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The Inaccuracy of Internet Addiction

The irony of technology and internet is that while companies and nations are racing to outdo each other, there has also been a steady increase on the debate on how technology and internet addiction are becoming a norm, and thus killing the traditional forms of communication and the values they transmitted such as empathy. When one looks at the conversation, it is geared towards talking about the need to ‘humanize’ technology, an extreme that looks impossible at best. The idea is that the conversation on internet and technology addiction has been seen based on the paradigm of seeking to measure the human values. Perhaps, one wonders whether other forms of innovation have been subjected to the scrutiny associated with information technology. The idea of ‘humanizing’ non-living entity is what makes information technology be regarded as ‘dehumanizing’ the human value system, all the while overlooking the role of self-inflicted aspect of human tendency in creating the situation.

One of the aspects that is indisputable is that technology has made people to spend less time cultivating face-to-face communication. In one of the articles, it has been observed that in the contemporary generation, people prefer texting rather than talking. This leads to the observation that “conversation is there for us to reclaim. For the failing connections of our digital world, it is the talking cure” and this seems to show that there is a malady, and its cure lies in abandoning the dependence on digital gadgets. It is further interesting to note that the author goes ahead to show how in a study of school children, after they stayed for five days without using their gadgets, they were able to develop empathy and interpret facial expressions.

What is the obsession with digital use and traditional conversation? If the question was simple and straightforward, one would argue that it could be that people feel the need to connect with each other, but the digital world is a barrier. However, such a position would be misleading. According to the latest statistics, the smartphone penetration is on an upward trajectory. In the US, 98% of the total population has access to a phone. Additional data shows that BY 2023, more than 257 million Americans will be using social media on a daily basis. This means that more than half of the total population in the US will have an active digital footprint. Moreover, the US and China, the two greatest global economies, are in a vicious trade war as each tries to have the lead in developing 5G internet connectivity. The main reason for the race being that whoever will control the internet connection will have made a breakthrough in artificial intelligence. What is the point in pointing out all these examples? It is an ironic situation that in a world that people talk of the need to have traditional conversations, there is a daily and incessant pursuit to further entrench the digital framework. Who is to blame? The US takes pride in its technological companies and is unwilling to let any other country take the lead position. It shows that while the world wants to move towards the traditional mode of communication, then it is insincere for it to continue innovating and entrenching dependence on digital gadgets.

The continued use of smartphones and other technological devices to define human lives makes it challenging to alienate the use of gadgets. In the modern period, people have online shopping, online works, online video streaming, online studies, online dating amongst other various spheres that have been integrated in the technological world. What this means is that people have come to rely on technology even on minimal activities that should help cultivate social capital. Companies such as Amazon and Uber have risen from the need to increase convenience among human beings, and technology has been the common factor. The rise of other related technological companies indicates the likelihood that people will continue relying on technology use moving forward. How then can addiction be fought when the parameters for the same condition are being increased? It is a contrasting and ironical, if not comical situation. The people want to revert to a social system that values empathy and social capital yet their actions show a difference of ideology towards attaining such a goal.

Why information technology? The main purpose for asking this question is because of the way everyone has a theoretical framework on why information technology does not augur well with the ‘human’ expectations. For instance, there has been a lot of innovation in transport industry yet this has not received as much attention and criticism as the communication sector. Companies such as Virgin Inc. are even organizing trips for people to visit space. Have they exhausted the abundance of Mother Nature? How about going to visit the diverse cultures the world has to offer? These are questions whose validity has been overlooked but they all point to a new trend of socialization. Innovation in the transport sector has only reduced the contact time among people, yet its relevance has been overlooked.

Internet addiction, while being a reality, is a reflection of the changing dynamics of humanity. People have to keep up with the rising cost of living, the celebrity culture, the demands of an enlightened and opinionated generation which all cumulatively show that people need to find ways to cope within such a structure. The use of google is not a sign that one is dumb but rather utilizing the abundance of technology. While the use of such technology robs people the opportunity to collect and interpret data, it saves time for other activities. People may not spend as much time engaging in traditional communication but they are able to have a global outlook on people and their conditions through social media and other news outlets. Is this addiction?

The existence of internet addiction is one-sided, and thus needs to be as comprehensive as possible. Conversation needs to shift to other issues such as the dominance of internet on issues such as shopping, transport, education amongst others. The idea that people spend time on their phones for the sole purpose of avoiding direct communication is both misleading and inaccurate. It is quite unlikely that personality traits such as empathy are solely affected by internet use. While internet plays a key role, it does not play a comprehensive or dominant role. The debate needs to embrace the convenience and importance of technology in the modern world, and try and find a threshold on how such factors could be leading to unhealthy use and dependence of internet and how traditional ways fit into the new dynamism.

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