-gratifications researchers to examine:

- *Interactivity* “significantly strengthens the core [uses-and-gratifications] notion of active user” (Ruggiero, 2000, p15 as cited in Baran and Davis, 2006:269). Bucy and Newhagen have quoted Steuer who defined interactivity with respect to new media as “the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time” (Steuer as cited in Bucy and Newhagen, 2004:55).
- *Demassification* is “the ability of the media user to select from a wide menu... Unlike traditional mass media, new media like the Internet provide selectivity characteristics that allow individuals to tailor messages to their needs” (Ruggiero, 2000, p16 as cited in Baran and Davis, 2006:269).
- *Asynchronicity* means that mediated messages “may be staggered in time. Senders and receivers of electronic messages can read mail at different times and still interact at their convenience. It also means the ability of an individual to send, receive, save, or retrieve messages at her or his convenience (Ruggiero 2000, p16 as cited in Baran and Davis, 2006:269).

According to Glenn Sparks the uses-and-gratifications theory was formalized by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch and was designed to impart deep understanding of “the ways that people use media to meet their needs” (Sparks, 2006:64). Different kinds of media satisfy different kinds of needs. Thus, users are active in trying to find media which gratify their needs in terms of cognitive, social interaction and diversion (Straubhaar and LaRose, 2006:400). As it is cited in Straubhaar and LaRose, Papacharissi and Rubin state that “interpersonal communication is one of the important gratifications that people expect of the Internet” (2006:400). However, behaviour related to media use changes with the passage of time and the satisfactions we try to find from the media follow suit (Straubhaar and LaRose, 2006:401). They add:

At some stages of our lives we may seek media that entertain; at other times information may be more of a priority. And, the different media vary with

respect to the gratifications they provide us. For example, television is associated with entertainment, whereas the Internet is more related to information seeking. (2006:401)

A large number of studies have tried to come up with lists of needs gratified or types of reasons (motivations) and functions involved in attending media, though the lists differ from researcher to researcher (Lowery and DeFleur, 1983:375). Bucy and Newhagen have quoted Rafaeli who “characterized the uses-and-gratifications approach as especially appropriate for spotlighting the motivations that drive people to take part in the Internet” (Rafaeli as cited in Bucy and Newhagen, 2004:75). According to Sparks the reasons his 14-year-old daughter used the Internet were, companionship, learning (which dominates), relaxation, arousal, pass time and blogging (means of expression) (Sparks, 2006:65). And John Battelle defines blogs as “home pages of sorts, but they are far more than that- they represent a new form of authoring on the Web, authoring that takes as its foundation the ability to quickly and easily link to anything else on the Web” (2005:266).

The uses-and-gratifications approach has been criticized not only for its behaviourist and functionalist inclinations but also for its failure to give a fruitful forecast or causal explanation in choosing and using media (McQuail, 2000:389). According to McQuail, generally, functional analysis tends to assume that communication works to make sure “the integration, continuity and normality of society, although also recognizing that mass communication can have dysfunctional (disruptive and harmful) consequences” (2000:46). And in terms of behavioural audience research, he states that:

Media *use* was now central, and the audience was viewed as a more or less active and motivated set of media users/consumers, who were ‘in charge’ of their media experience, rather than passive ‘victims’. Research focused on the origin, nature and degree of motives for choice of media and media content. Audiences were also permitted to provide the definitions of their own behaviour. (2000:367)

Due to this, some scholars criticize the uses-and-gratifications approach for generating not more than lists of “reasons” for which people say that they choose and use different media or lists of “satisfactions” they obtain (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach,1989:187). Besides, to what extent audience behaviour is directed by particular and rational motives

has always been contentious (McQuail, 2000:389). McQuail quotes Babrow (1988) who suggested that “we think in terms of ‘interpretive frameworks’ based on experience” (Babrow as cited in McQuail, 2000:389). My study will try to present the reasons why these children go online, the satisfaction they obtain and how they expose themselves to the Internet with the best possible interpretation to facilitate a clearer understanding of school children’s use of the Internet in Addis Ababa.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

In this literature review, I have presented some scholarly ideas, deliberations, standpoints and insights from previous research findings in relation to the Internet. I have also discussed the hopes and worries that it has caused for societies in different parts of the globe as well as the content that it has made available, the need for media literacy, children’s use of it and the uses-and-gratifications theory.

I have also tried to define some concepts and terms to pave the way for a better understanding of the Internet as a new medium and what children do with it. A discussion on how parents and schools struggle to make sure safer exposure of children and its implication on their adoption of new technology (how they are trying to appropriate it in their respective atmospheres), the possible limitations that could arise on children’s exploitation of the Internet the way they want to, without any kind of interference from other bodies were presented. And finally, I discussed the uses-and-gratifications theory, how it views the audience, in what ways it is useful on the study of media audiences, and some of the criticisms against it were given. The next chapter discusses issues related to the research methodology I employed.

## *Chapter Three*

### **Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This study endeavoured to examine how and why school teenagers in Addis Ababa use the Internet. In order to be able to do this, all the necessary data was gathered using the qualitative methods of data gathering. Therefore, in this chapter I have discussed why I chose this method and its significance to this particular study, which was slightly discussed in my first chapter.

Then, I discuss the two sampling and data collection procedures (that are focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews) I followed. And more specifically, I discuss the sampling and recruitment of groups, the interview setting, my role as a moderator, the interview guide, and the recording, transcribing and analyzing of data.

#### **3.2 Qualitative Research Methodology**

As I have noted, the methodological approach of my study was solely qualitative. Many regard qualitative research method as a recent phenomenon which is causing a flurry of interest amongst researchers (Jensen and Jankowski, 1995:1). As Jensen and Jankowski put it, there is a boom in the interest over the past few years worldwide “in applying qualitative research methods to the study of social and cultural processes. The turn to qualitative approaches has perhaps been especially prominent in mass communication research” (1995:1). It is also “known by different labels including critical theory, interpretive social science, hermeneutics, and naturalistic enquiry” (Larry Strelitz, 2002:112).

According to Flick et al., “Qualitative research claims to describe lifeworlds ‘from the inside out’, from the point of view of the people who participate” (2000:3). And Bryman suggests that: “Because of the commitment to see through the eyes of one’s subjects close

involvement is advocated” (1984:73). And as Babbie and Mouton put it, the main aim of studies that employ this methodology is “describing and understanding (verstehen) rather than explaining human behaviour” (2001:270). Jankowski and Wester referred to Mead’s notion of role taking that says, “in order to study human behaviour the perspective of the actor must be established. The researcher’s task, then, becomes one of reconstructing and understanding this perspective” (Mead as cited in Jankowski and Wester, 1991:45). This is what is called the inductive approach the researcher takes to “his or her object of study” (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:273). Babbie and Mouton further say:

Rather than beginning with an existing theory or hypotheses, the qualitative researcher begins with an immersion in the natural setting, describing events as accurately as possible, as they occur or have occurred, and slowly but surely building second-order constructs, sense of the observations. (2001:273)

As quoted by Babbie and Mouton, Bogdan and Taylor relate the “attempt to view the world through the eyes (perspective) of the actors themselves” to the phenomenological roots of qualitative research (2001:270). Bogdan and Taylor further explicate phenomenology as follows:

The phenomenologist views human behaviour as a product of how people interpret their world. The task of the phenomenologist, and for us, the qualitative methodologists, is to capture this process of interpretation. In order to grasp the meanings of a person’s behaviour, *the phenomenologist attempts to see things from that person’s point of view*. (Cited in Babbie and Mouton, 2001:271)

Babbie and Mouton argue that the researcher should transcend the role of being an observer and become more involved (2001:271). They further assert that: “He or she has to make a deliberate attempt to put themselves in the shoes of the people they are observing and studying and try and understand their actions, decisions, behaviour, practices, rituals and so on, from their perspective” (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:271). Taking this into consideration, it was advisable for me to assume that the actors I was studying, who were between the ages of 17-18, were relatively different from my psychological make up, my world view, styles of social interactions, and tried to become more engaging, sensitive and alert in my interactions with them. Lindlof affirms that the researcher is able to get “understanding of the subjects only insofar as he or she can participate in the subjects’ own scope of interpretation” (1995:2).

Bryman states that, “qualitative research is deemed to be much more fluid and flexible” and in effect, “it emphasizes novel or unanticipated findings and the possibility of altering research plans in response to such serendipitous occurrences” (1984:73). And according to Lindlof, what qualitative research basically strives for is, to “preserve the form and content of human behaviour and to analyze its qualities, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations” (1995:21). He adds that for qualitative research “actual talk, gesture, and other social actions are the raw materials of analysis” (Lindlof, 1995:21).

According to Bryman, because of the exploratory nature of qualitative research, researchers who use this method embark on “a voyage of discovery rather than one of verification, so that his or her research is likely to stimulate new leads and avenues of research that the quantitative researcher is unlikely to hit upon, but which may be used as a basis for further research” (Bryman, 1984:76). Therefore, this particular research has also attempted to discover some of the views the children in this study hold about their Internet use which could be used as a stepping stone for further studies. The following section discusses data collection and sampling procedures that were employed for this study.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Sampling Procedures**

There were two stages to my research design: focus group interview and individual in-depth interview. These stages are very closely interrelated with each other to support or reinforce claims, references and clues drawn from the data obtained in each stage. A discussion of these stages of the research process and the sampling procedures is due to follow in the section below.

### 3.3.1 Focus group interview

#### 3.3.1.1 Background

According to Lunt and Livingstone, “The focus group has been used, variously, to discover consumer attitudes and motivations and to reveal public discourses and interpretive communities” (1996:79). The method is a way of getting the necessary data by “bringing together a group, or, more often, a series of groups of subjects to discuss an issue in the presence of a moderator” (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996:80). It is an approach which allows the researcher a type of potentially richer and sensitive data “on the dynamics of audiences and their relations to media than the survey” (Hansen et al., 1998:257-258).

The researcher had an opportunity to have a preliminary group discussion with his former students to get some ideas and issues that should be explored with the proper focus group discussions that took place in the other schools later in the study. And these discussions in turn have produced some ideas that could be considered for further studies. In light of this, it was advisable for me to use focus group interview which is bolstered by Hansen et al. who state the following:

The use of focus groups may be appropriate at different points in the progression of a study: they may be used at a very early stage for exploratory purposes, to explore which issues and topics people are concerned about within a particular domain or field, and how they talk about these issues. Such exploratory data will help in the construction of relevant questions for a larger survey study using questionnaires. (1998:260)

They additionally provide a couple of their reasons for using this approach, which are:

- (i) group interviews are more cost-efficient than individual interviews- a wider range of people can be interviewed within the same limitations of time, resources, and research money; and
- (ii) groups allow the researcher to observe how audiences make sense of media *through conversation* and interaction with each other. (1998:258)

### *3.3.1.2 Sampling and recruitment of groups*

According to Doctor Lishan Adam of Addis Ababa University, the number of Internet users in Ethiopia “remained insignificant compared to the size of the population and Ethiopia has one of the lowest indicators for Internet users per capita in the world” (2007:66). The divide within Ethiopia between those with and those without access is huge and taking into consideration of my research agenda (School Teenagers’ Use of the Internet), I have resorted to using purposive sampling, whereby I selected teenagers who have access to the Internet by virtue of being from affluent parents. These teenagers go to three of the Catholic Mission schools in Addis Ababa, and I was teaching in two of them. My teaching there helped me “identify them by observation over time and then invite them to participate” in this interview (Schroder et al., 2003:265). These students in my focus groups do not represent students in Addis Ababa or Ethiopia. And as Hansen et al. put it, “focus group studies in media research have rarely sought to obtain groups representative of the general population as such” (1998:265). And in general, in qualitative research, according to Babbie and Mouton, “All observations are defined by the specific contexts in which they occur. The qualitative researcher, therefore, does not maintain, or claim, that knowledge gained from one context will necessarily have relevance for other contexts or for the same context in another time frame” (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:277).

My other sampling techniques were snowball and convenience sampling. Deacon et al. explain snowball sampling as follows: “Like a snowball rolling down a hill, a snowball sample grows through momentum: initial contacts suggest further people for the researcher to approach, who in turn may provide further contacts” (1999:53). In my case, I talked to my former students who have home-based access to the Internet and they contacted other students in similar situations for me. Furthermore, I talked to some teachers (specifically Computer teachers) who pointed out the target subjects for my study.

When it comes to convenience sampling, it is defined by Deacon et al. as being different from other sampling techniques “in that sample selection is less preconceived and

directed, more the product of expediency, chance and opportunity than of deliberate intent” (1999:54). They further classify it into weak and strong version and state that the weak version “is the least desirable form and is where sample units or clusters are selected simply because they are nearest to hand” (Deacon et al., 1999:54). In relation to the strong version they say that sampling concentrates on “natural clusters of social groups and individuals, who seem to present unexpected but potentially interesting opportunities for research” (Deacon et al., 1999:54). I would say that both versions worked well in paving the way for me to employ this technique. In the weak version, it was easy for me to contact some of these teenagers as their former English teacher. In the strong version, it was my chance or opportunity to teach in two of these clusters of Catholic schools and my coming into contact with the students which initiates the interest to do this research.

On the issue of composition, Margariet Pitout and GM (Trudie) du Plooy state that: “To compose a group, we should keep in mind that a focus group is characterized by homogeneity, but with sufficient variation among the members of the group to elicit contrasting opinions” (P2001:305). They add that when we consider homogeneity, it is in terms of the groups’ “age, gender, education, family characteristics, or use of a particular mass medium” (Pitout and du Plooy, 2001:305). The number of people in a group discussion could be influential in the quality of the outcome and “with a consensus that 6-10 participants work best” (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996:82). The students in my focus group discussion were grade 11 boys and girls, between the ages of 17 and 18 in average, with home-based access to the Internet. In three of the groups, there were six participants.

### ***3.3.1.3 Interview setting***

Selecting the venue of the interview is very important. Hansen et al. quote Gamson who emphasizes “the need to involve people who know each other for discussions on the ‘participants’ turf rather than in a bureaucratic setting” (Gamson, 1992:193, as cited in Hansen et al., 1998:271). In line with this, Lunt and Livingstone state that an informal setting stimulates group conversation (1996:82). Schroder et al. on their part state that: “Many studies of young people’s use of the media have had to conduct interviews in the

school environment ...” (2003:151). I used each group’s respective school to conduct the interview and I could say that this has made students feel at home to express their opinions and feelings freely.

#### ***3.3.1.4 My role as a moderator***

According to Hansen et al., the role of the moderator is “essentially to ‘facilitate’, ‘moderate’, and ‘stimulate’ discussion among the participants, not to ‘dominate’, ‘govern’, or unduly ‘lead’ such discussion” (1998:272). I saw this as my role. In line with Lunt and Livingstone, I realized that it was required of me to “monitor a complex social interaction, encourage contributions, and manage disruption, diversion, and other problematic group dynamics” (1996:82). I could say that I have done all my best to put this into practice using my skill in handling and dealing with students from my teaching experience.

Hansen et al. say that a moderator mainly ensures that:

- the issues, topic, and foci outlined in the interview guide are covered in the course of the discussion (this task includes managing the time spent on each topic),
- a reasonable balance of contributions is maintained (that is, no single individual is allowed to command and dominate the group), and
- the discussion is kept on course and not allowed to drift off in directions of little or no relevance to the study. (1998:272)

It was also important for me to refrain from reflecting my personal views or “from being sarcastic towards or critical of participants” (Pitout and du Plooy, 2001:309).

#### ***3.3.1.5 The interview guide***

Drawing up an interview guide helps the researcher to make sure that a focus group discussion “stays focused on the subjects or issues relevant to the research” (Hansen et al., 1998:274). They add that it is mainly a ‘menu’ which lists the topics, issues and areas of discussion to be covered and give directions as to:

- ❖ the sequence of topics/issues to be covered;
- ❖ the nature and extent of promoting and probing;

- ❖ the nature and use of visual or verbal aids, and the points during the course of a group discussion where these should be introduced. (1998:274)

They further state that if it is used in a consistent manner in all the groups, it could enable us compare one group from the other (Hansen et al., 1998:274). Schroder et al. give the following procedure on how to go about preparing the interview guide:

Once the overall research purpose has been clarified, and the cardinal question (s) have been established all the possible issues that one is curious to find out about should be written down. The next stage consists of clustering the different issues into a shorter list of major themes, for which the various issues then become the sub-themes. Finally, the interview guide is fine-tuned by discarding overlapping sub-themes and incorporating new themes that were overlooked in the first round. (2003:157)

In addition to this, they say that as qualitative research literature recommends, “an interview guide should include ‘probes’, i.e. follow-up questions” to exhaust some themes (Schroder et al., 2003:157). I attempted to shape my interview guide carefully taking the above discussion into consideration. I clustered the different issues, for instance, into three major themes that are Internet Access, Perceptions about Parents and Teachers and finally Internet Usage. (see Appendix 1 & 2)

#### ***3.3.1.6 Recording and transcribing the data***

The discussions were recorded on cassette tape with the participants’ consent and with the guarantee, where appropriate, of the confidential and anonymous use of the material. I asked each participant to identify himself/herself in terms of name, age, and other demographic information for the purpose of ‘voice identification’. This helped me to transcribe the data as accurately as possible. I also tried to take a written short note while the issues were being discussed.

#### ***3.3.1.7 Analyzing and reporting the data***

The interview was conducted in Amharic (the official language) to make the participants feel comfortable and express themselves better. Then, the data was transcribed and translated into English. This comprised my raw data which needed further analysis. In the analysis stage attempt was made to examine, categorize and analyze the types of

responses generated in relation to the major themes and the specific issues by the interview guide (Hansen et al., 1998:279). The discussions were highly focused around the themes and issues I selected. But some related themes were bound to emerge as it often happens with focus group discussions which I tried to present in sub themes. In the actual report, apart from my description and interpretation, some direct quotes were used in an effort to create a clearer picture of how the participants generally interact. The next section talks about the other data collection procedure that was followed- the individual in-depth interview.

### **3.3.2 Individual in-depth interview**

Individual interviews were conducted with individual participants in order to gain further clarification on the issues I had discussed in the focus groups. According to Barrie Gunter, the individual in-depth interview approach has been highly promoted by many media scholars to collect data from media audiences (2000:99). In trying to emphasize the importance of this approach to gather data Klaus Bruhn Jensen states that: “in-depth interviewing, with its affinities to conversation, may be well suited to tap social agents’ perspective on the media, since spoken language remains a primary and familiar mode of social interaction, and one that people habitually relate to the technological media” (2002:240).

In my case too, questions that sounded personal were left to this stage of the study. In order to conduct my individual in-depth interviews, I selected seven students from the focus groups who were very active, relatively knowledgeable about the Internet, and expressive. Besides the students, I interviewed two of the students’ parents who were willing to participate in this study. With the intention to facilitate active and open-ended dialogue I employed semi-structured interviewing and I tried to control the flow of the discussion by referring to the interview guide, which served me as a menu with the issues I intended to cover (Deacon et al., 1999:65). (see Appendix 1 & 2)

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I tried to present the philosophical underpinnings of the methodology I employed, that is qualitative methodology. I also tried to justify its significance for this particular study and media audience studies in general. Besides this, an attempt was done to explicate the reasons why I chose the two types of data gathering methods, focus group interview and individual in-depth interview, and the sampling procedures I followed. Specific discussions on the sampling and recruitment of groups, the interview setting, my role as a moderator, the interview guide, on the recording of the data, and finally analyzing and reporting the data was also included. The next chapter discusses the social context of the study.

## *Chapter Four*

### **Social Context of the Study**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter tries to explore the background of the social context in which school children in Addis Ababa expose themselves to the Internet. Many researchers believe that in qualitative research there is a need to look at the social context where studies take place. Babbie and Mouton state, “It is only, so the qualitative researcher argues, if one understands events against the background of the whole context and how such a context confers meaning to the events concerned, that one truly claim to “understand” the events” (2001:272).

Paula Saukko for her part states, “The contextual dimension of research refers to an analysis of social and historical processes, and the worth or validity of the project depends on how thoroughly and defensibly or correctly this has been done” (2005:346). Alan Bryman states that qualitative research shows “a preference for contextualism in its commitment to understanding events, behaviour, etc. in their context” (1988:64). He furthermore states:

It is almost inseparable from another theme in qualitative research, namely *holism* which entails an undertaking to examine social entities- schools, tribes, firms, slums, delinquent groups, communities, or whatever- as wholes to be explicated and understood in their entirety. The implications of the themes of contextualism and holism, particularly in connection with the others delineated thus far, engender a style of research in which the meanings that people ascribe to their own and others’ behaviour have to be set in the context of the values, practices and underlying structures of the appropriate entity (be it a school or slum) as well as the multiple perceptions that pervade that entity. (1988:64)

Therefore, based on the above discussion, the first section tries to give a somewhat general historical and geographical background of Ethiopia. Then after, a section discusses the status of Ethiopian children. Following that, the Ethiopian

Telecommunications Corporation - the sole provider of services like the Internet- and the Internet in Ethiopia has been discussed.

#### **4.2 Historical and Geographical Background of Ethiopia**

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is considered as one of the largest countries in Africa covering 1, 127, 127 square kilometers (Almanac, 2006). The total projected population of the country for July 2008 is estimated to be 79, 221, 000 persons, of whom 65, 996, 000 live in rural areas and 13, 225, 000 are in the urban areas (Central Statistical Agency, Ethiopia 2008:20). Ethiopia is in east-central Africa or what is commonly known as the Horn of Africa, bordered by Eritrea in the north, the Sudan in the west, Kenya in the south, and Somalia and Djibouti in the east (Aklilu, 1999:18).

The peoples of Ethiopia are linguistically divided into four main groups: the Cushitic, Semitic, Omotic and Nilo- Saharan and the Cushitic and the Omotic are the original peoples of the country (Aklilu, 1999:18). Among the Cushitic, the Oromo, Sidama, Somali and Afar are predominant, with the Oromo forming the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. From the Semitic side, the Amhara are the second largest ethnic group of the population of Ethiopia followed by the Tigreans (Aklilu, 1999:19). These two groups, inhabiting mostly the highlands of Ethiopia, have played the most dominant role in the country's history in establishing successful kingdoms and empires (Aklilu, 1999:19). Among the Cushitic languages, Oromiffa (the language of the Oromo) is the leading and spoken by 16, 615, 784 Ethiopians; next to it Amharic is spoken by 15, 455, 661 as a mother-tongue based on the 1995 Ethiopian census (Aklilu, 1999:23).

The name Ethiopia derived from Greek and means "land of the burnt faces" and the earlier name Abyssinia derived from the Habasha, a South Arabian ethnic group which migrated to Ethiopia over two thousand years ago (Aklilu, 1999:14). In spite of a brief occupation by the Italians, Ethiopia is considered as the oldest independent country in Sub-Saharan Africa and the first country to be Christianized in its 3000 years of history (Chambers Dictionary of World History, 1993:290). Aksum, one of the emerging and the strongest states in the Ethiopian region "flourished from the first to the seventh century

AD” (Zewde, 1991:8). According to Edward Ullendorff, Professor of Ethiopian Studies in the University of London, the fourth century saw the zenith of Abyssinian (Ethiopia’s former name) power and achievement with the reign of its greatest Aksumite king, Ezana, who was well known for his military campaigns, his great building activities and his conversion and subsequent proclamation of Christianity to be the state religion, which facilitated contacts with the Byzantine Empire (Ullendorff, 1960:54-55). However, the Egyptians were probably the first outsiders to establish relations with Ethiopia, which, under the name of Cush, was part of Nubia (Ullendorff, 1960: 47).

The decline of Aksum in the eighth century may have been largely to do with their loss of trade to the Persians and Arabs (Kevin Shillington, 1989:71). And according to Bahru Zewde, Professor of History at the Addis Ababa University, “The rise of Islam and the subsequent disruption of the Red Sea trade sapped Aksum’s source of life” (1991:8). Shillington states that, “By the early ninth century Ethiopia had become an isolated outpost of Christianity, a largely agriculturally-based economy, controlled by a landed aristocracy” (1989:106). And the capital, according to Shillington, “had been moved further south from Aksum to somewhere in the central highlands of the interior” (1989:106).

Shillington states that, “The main period of Ethiopian revival followed the emergence of the Zagwe dynasty from among a group of Agew military officers who had been enlisted into the Aksumite elite” (1989:106). According to Zewde, in their documented history of 1150 to 1270 “the Zagwe left their deepest imprint on Ethiopian history through the construction of eleven monolithic churches in Lalibela, named after one of the more famous of their kings” (1991:8). The Zagwe were overthrown in 1270 by Yuknoamlak, a chieftain from the Amhara, who “inaugurated a dynasty which called itself ‘Solomonic’, to emphasize its legitimacy as opposed to the Zagwe, who were portrayed as usurpers” (Zewde, 1991:8-9). But, Zewde furthermore states that during the period which was called the *Zemene Masafent* (Era of the Princes) and which forms the prelude to the modern history of Ethiopia by the second half of the eighteenth century, the emperors in Gondar merely reigned; they did not rule (1991:8).

Emperor Tewodros was considered as the first to get engaged in the task of unifying and modernizing the country- for trying to have organized central administration with regional lords appointed by him, for his attempt to set up a paid national army whose units comprised soldiers from different provinces with a hierarchy of command, for his “unrelenting drive to acquire modern arms” with the opening of a factory called Gafat, for his attempt to abolish the slave trade, and others (Bahru Zewde, 1991:31-35 and John Markakis, 1974:36). The unification of Ethiopia was also pursued by his successors, Emperor Yohannes and Emperor Menelik; and Menelik surpassed a great deal to culminate in the creation of modern Ethiopia (Bahru Zewde, 1991:60).

The last Emperor of the Solomonic dynasty, the dynasty which was the longest reigns in Ethiopian history, Hailesillase I was deposed in a revolution in 1974 (Zewde, 1991:209). The military regime that took power, the Darg, faced with a lot of ideological opposition and stiff struggle for power from young visionaries which resulted in a brutal bloodshed called the ‘Red Terror’ and in the full-scale dictatorship of Mengistu Hailemariam as chairman (Zewde, 1991:248-253). This marked the end of the regime’s relationship with the US and Britain and all forms of expression and the free flow of information. The overthrow of the Darg in 1991 by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) gave the people of Ethiopia some constitutionally guaranteed democratic rights under part two of the constitution or from article 29 to article 44 of the constitution. This facilitated the emergence of many independent newspapers, magazines, civic societies, and others which have been challenging the incumbent government to make sure that these rights are sanctified.

### **4.3 Ethiopian Children**

According to Convention on the Rights of the Child, article one, “A child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (2005:37). The children who participated in this study were between the ages of 17-18 and some writers label them as adolescents. As John W. Santrock states, “Adolescence is the developmental period of transition from childhood to

early adulthood, entered approximately at 10 to 12 years of age and ending at 18 to 21 years of age” (2000:321). He further states:

Adolescence begins with rapid physical changes- dramatic gains in height and weight; changes in body contour; and the development of sexual characteristics such as enlargement of the breasts, development of pubic and facial hair, and deepening of voice. At this time in development, the pursuit of independence and an identity are prominent. (2000:321)

Papalia et al. for their part state, “Overly strict, authoritarian parenting may be especially counterproductive as children enter adolescence and feel a need to be treated more as adults” (2001:466). They add, “School is a central organizing experience in most adolescents’ lives. It offers opportunities to learn information, master new skills, and sharpen old ones; to participate in sports, the arts, and other activities; to explore vocational choices; and to be with friends” (Papalia et al., 2001:446). Quoting Scholl and associates Assefa states, “Ethiopia is a nation of young people- over 65 per cent of its population is under 25 years of age” (Scholl, 2002:8, as cited in Assefa, 2005:30). According to the official UNICEF web site, in Ethiopia “Nearly 4.9 million adolescents aged 15-18, of which 2.4 million are girls, are not enrolled in school due to various economic and social reasons.” The web site also states, “For the entire working population, unemployment rates are highest in the 15-19 age groups. For all age groups, females constitute the majority of the unemployed.” According to Education Statistics Annual Abstract prepared by the Ministry of Education, “The total number of students enrolled in grades 11 and 12 in 2006/2007 was 175, 219 out of which 33.2% were girls” (2008:43).

#### **4.4 Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation**

According to Company Profile magazine (2008) prepared by Corporate Communication Division of the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation, since its establishment, telecommunication services in Ethiopia has ever been state-owned (Company Profile, 2008:19). It also states that the Ethiopian Telecommunications relatively enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy from 1953 up to 1974 (Company Profile, 2008:19). It further states that during the reign of the military government (1974-1991), the management

autonomy of the Ethiopian Telecommunications had been drastically curtailed, being adhered to the overriding objective of the then socio-economic system attached to strengthening the “socialist production relations” (Company Profile, 2008:19-20).

Following the downfall of the military regime, the profile states, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) has carried out an overall restructuring programme to change the previously centralized command economy to a free market-oriented one with the aim of making government owned enterprises more efficient and effective as well as encouraging the promotion and participation of the private sector in the country’s economic progress (Company Profile, 2008:20). The former Ethiopian Telecommunications Authority (ETA) had been responsible for the execution of both regulatory and operational activities. Currently the regulatory power of the Authority has been transferred to the newly established Agency, Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency (ETA) which was established under the Ministry of Transport and Communications to ensure the implementation of government policy on telecom, to create a conducive atmosphere for private investment in the telecom sector as well as to set standards for services and types of communication equipment- imported, assembled or locally manufactured (Company Profile, 2008:20).

Doctor Adam of the Addis Ababa University for her part says that the development of the telecommunications sector between 1995 and 2003 was largely influenced by a 1996 regulation that corporatized the state-owned incumbent, as the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation (ETC), as a sole provider of fixed, mobile, public phones and Internet services (Adam, 2007:65). She adds, “However, very limited progress was made on the regulatory front during this period, mainly due to the conflict of interest caused by the government acting both as an operator and a regulator. The regulatory body remained rather weak compared to the monopoly operator” (Adam, 2007:65).

#### **4.5 Dial-up Internet Service in Ethiopia**

It is a system that enables companies and individuals to get office and home-based Internet services using a modem and a telephone line to dial into an Internet Service Provider (ISP) node (Company Profile, 2008:53). According to Fanta Adane, Manager Internet Service Division of the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation, “Due to its easy accessibility to be used at home, easy installation and low cost requirement, the subscribers of dial-up Internet has shown an encouraging upward growth though the service was begun recently. As a result, the total number of dial-up Internet subscribers that was 1,042 in 1997 reached 28,800 as of December 2007.” Its ideal speed is 56 kilobytes but depending on the quality of computers, the modem, the telephone line and other factors it could be lower (Internet Service Division). A customer is expected to pay a subscription fee of 156 Birr, monthly fee including rental 60 Birr for 15 hours and 0.07 cents for each extra minute he/she uses (Internet Service Division). Mr Adane adds that in order to have access to dial-up Internet, customers should have:

- Fixed line telephone,
- Computer with a modem,
- Software to be used for Internet service,
- User name and password.

Many blame the government for the slow speed that this connection is reputed to with the reason that it has been denying the chance to encourage competition. Doctor Adam states that Internet connection was set up by ETC (Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation) “only in 1997, and the few Internet hosts appeared in 1998. The service became unreliable by March 2001 and no more subscribers were accepted until bandwidth was upgraded in 2002 and the bandwidth again proved insufficient in 2003, and another project for improving bandwidth was initiated” (Adam, 2007:65). She further states that in 2003, the government’s SchoolNet Project was launched to connect 560 secondary schools in order to facilitate ICT (Information and Communication Technology) teaching and learning, of which around 370 were connected today, and ICT training programs

were introduced in secondary and Technical and Vocational and Educational Training (TVET) schools (Adam, 2007:66). She furthermore states:

The penetration of personal computers (PCs) in Ethiopia remains among the lowest in the world. Some progress was made following a reduction in import taxes on computer equipment in 2002, and there has been noticeable progress since 2003 due to the availability of cheaper machines imported from the Middle East. The proliferation of computer colleges and cybercafés also contributed to the demand, which led to a modest improvement in the number of personal computers. (2007:66)

Internet uptake is even lower, mainly due to the lack of competition and the low level of literacy. Penetration outside the capital is limited due to the poor quality of phone services and lack of access to computers. The modest increase in the number of Internet users coincided with the easing of the rules governing cybercafés since 2002, and reduced Internet tariffs in 2003. Cybercafés were originally discouraged because they contravened the government's policy that makes ETC the sole provider of services. Nonetheless, the number of users remained insignificant compared to the size of the population and Ethiopia has one of the lowest indicators for Internet users per capita in the world. (2007:66)

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have tried to discuss the general contextual background of Ethiopia in which the children in this study try to make use of the Internet. Thus, I have discussed some of the basic historical and geographical background of the country. A brief discussion on the profile of the Ethiopian youth was included. I have also attempted to give a general overview of the state-owned Telecommunications Corporation which is the sole provider of the dial-up access that the children in this study have. Finally, I tried to discuss when and how the Internet in Ethiopia began along with its current status that is related to the number of customers, the cost, the speed and others. The next chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

## *Chapter Five*

### **Presentation and Interpretation of Findings**

#### *School Children's Use of the Internet in Addis Ababa*

##### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter attempts to discuss the presentation and interpretation of the findings by analyzing how and why Ethiopian high school teenagers try to make use of the Internet, in light of the uses-and-gratifications theory and other related literature. The results of the study are presented in terms of the following three major thematic categories: *Internet Access, Perceptions about Parents and Teachers, and Internet Usage*.

The first theme, *Internet Access*, discusses issues like where the participants in this study usually access the Internet, for what kind of major purposes they access it, what time of day and the like. The second theme, *Perceptions about Parents and Teachers*, deals with issues like whom they prefer to discuss matters that are related to the Internet with, some possible rules that their parents devise and their implications, et cetera. The last theme, *Internet Usage*, tries to explore issues that range from how much time they spend using the Internet to their favourite web sites.

As it is stated above, this chapter is going to show how the participants in this study are active in their use of the Internet for different purposes. Besides, it will try to closely examine how these teenagers use the Internet in terms of teenagers' preferred and major activity, communication. Some literature that revolves around the uses-and-gratifications theory and children and the Internet will be quoted to cast light on the interpretation. The following discussion will look at the first theme, Internet Access.

## 4.2 Internet Access

The participants in this study were grade 11 students with home-based Internet access. They said that they rarely use the Internet outside of their homes in places like their parents' offices and the British Council library (in the case of two respondents). Miraf, one of the respondents believes that, "As long as I have the access at my place there is no point in using it in cybercafés."

Another participant, Mahlet said that, "I prefer the home-based access primarily for the sake of privacy" and she only goes to cybercafés to "print out some stuff that I downloaded from the Internet. The other thing is that I can access it whenever I feel like it." Abel for his part said, "I always use it at home. This is because I usually chat with my sister who lives abroad and send her some photos which take much time. If I try to do these things in a cybercafé, it could cost me a lot of money and I really hate it when I pay for Internet." So, most of them prefer the home-based access for the following major reasons: the fact that they do not have to pay, privacy, and convenience.

Teenagers around the world access the Internet for different kinds of personal purposes. As it is cited in Straubhaar and LaRose, Papacharissi and Rubin state that, "interpersonal communication is one of the important gratifications that people expect of the Internet" (2006:400). Livingstone for her part says that, "children value this new medium for information, entertainment, relieving boredom and their preferred activity, communication (chat, e-mail, instant message)" (2003:149). One of the assumptions of the uses-and-gratifications theory also emphasises this. As Dennis McQuail puts it: "Broadly speaking, personal utility is a more significant determinant of audience formation than aesthetic or cultural factors" (1997:701).

The teenagers who participated in this study also access the Internet for the following major purposes: to e-mail different people, to chat, to visit social-networking sites, to search for information for assignments, to download music, software and pictures, to get recent news, to visit pen-pal sites to meet new people, to read film reviews, to read about famous writers and their latest novels, to read love letters, to find out about newly

released albums and which movies are in the Box Office list, to look for jokes, to acquire general knowledge and others. Social-networking sites like MySpace, hi5 and Facebook are so popular amongst these youth. According to Anastasia Goodstein, an award-winning blogger and often-quoted expert on American tweens and teens:

Social-networking sites usually start with a core group of founders sending out messages inviting people from their own networks to join. The new members repeat the process and it just keeps growing. Once you join, you have a profile and can begin accepting contacts from friends, friends of friends, or strangers. (2007:56-57)

It can be deduced that these teenagers' use of the Internet, which coincides with the above claim by Livingstone, is also dominated by communication or keeping tabs of their friends or family members who have gone abroad or friends who have changed schools or strangers they meet online. The other purpose they use the Internet for is to search for information that is entertaining and information that could help them with their assignments. Here are some of their actual responses:

Int.: What major purposes do you use the Internet for?

Yonathan: I use it mainly to e-mail friends. I also download music. Every time I'm online, I download at least a piece of music and many famous singers' pictures.

Kanchiwodia: I use it to e-mail people who live abroad and apart from that I use it to check for information about entertainment like music.

Daniel: I use it to e-mail friends, to check hi5 and Facebook, to download music and software, to look for information for schoolwork.

Int.: Do you use it for school projects?

Hilina: I sometimes use it for schoolwork but mainly it is for entertainment and to get new information.

Beyluel: Mostly I use the Internet to download music and different kinds of software. Unless I was told to use it by teachers, I don't usually use it for school projects of my own accord. I also use it to e-mail friends, to visit social networking web sites like hi5, Facebook and the like.

One of the most common features of the Internet these days is online shopping where you can buy stuff from sites like amazon.com. What you have to do is that search for the description of the item or items you want to buy, and if you would like to buy it or them you will have to send your mailing address and the money through the Internet. But none of the respondents used the Internet to do this. This could be because children in Ethiopia do not engage themselves in vacation time and gap year jobs to earn some pocket money

or do not get enough pocket money from their parents. But one of them, Beyluel, said that he sometimes visit amazon.com to find out about the prices of goods. He added, "If I want something to buy I communicate with my relatives in the US and they buy and send it for me." Mintesinot for his part said, "I use it to check if there are new books released." The other thing that could be striking is the fact that none of these children uses the Internet to play games which is regarded as one of the favourite online activities by children in other contexts. This is understandable given the current slow speed in the dial-up connection.

#### **4.2.1 Midnight's children**

The uses-and-gratifications theory, the theoretical background of this study, was the first to uphold the idea of audience activeness which steered the focus away from "what the media do to people" to "what people do with the media..." (Ross and Nightingale, 2003:31). In light of this Baran and Davis state:

Our level of activity might vary by time of day and by type of content. We might be active users of the World Wide Web by day and passive consumers of late-night movies. What the uses-and-gratifications approach really does, then, is provide a framework for understanding when and how different media consumers become more or less active and what the consequences of that increased or decreased involvement might be. (2006:271)

Based on their responses, it is possible to say that the participants in this study are also active in their choice of when and how they access the Internet. Abel, for instance, said, "I usually go online around nine in the evening because it's not convenient for me to study with the TV on."

As it is mentioned above, the access all these teenagers have is known as dial-up. They said that this connection is very slow and they prefer to go online in the evening, many of them until and even after midnight, when there is a relative ease in the network traffic. This has become a source of conflict between these teenagers and their parents who keep telling them to go to bed. One of the respondents said that her parents are usually worried about her readiness for the next day class. She said, "I usually ignore their warning me to go to bed depending on the tone how they say it. When I stay up late, they think that I

may not be ready for class in the next morning.” The other thing is that, this snail’s pace connection is the greatest source of disappointment and impediment for these teenagers to make use of the Internet as much as they want. When I asked them what barriers they face in using the Internet, the speed problem resonated in all the responses given, which were accompanied by sighs of disappointment and derision. One of the respondents, Mahlet said the following:

One of the most annoying barriers is the speed. It is very slow and searching for information or checking your emails could take hours. And sometimes my parents disconnect it while I’m online if they want to make or if they are expecting phone calls to or from abroad. Sometimes, if they think I have used it more than enough, they tell me to stop or if they see me working on it late in the evenings they tell me that I should not sit alone in the dead of night and insist that I should go to bed (Mahlet).

Along with the speed, these students have also mentioned a lot of other factors that frustrate them while they are online, for instance, “meeting some nasty people”, difficulty in surfing for the exact information they are looking for, lack of computing skills, pornographic advertisements that pop-up, the pages they try to open sometimes get stuck, hackers, viruses, junk e-mails and others. Another respondent, Abel, stated the fact that he has no one around him who could be of some help in providing ideas about the Internet as a barrier.

Abel: My parents don’t have any idea about the Internet and every time I have a problem I couldn’t talk to them. I have to teach myself some things about the Internet very slowly by asking friends or my uncle.

Yonathan: Pop-up ads could impede me while downloading some things which usually force me to shut down the computer and restart it.

Kanchiwodia: When I try to download something it may not open or it could display “error on page”.

Miraf: Whenever I want to use it, my mom may want it too or she may want me to log off in a short time. She tells me not to spend much time online. She is also a little overprotective of me from online child molesters. When I’m using messenger there are people that I don’t know and that is irritating. Pop-up ads are also annoying.

Beyluel: We have only one personal computer and I have to fight with my sisters to use the Internet.

The major problem, the speed, has caused many of them to abandon their downloading or searching materials they wanted to use for schoolwork. They said that it sometimes

severely limits them from having different perspectives for certain assignments they are supposed to do. One respondent said that services like messenger could sometimes prove destructive when she wants to work on the Internet for school projects. Because messenger is an instant messaging service, she could not leave the messages she gets aside for a convenient time to respond. So it could distract her attention when she tries to respond to messages that could keep popping up from the other person who wants to chat. Besides, with the current slow connection it could be very difficult to do online chatting especially while busily working on other things.

In an article entitled “Wrestling for influence” which talks about the power struggle between the already powerful and the emerging powers, and that is manifested in many ways, The Economist magazine argues as follows: “A modern map of power and influence should also include transformational tools such as the Internet;...” (The Economist, July 5<sup>th</sup> 2008:38). However, in Ethiopia ownership of the Internet is still under a tight control of the Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency which is run by the government and it is possible to say that this has rendered the Internet ineffective. Arnold S de Beer, a professor at the School of Journalism Studies, Stellenbosch University in South Africa states: “Efforts to control the Internet are in principle no different from other forms of media censorship. Even in the most of democratic of African governments, the regulation of access to the Internet is applied by political powers controlling Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in some way or another. In this sense, governments can effectively install ‘information valves’, which they have the ability to regulate” (de Beer, 2001:139).

So it is possible to say that unless there is an attempt to invite investors in this area to encourage competition to improve the speed and the cost, these teenagers will still suffer from the brunt of the current situation for a little longer. This could in the long run force them to lose interest in making use of the Internet for different kinds of things that could impact their life in a positive manner, and in effect, the future of their country. It could also be possible to argue that the current situation (the speed and the price) paves the way

to reinforce the yawning gap that is generally recognized to exist between what is commonly known as the North and South divide.

According to Norris, although the dominance of the English language may come to an end at some stage in the future as people from all corners of the world go online, “in the meantime those who can read English are greatly advantaged in the digital world” (2001:60). This proved true in the case of the participants in this study as well. What could be striking is the fact that none of the respondents mentioned the language of the Internet, English, as their barrier. This could bolster what is by and large claimed by some people that the Mission schools these teenagers go to give quality education, especially in the English subject. Although the interview during the data gathering was in Amharic, one of our local languages, many of them could not help mixing a lot of relatively good English.

#### **4.2.2 Why Internet is taking centre stage**

The nature of lesser or no accountability or anonymity (in some circumstances) of the sources of information on the Internet means, “its message content is very difficult or impossible for governments, parents, or other gatekeepers to control” (Rogers, 2001:98). However, many claim that the Internet has made life easier a lot more than other systems of communication. Rogers argues that “e-mail via the Internet” is better in many aspects, than postal mail and the World Wide Web is easier than books to get information, on condition of access (2001:97). David Croteau and William Hoynes also argue that new media are distinctly different from old media because it is possible to use them for “interactive communication” (2003:321). In relation to this they state:

In essence, digital media technologies provide citizens with the technical apparatus to do more than just receive information. They can respond to messages they receive, select which images they want to receive, or even send out their own messages. (2003:321)

Some of the reasons why the teenagers in this study use the Internet match with the above ideas. They have stated their enthusiastic responses as follows:

Aklil: It's faster than sending letters and it's less expensive compared to telephone. It could also be expensive to buy software but if you download it using your access, it'll cost you only the bill for the Internet.

Natnael: It has infinite resources. I have the privacy in searching whatever I want online but if I want to get it from books in a library, I have to tell the people who work there what I'm looking for.

Miraf: It makes your communication speedy and efficient. I can download music that I can't get here in Ethiopia.

Beyleul: Every time I go online, I get new things that entice me to go again.

Aelaf: It is easier than books to search for information.

Mintesinot: The information you get from the Internet is up-to-date. And we don't get music in books.

Mahlet: In the first place it's entertaining. In the Western World they have easy access to music, films and books. They can go somewhere outside of their home and get them. But here we don't have that opportunity. So in order to be in line with the rest of the world I use the Internet.

Tilahun: The lessons we are having are not usually up-to-date and if we don't try to read recent books and use the Internet, we won't be aware of the current issues of our world.

One of the fascinations of the Internet for these teenagers is its multimedia aspect. Jason Whittaker states that the Internet promises fully multimedia environment, offering not only texts and images, but also sound, animation, interactivity, and the like all at once (2004:96). Most of the participants in this study use the Internet for many kinds of things at the same time: using it for communication, downloading music and photos, searching information for schoolwork, or about celebrities, et cetera. They also think that it helps them feel that they are in line with the people in the rest of the developed world in terms of information and lifestyle.

Thomas Ruggiero argues that, "uses-and-gratifications has always provided a cutting-edge theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communications medium." (Ruggiero, 2000:15, cited in Baran and Davis, 2006:269). He identifies interactivity and demassification features of computer-mediated mass communication that "offer a vast continuum of communication behaviours" for uses-and-gratifications researchers to examine. Interactivity "significantly strengthens the core [uses-and-gratifications] notion of active user" (Ruggiero, 2000:15, cited in Baran and Davis, 2006:269). Bucy and Newhagen have quoted Steuer who defined interactivity with

respect to new media as “the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time” (2004:55). Glenn Sparks also states interactivity as one of the things that makes the Internet different. “That is, on the Internet, people had nearly complete control over what information they were exposed to and what information they wanted to screen out” (Sparks, 2006:220). Demassification is “the ability of the media user to select from a wide menu... Unlike traditional mass media, new media like the Internet provide selectivity characteristics that allow individuals to tailor messages to their needs” (Ruggiero, 2000:15, cited in Baran and Davis, 2006:269).

Using their access to e-mail and their space in some social-networking sites the participants in this study try to produce their own messages in trying to exploit the interactive side of the Internet. They are also highly active in terms of controlling their exposure and even some of them talked about how they avoided pornography pop-up ads and one student said that she avoids messenger whenever she wants to use the Internet for vital assignments by not signing in. It is possible to argue that the idea of producing their own messages could help them develop confidence in their creativity and openness in terms of self expression, even on some sensitive topics like sex. This could be unthinkable for some children due to their shyness in talking about sex in face-to-face communication situations. So it could be an alternative for them to exploit the Net, for Net-mediated behaviour “is relatively uninhibited and nonconforming” (Reid, 1993: 64).

It is possible to say that sex is generally considered as a taboo subject to discuss freely in Ethiopia, especially when it comes to older people. But the students in this study do not take it that way. One of them states, “With the girls, we usually don’t talk about sex most of the time but if we do, we end up talking about some deep and private materials, for instance, we ask each other about when we are going to do it.” He further states:

The internet is helpful in many ways. When discussing about sex we talk about if we are planning to do it in High School, in College or even consider sex after marriage. I have a friend who strongly believes in sex after marriage because of his strong religious attachments. There is also a question about who is dating who. We may also discuss about which is a hotspot to take our dates. Let’s say a guy wants to go out with a girl on a blind date. He uses her profile that describes

her and all he has to do is ask if she is willing. Then, the rest takes on its path. (a student participant)

Here are some actual e-mail messages from another student participant who requested anonymity:

(Message1) france was real fun. ya, i met a lot of ppl. but tell me who ever told u french guys r morons?! that is nottt true. ya they r so full of themselves and act very classy which sometimes tends to piss u off but all in all i wouldnt say they r morons. atleast i don have a problem with the black and habesha guys over there. u r right bout the whole gettin laid thing though, lol, half the time i was there my cuzin was tryin to convince me that if u feel like it u should go n do it whenever u want. it doesnt matter if ur a kid, if ur big or not. if u feel like it jus go n do it. Lol, i'm guessin u would like it a lot.

(Message 2) wow, u get a two week vacation for cristmas. lol, do u know Marylin Manson????the drug addict, rockstar who started this whole gothic stuff. he is a guy by the way, looks like shit and scares the shit outta me. i was supposed to act as the female version of him, go ahead have a laugh, BUT ITS WAY MUCH BETTER THAN THE PROSTITUTE. can you imagine me agreeing to act like that?? lol, probably. anyway, I had to put way load of eyeliner, wear all black and get my hair all messed up. but even worse you dont know exactly how much sarcasm I had to put on. lol, it was fun. ya, i saw the 'o' movie, its pretty old. Did u watch "americangangster" it is really guddd. i was going to see hitman this weekend. my cuzins get so jealous cuz u guys probably have to wait acpla months more. lol. ya the 12th graders got really pissed. they made this whole site and anyone can join it. u should see the stuff they write over there about us. My mom is about to kill me so i have to get off. nice vacatiion.  
chao

According to Livingstone, even though the Internet gives a safe haven for children's privacy to experiment on such things, "What is less clear is how creative, or subversive, such communication is" (2003:151). But in her recent study with Hargrave, they state how such communication could be a threat. They mentioned the idea of messages produced by children as possible challenges (to parents and regulators) which came into existence with the emergence of new media. They state that new media like the Internet, unlike older media like television, brought the "ability to produce and widely disseminate user-generated content which has little or no regulation applied to it" (Livingstone and Hargrave, 2006:41).

### 4.2.3 The digital divide within classrooms

All the schools that these teenagers go to, do not facilitate access to the Internet. What should be noted here is that it is only some parents who can afford to have access at home and this is creating a digital divide amongst students in a single classroom. It is possible to say that facilitating access at school would not be an absolute guarantee to do away with this problem but it is possible to argue that it could ameliorate it. According to Goodstein even if schools facilitate access, a digital divide could still exist between “students who have computers and Internet access at home and those who do not, and between students who have slower dial-up access versus those who have high-speed Internet access” (2007:127). Some of these students in this study strongly believe that there has to be the opportunity to get access at schools by stating some of the following reasons.

Israel: Most students don’t have access at their home. So when we have school projects, instead of going to Internet cafes it’ll make the teaching-learning process easier if there’s access at our school.

Tilahun: It saves time to do some school projects if everyone has the access. For example, if a teacher gives a work sheet and wants to give the answers for all the questions, sending them through our email addresses could be time-saving.

Samuel: There are some people who have negative attitudes about the Internet and if they know that even schools are facilitating access, they could change their mind. Besides this, I think schools could be the safest places to use the Internet because our teachers could block some dangerous web sites, for example, pornography sites. Our Computer teacher rarely leaves the lab and monitors what everyone is doing so we could be afraid of navigating illegal sites.

Mintesinot: In order to make sure that everyone gets equal education opportunity everyone should have the access.

But one student disagrees with the rest of the participants about the facilitation of access at schools. She said, “I think we don’t need it at school. Our breaks are short and after school we are not allowed to stay longer and we are eager to leave school. The number of computers we have at school wouldn’t allow us to let everybody access it.” In spite of the above participant’s statement, as long as it will remain unaffordable to many people to have a home-based access, access at school should supplement or should be another option to cybercafés. Livingstone also agrees with the idea of facilitating Internet access

at schools. She says, “One hope is that the school can redress inequalities at home” (Livingstone, 2003:155).

Some of these teenagers sound very confident about themselves in comparison with those who do not have access. And two of them described their observations about the divide that exists within their classes as follows. Kanchiwodia said: “If we try to look at it from the entertainment aspect, I know much about music but those who don’t have access have to wait until they get it from other sources of information, like the radio. It makes me aware and get a better view of things of politics and global issues when I read the news but those who don’t have access sound very naive.” Miraf on her part said: “I think it’s very prominent in our country. In Ethiopia the gap between the rich and the poor is so huge. Even most people use it for emailing purpose only. The one thing I noticed here is that those of us who use the Internet tend to flock together and getting along with the others is difficult.”

These students underscored the idea of equal opportunity to access based on their observation which needs a lot of pondering by policy makers and all concerned citizens. Norris (2001) mentions this initiative that focused in curbing this situation by former American President, Bill Clinton, who expressed his concern and “proposed a new plan to help bridge the “digital divide,” offering private companies a \$2 billion tax break, new teacher training programs, the development of Community Technology Centers in low-income neighborhoods to help close the gap so that the Internet eventually becomes as ubiquitous as the availability of the telephone or television” (Norris, 2001:10). Especially, the concern that is related to teachers should be considered very closely since these students spend a substantial part of their time with them to get the necessary knowledge which could play a greater role in making them efficient citizens.

#### **4.2.4 Summary**

In the above theme about Internet access, I have tried to discuss where the teenagers in this study usually access the Internet and for what major purposes they use it for. I have also discussed how they prefer to stay up late in the evenings to use the Internet even

though this proved to be a source of conflict with their parents. According to the children, the connection is relatively faster in the evenings because it is used by less number of people. A discussion on why the teenagers use the Internet has showed that the interactive side of the Internet, its speed compared to services like the post and its multimedia nature have drawn them towards the Internet. The last section under this theme, that is the digital divide within classrooms, discussed how the digital divide exists within the classrooms of the schools where this study took place. It also discussed reasons why schools should facilitate access for children who do not have home-based access to assist other sources of access. The next theme discusses how these students perceive their teachers and their parents in relation to the Internet.

### **4.3 Perceptions about Parents and Teachers**

The participants in this study seemed to be full of confidence about their awareness in terms of technology in general and Internet in particular compared to their parents and their teachers. This could develop contempt in the authority of parents' and teachers' role in the children's upbringing and result in the ineffectiveness of their effort to produce efficient citizens. Therefore, the next section deals with perceptions that these teenagers have about their parents and their teachers in relation to the Internet.

#### **4.3.1 'Techno-nerds' versus 'technophobes'**

Many media scholars, more specifically new media scholars, claim that younger people are much more skillful and savvy than elderly people when it comes to using new media technologies. One of them, Ulla Carlsson says that, "The younger generation today have a command of new media technologies that far surpasses the knowledge and skills the rest of us have managed to develop" (2006:12). Almost all the participants in the study also think they are better than their teachers and their parents, in general, in relation to sophistication with technological products, which reinforces the above claim. These teenagers seemed to be sure about their parents' level of sophistication (for instance, some of them said that their parents ask for help when they want to use the Internet). One of the parents said, "He knows a lot of things about the Internet and he guides me."

But concerning their teachers, they were forced to assume that was the case based on scanty observations and judgments. The resounding response “I’m better” was accompanied by “except my computer teacher.” And a student said that her father’s related professionalism led to his better sophistication than her though she does not want to accept this fact. Here are some of their responses:

Kanchiwodia: My dad is an electrical engineer and though I don’t like to admit it, he is better than me (laughs). But I’m better than my mother. I think many of my teachers don’t even have the access. As I told you earlier, most of our teachers are older people and they don’t try to make themselves exposed to new technology.

Miraf: It’s not just to have a high opinion about myself but I think I’m better relatively. This’s not because I’m a genius person but my teachers and my parents are less interested in technology.

Mahlet: I can say I’m better than my parents but I don’t know much about my teachers. But they don’t usually talk about technology and they always prioritise books. So, that could probably be emanated from their lack of understanding of technology.

Abel: I consider myself to be better than my parents and some of my teachers but our computer teacher seems to know a lot.

As it is stated earlier, these students use the Internet for diverse purposes. When it comes to their parents, they said that their parents’ use is different from their own use on the whole. According to these students, parents’ surfing of the Internet focuses around the news, sending emails and information for the work world. One of the respondents said, “My father is a service advisor for a car company and he uses the Internet to find out the price of new and used cars to help fix the price of cars his company tries to sell. But I don’t know for what purposes my teachers use it, if at all they use it.” Another respondent said, “My parents don’t use the Internet often and if there is a message they want to send, I’m the one who sends it to them. Most of my teachers don’t talk about using the Internet except my Computer teacher.” Mrs. Rahel, a parent, uses the Internet for the following purposes:

As I told you earlier, we process honey to the local and the international market and in order to find information on potential new customers or to advertise our products, to get some practical knowledge about honey and beekeeping, I use the Internet. Besides, I check the news using the Internet from time to time. I started using the Internet about seven years ago but I usually use it for emailing purposes for work related matters. And sometimes if I feel stomach burn, I check the causes for the illness, the possible cures, on dieting, etc. Besides, if a

doctor gives me a vague prescription I check it through the Internet. (Mrs. Rahel)

However, their parents' use is explained by Straubhaar and LaRose who state that behaviour related to media use changes with the passage of time and the satisfactions we try to find from the media follow suit (2006:401). They add, "At some stages of our lives we may seek media that entertain; at other times information may be more of a priority. And, the different media vary with respect to the gratifications they provide us" (Straubhaar and LaRose, 2006:401). In line with this, most of these teenagers considered their parents and their teachers to be beginners, on the whole, on their Internet uses.

Goodstein talked to three students in an affluent school in California about the Internet and their teachers. The response could be a wake up call for teachers everywhere to make themselves well informed about this technology:

They all told me that because the technology is so new to teachers, it has become "a scapegoat for almost anything," or the new my-dog-ate-my-homework excuse for not having work done on time. As Matt explained, "Kids will send blank e-mails and blame it on technology or have a blank disk and say something must not have worked. They will say, 'I don't have that program,' or, 'My printer wasn't working.' Nobody knows if they're lying. They'll say my Internet connection isn't fast enough- it's so much easier to make excuses. And teachers will accept it because it's a new frontier and they can't really prove you're wrong." (2007:125)

It is possible to argue that teachers' and parents' reluctance to engage in this technology could cause a rather strained relationship with these students in the long run, the more the perceived divide widens and paves the way for disagreements. On the contrary, if they try to become relatively more Internet savvy, like the children, the home and the school could be favourable platforms of discussion on the safe and fruitful use of the Internet.

When I asked them whether they try to openly discuss anything that concerns the Internet either with their teachers or their parents, some of them laughed off the idea. And almost all of them find out new things about the Internet from friends and not either parents or teachers. The students' responses match with Livingstone's quote of Schmidbauer and Lohr that says: "Significantly, if unsurprisingly, young people claim to learn about ICT

more from their friends than either parents or school” (Schmidbauer and Lohr as cited in Livingstone, 2003:153). The students’ responses were as follows:

Abel: Although my parents are relatively educated, they don’t know much about the Internet. And I usually have a limited discussion with my Computer teacher. But I openly discuss it with my friends.

Beyluel: I talk to my friends. Most parents do not interest themselves in this technology, so we are not encouraged to ask them questions. And sometimes, we ask our Computer teacher in a group.

Miraf: I don’t discuss it with my teachers or my parents but my friends.

Kanchiwodia: I don’t discuss it with my teachers (laughs). I usually discuss it with my brother openly and he knows everything I do. Besides, my friends and I use it for the same purposes and we talk about it a lot. With my parents, I talk about it once in a while.

Mahlet: I talk to my sister. My mother doesn’t know much about it and it’s unthinkable to talk to teachers.

It is possible to say that these students’ relationship with their teachers is a bit distant and talking about such things sounds very far-fetched. As an implicit norm, many teachers fear that if they develop close relationship, they could lose the respect they deserve. Besides, some teachers seem to lack confidence and all rounded knowledge to encourage their students to ask questions of such nature in and outside of class. And some of the students’ responses that they did not know if their teachers were familiar with the Internet or not shows that there is no discussion between these students and their teachers about the Internet. Mahlet said, “Most of them are not willing to talk to us about things that are not in the curriculum. They don’t encourage us to have informal chats with them and we feel sheepish to strike conversations with them.”

But they seemed to be willing to openly discuss it with their parents, if their parents knew a lot about this technology. This matches with Burn and Cranmers’ finding in their study ‘Schools and Young People’s Internet Use in the UK’. They state that home use entertains open discussion and students are inclined to consult their parents rather than their teachers (2007:83). Sister Almaz, a parent, said, “She encourages me to strike discussions about the Internet and she tells me a lot of things openly. She asks things that she doesn’t understand without any hesitations.” Mrs Rahel for her part said, “I hear that there are some bad web sites that try to lure children and I discuss such things with him. I

know that there are some people who send e-mails to other people that they don't know for some malicious purposes so I tell him not to open such emails.”

To sum up the above section, compared to their parents and their teachers, the participants in this study are savvier in terms of know-how that is related to technology. Some parents could not even use the Internet for preliminary purposes with confidence, so they ask assistance from their children. Unlike the teenagers, parents use is generally limited to their work. So it is possible to say that teachers' and parents' lack of enthusiasm towards new technology is widening the digital divide between them and their children. The participants were derisive to the idea of openly discussing things related to the Internet with their parents and their teachers. They freely discuss such things with their friends instead and inform one another when there is something new. These could tempt them to engage in some destructive behaviour and start to defy teachers' and parents' authority.

#### **4.3.2 Teachers' reluctance and the concern on plagiarism**

The next two issues could also manifest teachers' reluctance or engagement on the Internet. The first issue deals with whether teachers assign some schoolwork that require the use of the Internet on a regular basis or not. Some of the respondents talked about how teachers worry about plagiarism if these students use the Internet as their source of information. There were diverse responses on this issue and some of them are:

Mahlet: Yes. Some of them require us to use pictures, maps and the like. So the Internet is a good source to find these. The problem is, sometimes we simply print and submit these without any effort to modify them.

Beyluel: Teachers sometimes fear that everybody may come up with the same kind of thoughts for some assignments if we access the Internet and they warn us not to use the Internet and they suggest that we refer to books only. To be honest, even when I have a book review assignment, I usually look at other reviews from the Internet to get some ideas that could help me come up with a better review.

Daniel: I think our teachers prohibit us from accessing the Internet for such assignments because if we try to have a look at other reviews we may be influenced and it could unintentionally become the same. They want us to show our perspectives.

Kanchiwodia: If I can't get a piece of information from other sources, first I read it and try to rewrite it using my choice of words. But taking everything word for word could be embarrassing.

Hilina: It's tempting. If we think the teacher knows a lot about the Internet we fear that he may also check. So if I use information from the Internet and there are some words which I don't know before, I change them with words that I know well and present it.

But the participants said that even though there is a temptation to glean materials from the Internet, they think that it is dangerous. One of them said, "It's tempting but we are usually afraid of that because if they find out that we have plagiarized, we could be in a serious trouble." Daniel for his part said, "The other thing is that if two students copy the same material from one site, it will be very easy for the teacher to catch them. And I think this fear exists in most of us so we don't try to take materials from the Internet word for word." But another student said that sometimes they think that their teachers may not be motivated to cross-check and submit assignments without any due recognition of the source. In line with this, Gurak states how the Internet has made the temptation irresistible. He said, "Students read the standard 'do not plagiarize or else' statements in a course syllabus, but they are surrounded by a technology that encourages them to use others' material freely" (2001:42).

The other issue deals with whether teachers use materials from the Internet to make their lessons interesting and current. The participants unanimously said that they do not. Some of them said that their teachers mainly struggle and worry to finish the texts which are prepared by the Ministry of Education. They said, although these texts are boring their teachers do not bother to supplement their lessons using some interesting and current information from the Internet.

Tinsae: I think if they used the Internet as a supplementary source to get some updated information, students could be highly attentive and they could really appreciate and respect the teacher for being well informed.

Kanchiwodia: I don't think that they have access at their home and if they want to make their lessons interesting, they may use some supplementary books but not the Internet.

Miraf: They usually come to class with the text that was prepared by the government and let us copy the notes from it and practice rote learning.

Abraham Tensaew has been teaching Moral lessons in one of the schools for the last four years. He said that he uses the Internet to e-mail friends and to search for inspirational stories to supplement his lessons. He added that he does not spend much time with the Internet due to the cost and his busy schedule. Another teacher who refused to be named stated that he has never used the Internet and consider it as a waste of money and time. “I have taught Physics for over thirty years and I know where I can get useful supplementary materials, if the schedule allows that,” he said. And Goodstein elaborates the students’ claims as follows: “Previous generations grew up with teachers standing at the front of the class, lecturing or presenting information, which students were later tested on. Totally wired students are challenging this model, because when it comes to technology, they often know more than their teachers. They also have access to just as much material or more than teachers do online” (Goodstein, 2007:131). But some of the students argued that because their teachers do not have access at school, they may not be willing to spend money to get information from the Internet to supplement the lessons they teach.

#### **4.3.3 Rules and their implications**

It is possible to say that children who are online could face a lot of dangers like accessing inappropriate materials (for example, pornography), exchanging addresses with child molesters, et cetera; and this is causing their parents to become very cautious about the Internet. Gurak states this as follows: “While parents want children to use the Internet, these same parents fear problems they do not understand and cannot control” (Gurak, 2001:11). This, in turn, is forcing parents to devise rules to deter these kinds of exposures by their children. And quoting Wallace (1999), Livingstone states: “Parents are developing rules to manage their children’s use of the Internet, although many lack confidence and/or understanding in guiding their children” (Wallace 1999, as cited in Livingstone, 2003:155). She further says, “Such rules can polarize parents’ and children’s perspectives, for while anonymity and playfulness, privacy and deception, have always been vital to childhood and are therefore crucially what children value about the Internet, it is precisely these issues that give rise to fears for children’s safety” (Livingstone,

2003:155). Mrs Rahel and Sister Almaz, two of the parents in this study, have the following to say:

Int.: Do you have some fears (aspects) that the Internet could be a threat to your child? What are those?

Mrs. Rahel: Yes. Some friends could influence him to open pornography sites, there are some pedophiles, and he can get involved in political discussions that could endanger him since he is not matured.

Int.: So do you have rules on how your child uses the Internet? Can you name them?

Mrs. Rahel: Yes. I don't allow him to open sites that he doesn't know and pornography sites. The second one is time limitation, for reasons that are economical and wise time usage. The third one is that he can't use it alone; this is because I have seen some television programmes that are about children who surf web sites alone and went astray in abusing the Internet. And I encourage him to use it for education related information, corresponding with universities for scholarships. And I tell him not to spend too much time downloading music.

Sister Almaz: I don't have a lot of ideas about the Internet but from what I have heard from other people there are some things that should not be seen. But we have talked about visiting bad web sites like pornography and how it could be very harmful for her life. Even when she watches movies through the Internet we have told her to be selective. We don't have rules. But we try to discuss things and we try to let her decide for herself. My fear is, if I devise rules and can't be with her all the time to enforce them, she may be tempted to defy the rules to check those things forbidden out of curiosity.

The main issue that was mentioned by the students in this study was time limitation. Almost all of them said that their parents usually tell them to reduce the time they spend online, as in one of the parents above. Some of them also mentioned that their parents reiterate that they have to use the Internet for education. One of them, Mahlet, said that her parents usually thwart her use of the Internet for entertainment and communication. She said, "My parents could tolerate me when I tell them I'm using it for schoolwork but if I tell them that I'm checking e-mails, chatting, or downloading music, they would keep telling me to go to bed. So I may sometimes lie about what I'm doing with the Internet." Mahlet's response and her parents' action match with Livingstone's 2001 research report that states:

Parents are developing strategies to manage and regulate the Internet within the home, framed by educational aspirations for their children; meanwhile children prefer online entertainment centred on fandom transferred from already established media- music, celebrities, sports, television programmes. (2003:149)

This matches with one of the features of computer-mediated mass communication, *Demassification*, which is “the ability of the media user to select from a wide menu... Unlike traditional mass media, new media like the Internet provide selectivity characteristics that allow individuals to tailor messages to their needs” (Ruggiero, 2000, p16 as cited in Baran and Davis, 2006:269). It is possible to say that it needs another extensive research to find out the extent how these activities are useful or harmful for children and in what ways. However, as it is mentioned above and based on some studies on children and the media, children are no longer taken as helpless victims but as competent and selective media users (Birgitte Tufte, 2007: 94). And according to the children in this study and Livingstone’s statement above, children prefer the Internet for entertainment above everything else they do with it, in spite of parents’ aspirations for education.

According to Andrew Burn and Sue Cranmer, these and other opportunities made possible for children by the Internet along with those possible dangers posed (for instance, pornography) have alerted parents to warn their children not to give e-mail address, not to go to chat rooms, and so on while treating children “as objects of instruction” and discouraging discussion (Burn and Cranmer, 2007:80). Mrs. Rahel for instance said: “I hear that there are some bad web sites that try to lure children and I discuss such things with him. I know that there are some people who send emails to other people that they don’t know for some malicious purposes so I tell him not to open such emails.” On the other hand, it would be irresponsible to deny that some of these fears are justified (Livingstone, 2003:155).

Miraf said the following about her parents: “They tell me not to use it too much, not to surf bad web sites and not to talk to strangers when I’m in chat rooms.” So it could be possible to argue that instead of telling her not to do this or that, which could be uncomfortable or very tough for her, they could alert and engage her in an open discussion on what kinds of things she encounters online. But if parents keep interfering in these teenagers’ activities with the Internet or if they keep telling them not to do certain things without any sound justifications, they could be forced to cheat. And it is

possible to argue that the concomitant danger is that whenever they face real threats online, they may hide it from their parents who could come up with better solutions. Abel, for instance, said:

The cardinal one is that not opening pornography sites. They always tell me not to download music. They also tell me to use yahoo alone because they only want me to use it for email. They tell me to use it after nine in the evening because they think it will be less expensive. But when they tell me not to download music, I don't listen to them. Because when I ask them why, they tell me that it slows down the computer. (Laughs) I also open some sites other than yahoo, like hi5, secretly.

The participants also said that they abide by rules that state 'do not surf bad sites', like pornography sites. But almost all of them said that they do not abide by the rule which is about the limit on the time they spend online and some activities like the ones that Abel mentioned above. It is possible to argue that if parents become stricter on safety rules, they could "pose the biggest risk of all, paralyzing effective and creative use of the Internet" (Burn and Cranmer, 2007:85). It should also be noted that when Abel's parents told him not to download music, it was not because they were afraid of his being engaged in this illegal activity since Ethiopia has not yet signed the international copy right agreement.

#### **4.3.4 Wish list**

These students were also asked about what kinds of things they wish their teachers know about the Internet. Almost all of them said that teachers should know sites that are related to the subjects they teach them. These are some of their responses:

Mahlet: I wish they know some specific sites for every kind of project they want us to do. That could help us save our time that we waste in searching and stumbling to some unrelated or not so important sites, but alluring ones. I also wish that they have positive attitude about the Internet to encourage us to use it more.

Abel: The first thing teachers must know is the fact that many students don't have the access to the Internet. So when they give us assignments it'll be better if they make it a group work; because if it is individual, it could be difficult for those who don't have home based access. If they also start to think that materials from the Internet are interesting instead of always telling us to use only the books in the library.

Beyluel: I think they should know a lot of things about the Internet even better than we do. They also have to know some specific sites that could be reliable sources in their respective subjects. They should be aware that some times some of us could be tempted to take a fair chunk of information and pretend that it is our own idea. So in order to be able to find out this sort of thing they have to devise methods like giving the chance to everyone of us to present our work.

Yonathan: First of all, they have to use the Internet for as many purposes as possible by taking trainings on how to use it. They have to talk to Computer teachers to get some ideas.

Miraf: It would be nice if they know how to Google, discuss the Internet with us freely and don't focus on the text all the time to make their lessons more interesting. I'll be happy if they know that the Internet has up-to-date information; personally I would feel much better coming to school.

The students' response could show how they are ready to start using the Internet as a regular source of information that should be encouraged by their teachers. They suggested that their teachers must be well informed about information available in the Internet and how their students could make use of it instead of totally disregarding it as something of minor importance. They also suggested that each subject teacher should be aware of sites that are related to his/her respective subject so that he/she could have something in common with his/her students.

#### **4.3.5 Summary**

In the above theme, perceptions about parents and teachers, I have discussed the teenagers' competence in terms technology in comparison with their parents and teachers and the yawning difference in the purposes they use the Internet for. Hence, the digital divide between the children and their parents and teachers is gaping. In some instances the children are becoming contemptuous towards their parents and teachers authority. So they do not openly discuss issues related to the Internet with their parents and teachers but with their friends. According to them, teachers very often worry about plagiarism when they think of the Internet as a source of information. So they usually discourage these teenagers from using the Internet when they give them assignments. The participants fear the consequence of plagiarizing even though they are tempted from time to time. But some of them said that their teachers would not find out if they plagiarize. This is because they assume that teachers are not well informed about the Internet. They

also mentioned that their teachers do not use the Internet to make their lessons interesting. Parents' fear of dangers on the Internet has also led them to devise rules. Some of the rules collide with the participants' interests- especially the time limitation and parents insistence that children should use the Internet for educational purposes mostly. The participants said that they abide by some of the rules like not opening bad web sites. The next section discusses the last major theme, which is Internet usage.

#### 4.4 Internet Usage

It could be very common to read/hear children in the Western World describing the enthusiasm about their Internet usage in this sentence, "I'm online 24/7." The numbers 24 and seven stand for 24 hours a day and seven days a week. But none of the participants in this study used the above sentence in describing their time spent online. Weekends entertain a relatively higher rate of exposure since students are at their houses all day and the right time to download different things since this takes up much time.

The following table shows the years these teenagers started using the Internet, the number of days and hours of exposure as well as how they perceive themselves and parents/teachers on the expertise of Internet usage:

<b>Name of students and (started to use the Internet)</b>	<b>Internet use per day</b>	<b>Internet use per week</b>	<b>Considers himself/her self as</b>	<b>Considers teachers/parents as</b>
Mahlet (2004)	Two-three hours	Everyday	Beginner	Beginners
Samuel (2007)	Two hours	Everyday	Beginner	Beginners
Abel (2006)	45 minutes	Everyday	Intermediate	Beginners
Beyluel (2004)	30 minutes	Everyday	Intermediate	Beginners
Yonathan (2006)	One hour	Three days	Beginner	Beginners

Kanchiwodia (2004)	One hour	Everyday	Intermediate	Beginners except father
Miraf (2005)	Two hours	One day	Intermediate	Intermediates

Most of these teenagers do not feel confident on their expertise on Internet usage. And this could be attributed partly to their relative late adoption of it. Most of them said that they started using the Internet between the last two to four years in average; and that was when they first had their e-mail addresses too. This is, for instance, the reason why one respondent considers himself as a beginner. He said, “I think I started to use the Internet very late. I started using it in June 2007 and when our line was cut somewhere, we didn’t know what happened for a long time so I couldn’t use it for a while.” This late adoption of the Internet and other technological products by these teenagers could implicate the fact that how third world countries are still struggling to comprehend how these things work and how they are forced to use them for some preliminary activities. Pippa Norris argues that, “most poorer societies, lagging far behind, plagued by multiple burdens of debt, disease, and ignorance, may join the digital world decades later and, in the long term, may ultimately fail to catch up” (2001:5).

Besides, they all reported that they do not have their own web sites (blog sites) and that they do not learn how to construct them, which is a creative activity that could have helped them produce their own messages, as a hobby or as platform of self expression about anything or anybody that interests them more. This could have, in turn, helped them develop their writing skills which could pave the way to any related professionalism. Unlike the teenagers in this study, Goodstein states that blogging is dominated by the youth in America. She says: “While a few high-profile adult bloggers have managed to capture the attention of the media, the reality is that more than half of all blogs are published by teens and read by their friends. ...According to 2006 research the Pew Internet and American Life Project, teens are 19 percent more likely than older Internet users to create a blog” (Goodstein, 2007:28-29).

What an Iranian student who moved to the U.S. about seven years ago told Goodstein in an interview could reinforce the above claims.

Anastasia: How has your writing and/or sense of identity evolved since you started blogging?

Elaheh: My sense of identity and writing have both evolved tremendously. I'm amazed at how my writing grew; when I look back at the things I wrote three or even two years ago and compare it to what I write now, I realized how much I learned. And I'm not just talking about grammar and punctuation; I'm talking about using my voice, speaking from the heart, being able to have even one short, but meaningful sentence. Writing is my identity; what I write is essentially who I'm. I can express myself better when I write. So yes, blogging encouraged me to write more, dig deeper into myself, and really look and observe the world around me. I get a rush when I write from the inside, when I can hit the point and feel what I wrote, when I can read it over and over and be satisfied (Goodstein, 2007:33).

What should be noted in here is that none of the respondents even knew what a blog is, although they could be considered as early adopters of the Internet in Ethiopia. But Goodstein has the following consolation for the children's lack of knowledge about blogs that states: "If you don't know what a weblog or blog actually is, you're not alone. At the beginning of 2005, the Pew Internet and American Life Project discovered that 62 percent of Internet users who had heard of blogs didn't know what a blog actually was." (2007:27)

For some of these teenagers, it is common to have more than one e-mail account that they use for different purposes. Livingstone states that children value the Internet for the sake of "anonymity and playfulness, privacy and deception" (2003:155). And according to Karin Larsson, the nature of anonymity also gives a chance for children to be someone else (2003:116). They stated different reasons for having multiple addresses; for instance, when a certain address they started using fails to work efficiently (slowing down when it opens or other reasons) they prefer to have another one which could work better. These are some of their reasons:

Miraf: Once, I started using a yahoo address and it became difficult and I started using hotmail. Now, when I subscribe to different scholarships I use my yahoo address and I use my hotmail address to correspond with my friends and for messenger.

Kanchiwodia: I have a yahoo account which I use it with my family, I use one of them to correspond with foreigners, and I have others that I use on social networking sites like hi5, just for fun.

Beyluel: I have two accounts. The first one is yahoo and the second one is gmail, I got the last one just to make myself use the latest in the technology arena.

Abel: I have three accounts. I use one of them to email friends. I use the second one for a site called FanBox. And finally, I opened a hotmail account to find out which one is better from the speed, service and other aspects.

They also said that at least one of their e-mail addresses they use to correspond with people they meet online are disguised identities.

Web sites that are produced here in Ethiopia and that target these teenagers seem to be nonexistent. Almost all of them mentioned many famous entertainment and social-networking sites that are produced or created outside of Ethiopia except one student who said that she likes her seniors' web site. Most of them mentioned the names of sites that let them download music and new chat rooms as their favourites. So whenever someone gets one new site, for instance a site where they can download music, they inform one another and it becomes very popular within a short time. These are some of their responses:

Abel: I like hi5 very much, may be it's because of the photos of some friends. I don't have any local ones. We inform about sites and when we get one interesting web site it circulates amongst those who have access immediately.

Beyluel: There are some web sites I check to get information about music and movies, like Launch (a yahoo music radio station) which is my favourite. And emule, morphues, seekasong and bored.com are sites where I download my music, music videos, and pictures. I don't have a local one. We exchange every kind of information about the Internet with my friends.

Yonathan: Seekasong is where I download my music. And I use Google to download pictures of singers to post them on the albums I download. I don't have a favourite local site. We inform about sites with each other.

Kanchiwodia: I like hotmail for its graphics and it's convenient to send email. And I like hi5, it has music, there's a profile page and you meet a lot of new people, it has some news. My friend informs me if there is a new chat room or sites like Facebook.com and I do the same.

Samuel: I love football and I'm a fan of the English club Liverpool. The first thing I do is I open their web site and check for something new about them. The other thing that I check is news sources like CBS News to find out how the American election for the presidential nomination for both parties is going on.

But I have never checked a local web site except that I have a glimpse on one site that my brother uses to search for jobs. We inform each other about sites with my friends- even with those who live abroad.

Some of them mentioned one local site called [addisunderground.com](http://addisunderground.com) which is a social net-working site. This was a site that helped Ethiopian teenagers to meet online and discuss a range of subjects until it was blocked by the government for some reasons they are not sure about. This has left them with no choice but to use other globally known sites which do not know or bother to know the Ethiopian context while producing materials that these students consume. This exposure could be seen as a mixed blessing for these children. To begin with its drawback, it could have a profound impact on their adopting of outside cultures that could conflict with the society they live with in general and their friends at school in particular. A case in point could be what Miraf, one of the participants, stated earlier on how those who use the Internet find it difficult to communicate with those who do not. She said, "The one thing I noticed is that those of us who use the Internet tend to flock together and getting along with the others is difficult." This concern is also amplified by Terry Flew and Stephen McElhinney as follows:

An issue of particular relevance to all critical theories of global media is the relationship between United States hegemony in the global system and the 'soft power' deriving from U.S. media and cultural exports and their impacts upon the culture and values of importing societies. (2001:18)

Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Assistant Secretary of Defence for international affairs in the Clinton administration succinctly defined 'soft power' as the 'ability to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion. It works by convincing others to follow, getting them to agree to, norm and institutions that produce the desired behaviour. Soft power can rest upon the appeal of one's ideas or the ability to set the agenda in ways that shape the preferences of others' (quoted in Thussu1998, pp.66-67, Flew and McElhinney, 2001:18).

When we try to have a look at its possibly positive side, it should be worth mentioning what Article 17 of the UN Convention states as quoted by Ulla Carlsson.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989 provides a framework in the form of Article 17, which states that those countries that have ratified the

convention shall ensure that children and young people have access to information from different national and international sources, particularly information intended to promote their social, spiritual and moral well-being as well as their physical and mental health. To this end, appropriate guidelines shall be developed to protect children and young people from information and material that are detrimental to their well-being. In various official documents from as well national public authorities as regional and international organizations protection of minors is described as an issue of great public interest. (2006:157)

In light of this article, it is possible to argue that children in this study have better access to information than those who do not have the access to the Internet, hence reinforcing the argument that “media globalization promotes new opportunities for shared information, borderless communication and global commerce” (Flew and McElhinney 2001:14).

#### **4.4.1 About e-mailing teachers**

These students were also asked if they e-mail their teachers and if they think that it is beneficial. This is not a very common thing and they blamed their teachers for being unapproachable and their unwillingness to give their e-mail addresses in order to be able to do that. But some of them expressed the rare experiences of e-mailing their teachers as follows:

Tilahun: In my other school one English teacher gave us his e-mail address but he warned us not to use it for educational purposes. But the rest of our teachers didn't give us.

Daniel: We have an English magazine called Guys and Girls and we e-mail the teacher who receives contributions.

Yonathan: There was a teacher who sent us an assignment once and we responded through his e-mail.

Aklil: I e-mail our Computer teacher to ask him for help about things that I couldn't solve by myself; but I don't do that with the other teachers.

These teenagers do not e-mail their teachers for some reasons that are not deeply explored in this study. But some of the students speculated some possible reasons. A few of them say that it is not at all necessary to e-mail their teachers. But some of them think that it is useful to e-mail their teachers for the different purposes they have mentioned below.

Israel: It would have been useful to ask some questions that we don't understand when we are at home. We can even get engaged in discussions online. But I will be forced to be reserved from giving some unfavourable comments for fear of reprisals.

Tinsae: I can't see any point why I have to e-mail my teachers, it's not necessary.

Hana: In Ethiopia, students are sometimes very shy or less confident even to ask questions. So if I know the address of a teacher, I would be free to ask whatever I want. I sometimes wish I could send things that are funny and information that my teachers could use in their lessons.

Mahlet: Sending assignments would be my priority especially when I find it difficult to track some teachers at the end of the academic year.

Yonathan: If we correspond with them, we would limit ourselves to educational matters. But if we consider a teacher very friendly and if we treat him as somebody closer to our age, we could send him things that we think are 'cool' like pictures, jokes, and others. Otherwise our teachers could get shocked in the things we may send to them or in our use of language.

Beyluel: We would send different things to different subject teachers. For instance, our Civics teacher likes current affairs and I would send him some pieces of news from around the world. But I still think it is not important. Recently, in America, a lady teacher and her male student were involved in love affair after they correspond via e-mail for quite some time. So if we start this here in Ethiopia, some day somebody could be victimized.

Natnael: I think it's necessary. If a teacher has an e-mail address for his students, it could be useful for a one-to-one relationship which could be beneficial for both; for example, it could encourage a student to ask whatever kind of question he/she has, especially if the student is shy to do it in person. When teachers make mistakes it is so difficult to tell them or to point out that in class. But if we have their e-mail we may inform them later.

Most of these students think that shy students would have had the chance to openly discuss different issues with their teachers through the Internet if their teachers would give them their e-mail addresses. They also believe that it could make things easier with the teaching-learning process if they are able to receive and send assignments through email addresses. They also wish to use the Internet as a way to socialize with their teachers by sending materials like jokes, pictures, some pieces of news, and others.

#### **4.4.2 About pornography**

It is possible to argue that no other medium has caused such tremendous concern over the accessibility of pornographic materials, especially to children, than the Internet ever since

it was commercialized and the invention of the World Wide Web. Mark Griffiths argues pornography web sites are “‘undisputed kings’ in selling advertising space” (2000:174). Furthermore, he states:

One of the main reasons why the pornography industry has such a vested interest in this area is that in the online world the buying of most products is hassle-free and anonymous. However, buying pornography in the offline world may be embarrassing or stressful to the consumers particularly if they have to go to venues deemed to be “unsavoury”. (2000:174)

No respondent in this study said that he or she deliberately access pornography sites in the places they access the Internet. Even though they find pornography advertisements from time to time they say that they close them immediately. Here is what Samuel stated about pornography advertisements, which was shared by the other participants:

Int.: Does anything frustrate you when you are online?

Samuel: When I’m working on something serious, there are pornography ads that pop-up which are annoying.

Int.: What do you do when you have those?

Samuel: In the beginning I didn’t know what I had to do, so I opened it. You know, pornography sites are expensive so I immediately closed it. Later, I learned that I had to minimise them but if I cancelled them they could keep coming back.

This may not be the case with some children who tend to misuse the Internet to expose themselves to obscene materials like pornography. Livingstone and Hargrave suggest that there may be a difference between children who navigate to pornography web sites and those who got it by accident (2006:42). They say: “However, for both adults and children, some research suggest that, irrespective of whether content is found accidentally or deliberately, harm may still result (especially from violent pornography)” (Livingstone and Hargrave, 2006:42). In the case of the participants in this study, it could be argued that they will be out of harm’s way if they could keep avoiding these pop-ups (the way the above respondent did), until they manage to get rid of them permanently through some mechanisms like software that could block them. But according to Livingstone and Hargrave this software is not used widely (2006:42). They additionally say that this is not because of lack of concern. “Rather, it is because people lack the knowledge and awareness of how to choose, install and use access controls or they feel

such mechanisms are not necessary within their own families” (Livingstone and Hargrave, 2006:42). This is also the case with some of the parents who participated in this study. One parent, Mrs Almaz Gebre, a nurse said that she does not know how to use such software and another participant, Mrs Rahel Tamrat said, “I know how to use them but because the computer is visible and I trust my children, I don’t at the moment use this kind of software. But I have a plan to use in the future.”

#### **4.4.3 Summary**

In the final theme, Internet usage, I discussed the number of hours per a day and days per a week these teenagers spend online. Their expertise on Internet usage was also discussed based on how they perceive themselves. It is possible to say that they started using the Internet relatively late taking 2006 as an average year of adoption which makes them feel less confident on their Internet usage that focus on some preliminary activities compared to children in the Western World. These teenagers tend to have more than one e-mail account to use them for different purposes of communication. The other thing is that they exclusively access sites that are not local. They found it very difficult to mention local sites that target teenagers and their popular activities. They considered e-mailing teachers as a far-fetched idea because they have distant relationship with them. But some of them thought that it could be beneficial for receiving/sending assignments. Finally, even though some literature suggest that pornography materials are highly consumed through the Internet given the relative privacy of accessing them, except some pop-up advertisements the teenagers in this study do not intentionally access them.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The researcher has tried to present and interpret the nature of middle class school children’s use of the Internet, in light of the basic features of the uses-and-gratifications theory along with other related literature. The results of the analysis showed how the participants in this particular study were active in their choice of which sites they access and which ones they avoid, in their trying to participate in the different online discussions and idea sharing, in their choosing what time of day they should go online, et cetera. This matches with one of the basic tenets of the uses-and-gratifications theory or approach-

that is the idea of audience activeness. Their preferred and major activity with the Internet, communication, also falls in line with what this theory and other related literature state. For instance, as it is cited in Straubhaar and LaRose, Papacharissi and Rubin state that “interpersonal communication is one of the important gratifications that people expect of the Internet” (2006:400). So they try to communicate with different people- people they know offline and online. In doing so, they gratify the satisfactions they expected of the Internet which is considered to be a true multimedia, in spite of some of the barriers mentioned with the speed as the major one.

## *Chapter Six*

### **Conclusion**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In this final chapter, I have attempted to summarize some of the core issues and findings of this study. Hence, a summary of what the research was about, how it was undertaken, and the main themes that emerged will follow.

#### **6.2 Summary**

The main aim of this study titled “Teenagers’ Use of the Internet – A Case Study of Selected Children in Addis Ababa”, was to explore how and why these teenagers, located in a particular socio-political context, use the Internet. More specifically, I attempted to find out about what major purposes these teenagers use the Internet for, the place where they frequently access it, and their overall interaction with it. The findings of the study showed that the introduction of the Internet into Ethiopian society has impacted on social relations: between those with and those without access, between teenagers and parents and between teenagers and teachers. The investigation also revealed that these teenagers try to make use of the Internet for multi-dimensional purposes hence indicating the claim by some people that the Internet is a true twenty first century multi-medium. But the teenagers’ enthusiasm about this new medium was marred by one factor that was unanimously mentioned, the slow speed of the Internet in Ethiopia. This has forced these teenagers to make use of it in the evenings when it is relatively faster given that it is used by less number of people. This in turn has proved to be a source of conflict between parents and the teenagers when parents tell them to go to bed by giving reasons like they might not be ready for the next day class, that they should not stay up late at night alone, et cetera.

As mentioned above, the study was about the use of the Internet by the specified group of teenagers and I found it relevant to discuss the uses-and-gratifications theory as the

theoretical background of the study. The uses-and-gratifications theory or approach was the first to uphold the idea of audience activeness which steered the focus away from “what the media do to people” to “what people do with the media...” (Ross and Nightingale, 2003:31). Based on the assumptions of this theory, I tried to show how the participants in this study were active in their engagement with the Internet in terms of many aspects.

In order to be able to systematically investigate how and why school teenagers in Addis Ababa make use of the Internet in relation to the context they live in, I employed focus group interviews as well as individual in-depth interviews. These interview sessions gave me the opportunity to record the teenagers’ responses on how and why they use the Internet and all the other closely related issues we discussed. This, therefore, helped me to strive to come up with the best possible understanding and interpretation of the data.

I have attempted to present the findings on how and why the subjects of this study try to make use of the Internet in light of the uses-and-gratifications theory in three major themes that include Internet Access, Perceptions about Parents and Teachers, and Internet Usage. One of the findings of this study is that the teenagers use their home-based access for the sake of convenience or using it anytime they want to; the fact that they are not under pressure about charges as opposed to Internet cafes where they are expected to pay some money; and the relative privacy they enjoy. These teenagers also prefer evenings to use the Internet based on two major factors that are the relative faster speed of their connections given that many people do not use it at that time as well as their staying in their schools in the day time. For carefully avoiding some content, in their choice of the time that they prefer to go online, et cetera, these teenagers could be labelled as active users of the Internet which goes in line with the theoretical background of this study, the uses-and-gratifications theory.

Despite some of the frustrating factors like the slow speed connection that impede these teenagers from experimenting and enjoying what the Internet promises, they are relatively savvy about the Internet and its complex features, compared to their parents

and some of their teachers. Ulla Carlsson states, “The younger generation today have a command of new media technologies that far surpasses the knowledge and skills the rest of us have managed to develop” (2006:12). This has made the teenagers confident about themselves in comparison with their parents and teachers who generally sounded wary of the Internet. This stance by parents and teachers about the Internet is creating tension in their relationship with the teenagers. But it is possible to say that some of the concerns are tangible that should be acted upon in a less coercive manner in order to prevent some of the possible harms that could be inflicted on these children.

One of the most common activities these teenagers use the Internet for is corresponding with their peers they have already been friends with and those they have never seen or known in the offline world, both from here and abroad. One of the trendiest ways of this communication is using social-networking sites that are popular worldwide and that help them inform one another about emerging sites, leave messages (text, picture or voice) to keep tabs of their friends, download music and different software, and share general information that is related to their education and entertainment. It is possible to say that, against all odds, these teenagers avoid using the Internet to access pornography sites even if such sites appear by their own accord. It could be argued that these teenagers are safer from possible harm that could be caused by pornography viewing even though it has always been contentious whether it causes harm at all or not. But Livingstone and Hargrave suggest that there may be a difference between children who navigate to pornography websites and those who access them by accident (2006:42). They also state that, “However, for both adults and children, some research suggest that, irrespective of whether content is found accidentally or deliberately, harm may still result (especially from violent pornography)” (Livingstone and Hargrave, 2006:42).

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## LIST OF TERMS

- Blogging- an online public diary
- Browser- programme for viewing web pages: the earliest of these were text-based applications such as Lynx, but since the release of Mosaic in 1993 have nearly all been capable of displaying graphics. The browser market is currently dominated by Microsoft's Internet Explorer followed by Netscape Navigator
- Byte- a defined number of bits, usually eight, often corresponding to a letter or symbol, upon which computer operations are performed
- Chat- when two or more people are having a real-time text-based conversation by typing into a chat application or instant-messaging software. Everything you type displayed to whomever you are chatting with
- Cyberspace- term coined by William Gibson in *Neuromancer* referring to the conceptual space created by new technologies. Often used as another term for the Internet
- Dial-up- a connection to the Internet through a standard telephone line
- Digital- a mode of transmission in which information is coded in binary form for transmission on the network
- Downloading- transferring a file from a web site to a computer
- Google- one of the most popular sites online, Google is a search engine for the Web and newsgroups at [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)
- Hacker- originally derived from the activities of model train enthusiasts who would 'hack' their models to improve performance, a computer hacker was anyone who sought to understand a system as thoroughly as possible. Increasingly the term has come to be used to mean someone who gains access to computer systems without the owners' consent (or even knowledge).
- Hypertext- text symbols, or icons which, when actuated by the user, establish a connection to a database, which may be local or on the World Wide Web
- Internet protocol (IP)- a connectionless protocol used for delivering data packets from host to host across an Internetwork

- Internet Service Provider (ISP)- a company that provides subscriber services to the Internet
- Junk emails- unsolicited email sent indiscriminately to multiple mailing lists, individuals, or newsgroups
- Kilobyte- a unit for measuring computer memory or information equal to 1024 bytes
- Modem- a device that connects one computer system to another using a telephone line so that data can be sent
- Multimedia- a term with so many and varied usages that it is nearly meaningless. Most commonly, a computer equipped with a CD-ROM drive and speakers
- Network- the collection of links that connects end-users with one another and with devices such as servers, switches and routers
- Virus- a software programme that can replicate itself onto a computer and vandalize a system (for example, by deleting important information)

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX 1

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CHILDREN

#### *Internet Access*

1. Can you tell me your name, how old you are and what grade you are in, please?
2. Where do you usually access the internet- at home or at a cybercafé? Why?
3. What major purposes do you use the Internet for?
4. When do you go online- what time of day most often?
5. Why do you use the Internet?
6. Are there any barriers to using the internet at your home or any place else?
7. How do those barriers affect your capabilities to use the internet for schoolwork? What can be done to eliminate or reduce those barriers?
8. Do you think schools should facilitate access to the Internet? Why?
9. Are you familiar with the term 'digital divide'?

#### *Perception about parents and teachers*

1. Who is more sophisticated about technology- you, your parents or your teachers?
2. How does your use of the Internet compare with your parents/teachers use of it?
3. Do your teachers assign schoolwork that requires the use of the Internet on a regular basis?
4. Do you think your teachers use the internet to make their lessons more interesting or current?
5. Whom do you discuss anything that concerns the Internet openly with? Your teachers or parents? Why?
6. Do your parents have specific rules about how you can use the Internet? What are some of those rules?
7. Do you regularly abide by that rule or do you sometimes ignore it?

8. What would you like your teachers to know about how to improve using the Internet for schoolwork?

*Internet Usage*

1. How many minutes or hours a day are you online?
2. Do you consider yourself a beginner, intermediate or expert on internet uses?
3. Do you consider parents/teachers on the whole to be beginners, intermediates or experts on Internet uses?
4. Do you have an email account? How many? Why?
5. How long have you had your original email account?
6. Do you learn how to construct your own web sites in school? Do you blog?
7. Do you have favourite web sites? Are there any local ones? Do you inform each other about sites?
8. Does anything frustrate you when you're online?
9. Do you email your teachers?
10. Do you think it would be beneficial to email your teachers? If you email them, what would you email them about?
11. Is there a temptation to use information you get from the internet without recognizing the authors? What do you know about plagiarism?

Thank you very much!

## APPENDIX 2

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. Can you tell me your name and what you do for a living, please?
2. Do you use the Internet- for what purposes? When did you start using it?
3. Do you use it with your child? Why?
4. Do you know what your child usually does online?
5. Do you discuss issues related to the Internet openly with your child? Why?
6. Do you have some fears (aspects) that the Internet could be a threat to your child?  
What are those?
7. Do you have rules on how your child uses the Internet? Can you name them?
8. Do you use software that could block unwanted sites?
9. How do you think the Internet could be beneficial to your child?

Thank you very much!

## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and all the sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Tefera Teklu

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of submission: 12/01/2009

Place of submission: Addis Ababa University