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Can You Please Put Your Phone Away?

Examining how the FOMO phenomenon and mobile phone addiction affect human relationships

Laila Chaudhry, Faye O. Prichard

Abstract

This study attempts to identify how attachment to social media as well as attachment to other forms of communication technology can lead to addiction to mobile devices and affect non-virtual interpersonal communication. I examined the phenomenon known as the fear of missing out, or FOMO, which can be defined as apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. Experiencing FOMO can lead to overuse of and even addiction to social media, another category I examined, because addicted individuals want to stay more up-to-date with social networks and social media is the most efficient way to do so. This, by default, also connects to overuse of mobile devices due to ease of access with mobile social networking applications. This addiction is linked to loneliness and depression in and of itself, but the general overuse of mobile devices also has negative effects on interpersonal face-to-face communication, the final category that I researched. Numerous studies showed that the use or even mere presence of a mobile phone decreased interpersonal trust in conversation partners. Therefore it can be inferred that excessive social media use can lead to loss of non-virtual connections. Further research into the psychological impact of virtual communication addiction is needed to explore these incredibly new phenomena and help to prevent addiction and negative associations with new technologies.

Introduction

Walk down any modern street and what is the only universal that can be seen between the people on that street? Phones. So many people are just strolling down the sidewalk, phone in hand, texting, calling, not paying attention to where they are walking. What is to blame for this phenomenon?

In an age where the mobile phones and other technology have saturated the population, these communication technologies have changed the way we live and have become a necessity in our lives. They enable billions of people to connect anytime, anywhere, with anybody. A smartphone is no longer a cutting-edge communication gadget, but an integral part of an individual's communication network, due to its portability and applications that allow access to other communication tools.

This study attempts to identify how attachment to social media through FOMO, as well as attachment to other forms of communication technology can lead to addiction to mobile devices and affect non-virtual interpersonal communication. FOMO can be defined as apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. Experiencing FOMO can lead to overuse of and even addiction to social media, another category I examined, because addicted individuals want to stay more up-to-date with social networks and social media is the most efficient way to do so. This, by default, also connects to overuse of mobile devices due to ease of access with mobile social networking applications. This addiction to mobile "apps" is linked to loneliness and depression in and of itself, but the general overuse of mobile devices also has negative effects on interpersonal face-to-face communication. Over use of phones during face-to-face conversation, cause disconnect between conversation partners, and addiction to technology causes numerous social detriments. Through these advancements in technology, the smartphone is beginning to blur the line between personal communicator and extension of self, and changing the way we communicate with others on an everyday basis.



Results/Discussion

The FOMO phenomenon can be indirectly linked to loss of non-virtual relationships through their connection with smartphones and mobile applications. The fear of missing out, a phenomenon that can be found in nearly 75% of young adults using social media these days, is linked to constant use of social media, due to its efficiency for connection to social networks. This can lead to addiction to social networking sites, and through the medium of mobile apps, to phones also. The mere presence of a phone in a dining setting, let alone the touching or use of it, has been showed to significantly decrease conversation partners' perception of the quality of conversation, as well as trust between the individuals. Therefore it can be inferred that excessive social media use can lead to loss of non-virtual connections.

Conclusion

In a generation where the individuals are conditioned towards instantaneous information, the efficiency of communication technologies such as texting and social networking are used increasingly often. Communication is moving towards a virtual medium and non-virtual interactions are almost becoming obsolete. If this trend in communication continues future generations may all together lose the ability to communicate non-virtually. Through advancements in technology, the smartphone is beginning to blur the line between personal communicator and extension of self, and changing the way we communicate with others on an everyday basis.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my HONR 200 professor, Faye Prichard, for asking me to do this. She is an amazing person who not only teaches her students about the lessons we learn in class, but also about life in general. She is an amazing educator and inspiring individual.