NEW MEDIA, TIME MANAGEMENT AND ADDICTION

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ABSTRACT

The negative consequences of too much engagement with the Internet and the New Media on the quality of life are examined in this paper. The researcher also examines the positive outcomes of the use of technology in terms of the bulk of work produced as a result of eliminating time and space in communication. Additionally, the element of people of different standards being brought together as they take part in the same dialogue is emphasized, which activates fluidness in speech. The piece of research also presents evidence on the sharp increase of time spent online with the use of online technology no longer being optional. The need for a ‘mindful’ use of digital technology is underlined, meaning that one should be aware of what he is doing on the web and cultivating an ongoing inner inquiry into how he wants to spend web time. The amount of time spent producing results and the amount of time wasted on unproductive thoughts, conversations and actions is also examined. The writer is additionally engaged with the problem of Computer/Internet Addiction, especially in children and teenagers. The ways in which Internet or Computer Addiction manifests are also discussed and the causes and symptoms of such an addiction are brought to surface. Lonesome individuals seek connectedness with others through the Internet but are at the same time deprived of the joy of face to face interaction, collaboration and live communication with others. The author concludes that unless someone defines ethics and is clear about what will or will not be done on the Internet and how time will be managed on the Internet, the danger of being overwhelmed by the web will always be imminent.

Keywords: Internet, New Media, Time Online, Internet Addiction.

INTRODUCTION

What are the consequences of too much engagement with and usage of the Internet and the New Media on the quality of life? Can the excessive use of the New Media (including websites, online newspapers, blogs, wikis, video games, and the social media) affect professional performance or productivity, children’s life ambitions, relationships with friends and family and even the conception of our own selves negatively? Does the excessive use of technology interfere with the skill of managing

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our lives in terms of choice of activities, every day time allocation to activities, short or long-term scheduling, even choices of ways and styles of living?

Or on the contrary, does technology make individuals more communicative and productive, especially in terms of the bulk of work produced due to the advantage of saving time and space that it offers? The immediate interaction among readers of different ways of life and educational standards activates fluidness in speech. Especially the comment section, in which a post can be taken to the next level as readers share their thoughts, ideas and experiences on a topic is where the real action takes place in most successful blogs (Menelaou, N. 2013). Nobody can deny the immediate transmission of information that the New Media offer.

**INCREASE OF TIME SPENT ONLINE**

It is generally accepted and proven by research as will be noted below, that in recent years there is a sharp increase of time spent online. As a result, several unpredicted consequences come to surface.

Mike Langlois, (2012) argued that ‘two years ago, the average amount of time adults in the U.S. spent online was 13 hours a week excluding email, and with the advent of the iPad it has undoubtedly increased from there’. He goes on to argue that fortunately, people are starting to talk about ways to reflect on the way we use technology, such as Howard Rheingold, (2014) suggests in his new book, Net Smart. Rheingold argues that knowing how to make use of online tools without being flooded with too much information defines personal success in the twenty-first century.

Skills associated with the use of technology are included in the necessary qualifications to join the work force, either as a member of the scientific personnel or of the technical personnel in the sectors of science, health, education, food and beverage etc. Literacy in the use of technology is no longer optional but required. Langlois agrees with this reality by commenting that “we have passed the point where using technology is optional”. He gives tips that are helpful in learning how to manage time while we use technology. For example, he suggests figuring out what thing is the most time consuming for the Internet user and what particular elements are taking up most of his time. He also suggests making priorities as not everything needs to be attended to. Langlois refers to Peter Bregman, a blogger for the Harvard Business Review, who makes the excellent suggestion of having two lists for our day. The first list counting the things that we need to pay attention to on that day; the second list counting the things that we do not need to pay attention to.

Rheingold argues that a ‘mindful’ use of digital media means realizing the importance of being aware of what we are doing on the web and cultivating an ongoing inner inquiry into how we want to spend our time. He focuses on five digital literacies that contribute to a ‘mindful’ use of the digital media: ‘attention, participation, collaboration, critical consumption of information and network smarts’. The writer believes that the act of combining individual efforts wisely produces a more thoughtful society. Agreeing with Rheingold we may note that what really happens is that very often, users of the Internet act automatically without really thinking about the possible consequences of their posts and without having in mind the reality that the Internet is a public platform. Thoughts are not only shared, but they are also criticized. That is the reason why one should always be careful and skeptical before posting his views. Undoubtedly a more thoughtful society is produced with the
combination of thinking energized through online dialogues, but online posting may very well generate problems.

**SPENDING TIME ON THE INTERNET AND MANAGEMENT OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

Before we try to manage our time on the web, we may at first simply contemplate on what time really is. Many definitions have been attributed to ‘time’. If we accept that time is ‘the point or period at which things occur’ we automatically accept the fact that we measure time in respect of happenings. In other words, we refer to real time which is related to our activity and not to clock time.

Having the above in mind, the way of spending time on the Internet can define the way we manage time in our lives. Most importantly, it can define how much time is spent producing results and how much time is wasted on unproductive thoughts, conversations and actions. Is time spent on the web contributing to our progress in life, to success? Can we take some time off the web or are we dangerously addicted to it? Do we spend time thinking about how to act and react on the web or do we behave spontaneously? Do we have a plan of how to use the Internet? Mathews, J., Debolt, D. and Percival, D. (2011) give some more tips on effective time management with technology in general advising that ‘one should practice not answering the phone just because it’s ringing and e-mails just because they show up, but instead disconnect instant messaging and schedule a time to answer email and return phone calls. Similarly, one should block out other distractions like Facebook and other forms of social media, unless one uses them to generate business’.

If we take into account the fact that the amount of time that is lost due to being occupied with the Internet for entertainment purposes could be used up to produce units of work, productive dialogues, useful services, works of art and other creative practices beneficial to society in general, then we can understand the real dangers of not using the media ‘mindfully’, to quote Rheingold once again.

With the increasing use of tablets and smartphones, ‘people are spending twice as much time online compared to 10 years ago’ as an Ofcom (2015) research has shown. Using a large sample of 1,890 adults aged 16 and over who were interviewed as part of the research, Ofcom has revealed that over a period of ten years, the amount of time spent online had dramatically increased from 30 minutes in 2005 to nearly two and a half hours in 2014 and that by 2014 nine in ten adults were using the Internet whereas in 2005 only half of them were doing so.

The research has also shown that numbers of people watching TV or films, gaming online and text messaging on mobiles have also risen sharply. Nearly all mobile phone users were sending text messages (90% in 2014, compared to 70% in 2005). People were also increasingly using their mobile phone to email (52% were regularly using their phone to email, compared to 5% in 2005) or make a phone call over the Internet (VoIP) – (43% in 2014, compared to 27% in 2013).

Additionally, the Ofcom research has demonstrated a sharp rise in the use of the social media, which has tripled since 2007, when Ofcom first asked people about their social media habits. ‘Nearly three quarters (72%) of Internet users aged 16 and above said they had a social media profile, compared to 22% in 2007’. However, the biggest rise was seen among 35-44 year olds. 80% of the Internet users who had a social media profile belonged to this age group in 2014, compared to just 12% in 2007. Also,
in 2014, nearly half of 55-64 year olds were online with a social media profile, compared to one third (33%) in 2013.

Findings of the same piece of research have also revealed that people are much more likely to go online for public or civic activities in 2014 than they were in 2005 and that more Internet users had visited political or campaigning websites, up from 19% in 2005 to 44% in 2014.

The research was conducted in the framework of Ofcom acting in accordance to the Communication Act of 2003 requirements, as its Section 11 requires Ofcom to promote media literacy in the UK. Under Section 14 (6a) of the Act, Ofcom has a duty to make arrangements for the carrying out of research into the matters mentioned in Section 11 (1). The Communications Act 2003 is an Act of the Parliament of the UK. The act, which came into force on 25 July 2003, superseded the telecommunications Act of 1984. The new act was the responsibility of Tessa Jowell, Culture Secretary. It consolidated the telecommunication and broadcasting regulators in the UK, introducing Ofcom, the Office of Communications, as the new industry regulator. On 28 December 2003 Ofcom gained its full regulatory powers, inheriting the duties of Oftel, the Office of Telecommunications.

The results of the piece of research referred to above, as well as everyday observation and experience, lead to the conclusion that today, the Internet has become ‘the center of our lives’. If we elaborate this reality with a positive mind attitude, we feel that life has become more interesting with the richness and depth of information that can be so effortlessly obtained and with the interaction opportunities and time and space elimination so amply offered. A common trait of “connecting” on the Internet is that it makes an individual feel an active member of society as his ideas travel past and away from the boundaries of home, school, working place or any gathering place to groups, communities, countries and even the world.

However, if we elaborate this reality in terms of missed opportunities to enjoy real life and not just observe happenings around us or the life of others presented on a screen, we may very well speak of Internet or computer addiction; in other words, the excessive use of the Internet or the computer that interferes with daily life is a dangerous addiction that leads to imbalances in life that have to be cured.

**COMPUTER/INTERNET ADDICTION – ‘EVERY FOURTH CHILD IS ADDICTED TO THE INTERNET’**

An addiction may be defined as an excessive use of a kind of food, drink, medicine or substance, an excessive need for the presence of a person or an excessive use of a product of technology like the TV, the Internet and the computer in general. The latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) actually refers to addiction to the Internet as a disorder that needs further study and research. DSM is the manual used by clinicians and researchers to diagnose and classify mental disorders. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has published DSM-5 in 2013, culminating a 14-year revision process. In a publication on the National Center for Biotechnology Information website, the study which was conducted by the Department of Adult Psychiatry in the Poland Medical University, showed that ‘Internet addiction was seen to be quite popular and common among young people, especially those who were only children. In fact, every fourth child is addicted to the Internet’ according to Zboralski, K., Orzechowska, A., Talarowska, M., Darmosz, A., Janiak, A., Janiak, M., Florkowski, A., Galecki, P., (2009). Computer and Internet addiction among pupils
is a serious and alarming finding and a way to fight against it has to be found as soon as possible.

After pointing out that ‘the Media have an influence on the human psyche similar to the addictive actions of psychoactive substances or gambling’ and that ‘computer overuse is claimed to be a cause of psychiatric disturbances’, the writers argue that it is worth considering preventive activities to treat this phenomenon. They also state that it is necessary to make the youth and their parents aware of the dangers of uncontrolled Internet use and pay attention to behavior connected with Internet addiction. They go on to demonstrate the different ways in which Internet or computer addictions manifest:

- Information overload. Too much online surfing leads to decreased productivity at work and fewer interactions with family members.
- Compulsions. Excessive time spent in online activities such as gaming, trading of stocks, gambling and even auctions often leads to overspending and problems at work.
- Cybersex addiction. Too much surfing of porn sites often affects real-life relationships.
- Cyber-relationship addiction. Excessive use of social networking sites to create relationships rather than spending time with family or friends may destroy real-life relationships.

**CAUSES OF AN ADDICTION TO COMPUTERS OR THE WEB AND THE VICIOUS CIRCLE**

One can argue that if people are well-bonded to others and well related to the organizations and institutions of their environment, they will have no desire to use the Internet addictively. The lack of bonding and emotional support makes people to turn to the Internet. The fact of being stressed and unhappy can contribute to the development of a computer or Internet addiction. Introvert and shy individuals who are not able to easily relate with others are more prone to get addicted to the Internet.

However, what happens is a paradox. The very potential of global and instant communication through the Internet and social networking that is offered to the friendless and emotionally deprived individual, can cause the exclusion of the individual from the fullest kind of communication, the physical/bodily communication. As a result, the effect of nonverbal communication is cancelled (Menelaou, N., 2016). A vicious circle is generated as lonesome individuals seek connectedness with others through the Internet but are at the same time deprived of the joy of face to face interaction, collaboration and obviously live communication with others due to this Internet addiction of theirs.

**SYMPTOMS OF INTERNET ADDICTION**

Physical and emotional symptoms of such an addiction manifest like headaches, insomnia, poor vision, anxiety, isolation and agitation. Long-term effects can be as severe as leading to bankruptcy, especially if the time spent online is focused on shopping, gambling and gaming (Computer/Internet Addiction Symptoms, Causes and Effects). The study which lead to these findings, which was conducted by the Department of Adult Psychiatry in the Poland Medical University, has also brought to
surface the fact that another symptom of Internet addiction is the inability to keep time schedules and in cases losing the sense of time.

The inability to keep time schedules and in cases the fact of losing the sense of time as symptoms of Internet addiction, severely affect the life of the Internet user and most importantly his/her ability to shape the near future and construct his/her real life in terms of planning. The consequences of this phenomenon are not yet clearly manifested as the emergence of the Internet and social networking is quite recent and some time is needed for them to be assessed. But as the numbers of Internet users have grown and continue to grow dramatically, we can expect real changes in the future regarding the short and long-term goals of individuals, their missions and visions and the quality of their expectations.

Zimbardo, Ph. and Boyd, J (2008) talk about the past, present and future perspectives that every individual has and argue that every important decision made is determined by a force operating deep inside our minds which is our perspective on time, our internal time zone. They go on to point out that we are unaware of this influential force in our life and as a result we do not manage our life efficiently. They speak about how past, present and future perspectives shape our lives. If we apply this to time spent excessively on the Internet, especially by young users, then we may speak of focusing on present perspectives rather than future perspectives. This in its turn has a very negative effect on the visions of young people for the future. Surely it would be horrific to find out that young people no longer have aspirations and that technology has managed to sweep away their dreams. Succeeding in life without a plan is risky indeed. Usually, no planning means no desire for progress in life, no meaning in life. Lots of arguments have been at times made on the importance of setting missions and visions in life. "A soul without a high aim is like a ship without a rudder", as Eileen Caddy, spiritual teacher and new age author claimed.

**CONCLUSION**

Unless someone defines his ethics, unless he is clear about what he will and especially what he won’t do on the Internet and how he will manage time on the Internet, the danger of being overwhelmed by the web will always be imminent. To quote Rheingold (2014) on the issue of ‘mindful’ use of digital media, 'knowing how to make use of online tools without being overloaded with too much information is an essential ingredient to personal success in the twenty-first century’. He insists on using the digital media in a way that ‘they make us empowered participants rather than passive receivers’.

An intelligent person is surely aware of the shortness of his time on earth; an intelligent person will not allow the Internet take advantage of this time but use the Internet as a tool for facilitating, not stealing away real life. Let us shape our lives ourselves and not allow the world of technology shape it. Real life does not consist of happenings demonstrated on a screen that may be altered and manipulated in several ways by those who post them. Real life consists of what really happens in everyday life.
REFERENCES


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