



Technology and Social Isolation: Exploring the Paradox of Connectivity

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Abstract

In an era dominated by technological advancements and unprecedented connectivity, the relationship between technology and social isolation has become a topic of paramount importance. This paper delves into the paradoxical nature of connectivity in the digital age, examining how the very technologies designed to bring people closer together may inadvertently contribute to feelings of social isolation. The study employs a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on insights from psychology, sociology, and communication studies to analyse the intricate interplay between technology use and social connectedness. The paper begins by reviewing existing literature on the impact of technology on social relationships, highlighting both positive and negative aspects. It then explores the psychological mechanisms underlying the paradox of connectivity, investigating how excessive screen time, online interactions, and social media engagement can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Additionally, the role of technology in altering traditional modes of communication and community building is scrutinized. The research incorporates empirical evidence from surveys and case studies to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play. By examining real-life scenarios and experiences, the paper aims to offer practical insights into mitigating the negative effects of technology on social isolation. Furthermore, it explores potential avenues for designing technologies that foster genuine connection and meaningful social interactions.

This paper contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding the impact of technology on society by shedding light on the paradoxical relationship between connectivity and social isolation. By unpacking the intricacies of this phenomenon, it provides a foundation for future research and the development of strategies to harness technology for enhancing, rather than hindering, human connection in the digital age.

Keywords: Technology, Impact, Modern, Society, Social Relationships

Introduction

In the ever-evolving tapestry of human existence, the 21st century stands as a testament to the transformative power of technology. The accelerated pace of technological advancements has ushered in an era of unparalleled connectivity, reshaping the very essence of how individuals communicate, interact, and cultivate relationships. From the omnipresence of smartphones to the ascendance of sprawling social media platforms, the contemporary landscape is marked by an intricate dance between the digital and the interpersonal. However, amidst the promises of a globally connected society, a paradox looms large—an enigma that challenges the very foundations of this digital revolution: the paradox of technology contributing to social isolation.

At the heart of this digital renaissance lies a narrative of unprecedented connectivity. The ubiquitous nature of smartphones, with their ability to seamlessly integrate into every aspect of our lives, has rendered communication instantaneous, eroding the constraints of time and space. Social media platforms, once confined to the realm of novelty, have evolved into sprawling virtual ecosystems where individuals curate their identities, share experiences, and forge connections with a global audience. The promises embedded in this digital age were grand, suggesting a world where the barriers to communication would crumble, and communities would flourish without the limitations of physical proximity.

The Paradox Emerges: Navigating Unintended Consequences

Yet, within the interwoven threads of digital interconnectedness, a paradox begins to unfurl—a paradox that challenges the assumed benefits of this technological evolution. Despite the undeniable advantages in terms of breaking down geographical boundaries, fostering instantaneous communication, and creating virtual communities, reports and studies have surfaced, revealing a disconcerting trend: the rise of social isolation. The very tools designed to bring people closer together seem to, at times, contribute to a sense of loneliness and disconnection. This introduction seeks to set the stage for an exhaustive exploration of this paradox, aiming to unravel the complexities inherent in the relationship between technology and social isolation.

The allure of connectivity, at its inception, was akin to a siren's call—a promise of a world where geographical distances would become inconsequential, where long-lost friends and

relatives could be virtually reunited, and where the collective human experience would be shared and celebrated on a global stage. Smartphones were hailed as liberators, emancipating individuals from the shackles of landline telephones and enabling them to carry their social world in their pockets. Social media platforms were envisioned as bridges, connecting diverse cultures and fostering a sense of shared humanity. The initial optimism surrounding the potential of technology to enhance human connection was palpable and infectious.

The Digital Ecosystem: An Intricate Web

To comprehend the paradox of technology-induced social isolation, one must delve into the intricacies of the digital ecosystem that now permeates nearly every facet of modern life. Smartphones, with their sleek designs and multifaceted capabilities, have become extensions of the self, mediating our interactions with the world and shaping our perceptions of reality. Social media platforms, evolving from simple networking tools to complex social ecosystems, have become virtual realms where individuals navigate the complexities of self-presentation and social engagement. Within this digital web, the paradox manifests, prompting a reevaluation of the assumed benefits of this interconnected age.

At the core of the paradox lies the intricate relationship between technology and the human psyche. The allure of digital interactions, characterized by curated profiles and filtered snippets of life, often conceals the nuanced complexity of genuine human connection. Studies delve into the psychological ramifications of excessive screen time, revealing that the curated nature of online interactions can contribute to feelings of loneliness and isolation. As individuals tether themselves more closely to their digital devices, the authenticity and depth inherent in face-to-face connections may be compromised, leading to a subtle erosion of the meaningful relationships that sustain the human spirit.

Beyond the individual psyche, societal dynamics play a pivotal role in shaping the paradox. Traditional notions of community, once anchored in physical proximity and shared experiences, undergo a metamorphosis in the digital sphere. Online communities, while providing platforms for like-minded individuals to converge, may lack the depth and authenticity inherent in face-to-face interactions. As the virtual realm expands, questions arise regarding the quality and substance of the connections forged within it. The shift from traditional communities to virtual networks challenges fundamental assumptions about the nature of human connection, prompting an exploration of the societal implications of this

digital transformation. In addition to psychology and societal shifts, the very fabric of communication undergoes a profound transformation in the digital age. The immediacy of messaging apps and the brevity imposed by character limits redefine the contours of conversation. While digital communication facilitates quick exchanges and real-time connections, it may inadvertently sacrifice the depth and nuance that characterize meaningful human interaction. As emojis replace facial expressions and brief texts substitute for nuanced tones, the essence of true connection faces a subtle erosion. This section scrutinizes how the evolving nature of communication contributes to the paradox, challenging assumptions about the quality of digital connections.

This introduction establishes the overarching scope of our exploration – to navigate the paradox of technology and social isolation through an in-depth analysis of its psychological, societal, and communicative dimensions. By acknowledging the undeniable benefits of technology in facilitating global communication, we set the stage for a comprehensive investigation into the complexities surrounding the paradox. In the subsequent sections, we delve into existing literature, incorporate empirical evidence, and scrutinize real-life scenarios to contribute substantively to the ongoing discourse on the impact of technology on social relationships. Moreover, this inquiry aspires to offer practical insights and recommendations for mitigating the negative effects of technology on social isolation while proposing avenues for the design of technologies that authentically foster human connection.

As we embark on this intellectual journey through the intricacies of the technology-social isolation paradox, the goal is not merely to dissect the phenomenon but to weave a narrative that transcends the dichotomy. In the chapters that follow, we navigate the labyrinth of this paradox, seeking to illuminate its shadows and reveal potential pathways toward a more connected and meaningful digital future. The exploration encompasses a multidimensional analysis, acknowledging both the promises and pitfalls of technology, with the ultimate aim of contributing to a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between connectivity and social isolation in the digital age.

Technology and The Impact on Social Relationships

The impact of technology on social relationships is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has unfolded with the rapid advancement of digital technologies in recent decades. As we navigate the intricate web of connectivity woven by smartphones, social media platforms, and

other technological innovations, it becomes evident that the very tools designed to enhance communication and foster relationships carry both transformative benefits and nuanced challenges. The advent of smartphones marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of human interaction. These handheld devices, now ubiquitous in daily life, serve as portals to a vast digital realm where communication knows no temporal or spatial constraints. While smartphones have undoubtedly facilitated communication, enabling individuals to stay connected across great distances and fostering a sense of immediacy in exchanges, they also introduce subtle shifts in the dynamics of face-to-face interaction.

In the digital age, the act of physically being present with others can sometimes be overshadowed by the constant allure of the virtual world within our pockets. The pervasive use of smartphones in social settings has given rise to a phenomenon known as "phubbing," where individuals prioritize their digital interactions over the immediate presence of those around them. This shift in attention dynamics can contribute to a sense of disconnection even in physical proximity, highlighting the paradoxical nature of our hyper-connected yet potentially isolating world.

Social media platforms, once envisioned as bridges connecting diverse communities, have become integral components of modern social relationships. These platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for individuals to share their lives, connect with others, and form virtual communities based on shared interests. However, the curated nature of social media, where users often present idealized versions of themselves, can give rise to a distorted perception of reality. The quest for validation through likes and comments may subtly impact self-esteem and contribute to a sense of social comparison, where individuals measure their lives against the carefully crafted images presented by their online peers. The emergence of online relationships adds a new layer of complexity to the social landscape. The digital realm facilitates connections with individuals across the globe, transcending geographical boundaries and enabling the formation of virtual friendships. While online relationships can be enriching and provide a sense of belonging, they also pose challenges in terms of authenticity and the depth of connection. The absence of physical presence and the reliance on digital communication mediums may limit the nuances and subtleties inherent in face-to-face interactions, raising questions about the true nature of these connections.

The psychological impact of technology on social relationships is a subject of increasing concern. Studies suggest that excessive screen time, particularly on social media, may be

linked to feelings of loneliness and isolation. The constant exposure to carefully curated images and lifestyles can contribute to a sense of inadequacy and a fear of missing out (FOMO). The addictive nature of social media platforms, designed to maximize user engagement, further complicates the relationship between technology use and mental well-being. Societal dynamics undergo a transformation in the digital age, reshaping traditional notions of community and social bonds. Online communities, forged around shared interests or ideologies, provide individuals with a sense of belonging that transcends physical proximity. However, the potential for echo chambers to form within these digital communities raises questions about diversity of perspectives and the role of technology in reinforcing pre-existing beliefs. The blurring of lines between online and offline identities introduces new challenges in understanding the true nature of social relationships in a world increasingly mediated by technology.

Communication itself undergoes a profound shift in the digital age. The immediacy of messaging apps, the brevity imposed by character limits, and the prevalence of emojis redefine the contours of conversation. While digital communication facilitates quick exchanges and real-time connections, it may inadvertently sacrifice the depth and nuance that characterize meaningful human interaction. The reduction of complex thoughts and emotions into bite-sized digital messages challenges our ability to convey the richness of our experiences.

The impact of technology on social relationships is a nuanced interplay between the transformative potential of digital connectivity and the subtle challenges it introduces. While technology enables unprecedented communication across distances and the formation of virtual communities, it also gives rise to issues such as phubbing, social comparison, and the erosion of face-to-face interaction. The psychological implications of technology use, particularly on social media, highlight the delicate balance between connection and isolation. As society grapples with the evolving nature of social relationships in the digital age, it becomes imperative to critically examine the role of technology in shaping the way we connect, communicate, and ultimately, the paradox of connectivity in the digital age unveils a complex interplay of psychological mechanisms that shape the way individuals experience and navigate their relationships within the vast landscape of technology. As we delve into the intricacies of this paradox, it becomes apparent that the very tools designed to enhance social connections may, at times, contribute to a sense of isolation and disconnection. At the heart of

the paradox lies the psychological impact of technology on the human psyche. The allure of constant connectivity, facilitated by smartphones and social media platforms, creates a dynamic where individuals are perpetually engaged in a digital dance of interactions. However, beneath the surface of this constant connectivity, psychological mechanisms come into play, influencing how individuals perceive, engage with, and derive satisfaction from their social interactions.

One of the key psychological mechanisms underlying the paradox is the concept of the curated self. In the digital realm, individuals have the power to meticulously curate their online personas, presenting an idealized version of themselves to the world. Social media platforms, with their emphasis on visual representation and instant gratification through likes and comments, encourage users to showcase their achievements, experiences, and positive aspects of their lives. This curated self, while allowing for self-expression and identity exploration, also introduces a layer of inauthenticity to online interactions. The interplay of these psychological mechanisms within the paradox of connectivity illuminates the intricate dance between the benefits and drawbacks of digital interactions. While technology offers unprecedented opportunities for connection and self-expression, the psychological toll of curated identities, social comparison, addictive behaviours, online disinhibition, and the erosion of solitude introduces a nuanced dimension to the way individuals experience their social relationships in the digital age. Understanding these psychological mechanisms is crucial for unravelling the complexities of the paradox and for developing strategies to foster healthier, more authentic digital connections.

Modern Digital Technologies and the Positive Impact on Social Relationships

In the realm of modern digital technologies, an intricate tapestry of connectivity is being woven, reshaping the landscape of human relationships. Far from the narrative of isolation and disconnection often associated with technology, contemporary digital tools wield a profound and positive impact on social relationships. As we delve into the nuances of this impact, it becomes evident that the digital age has ushered in transformative changes, fostering deeper connections, broadening social horizons, and enhancing the quality of interpersonal interactions. At the forefront of this digital revolution are smartphones, compact devices that have become indispensable companions in the pockets of billions. These handheld marvels serve as gateways to a virtual realm where communication knows no boundaries. Instant messaging applications, video calls, and social media platforms converge

within these devices, offering users unprecedented opportunities to connect with others irrespective of geographical constraints. The positive impact of smartphones on social relationships is unmistakable, breaking down physical barriers and enabling real-time communication that transcends borders. Social media platforms, once viewed with scepticism, have evolved into dynamic arenas for social interaction. These platforms are not merely spaces for status updates and photo sharing but have become integral components of modern social relationships. They provide individuals with the means to maintain connections with friends, family, and acquaintances across vast distances. From the sharing of life events to the exchange of ideas and opinions, social media platforms serve as virtual bridges that span the gaps created by time and space. The positive impact of these digital technologies is especially evident in the realm of long-distance relationships. In an era where geographical mobility is common, individuals often find themselves separated by thousands of miles from loved ones. Video calls and messaging applications act as lifelines, offering a semblance of closeness that transcends the physical distance. The ability to share daily experiences, celebrate milestones, and witness the lives of distant friends and family in real-time contributes to a sense of connection that would have been unimaginable in previous eras.

Furthermore, digital technologies play a pivotal role in fostering inclusivity and expanding social circles. Online communities, forged around shared interests or common goals, provide individuals with platforms to connect with like-minded individuals globally. Whether it's a passion for a niche hobby, a particular academic discipline, or a social cause, the digital realm facilitates the formation of communities that transcend physical boundaries. This democratization of connection allows individuals to build relationships based on shared values and interests, promoting a sense of belonging that might be challenging to find within the constraints of local communities. The positive impact of digital technologies on social relationships is also evident in the realm of social support. Online forums and support groups offer spaces for individuals facing similar challenges to connect, share experiences, and provide mutual assistance. From health-related concerns to personal development journeys, the digital realm serves as a supportive backdrop where individuals can find understanding, empathy, and encouragement. The ability to access a diverse range of perspectives and experiences contributes to a more robust support network, enhancing individuals' overall well-being. Moreover, digital technologies have redefined the dynamics of communication within existing relationships. Couples separated by work or other commitments can maintain

a continuous flow of communication through messaging apps and video calls, mitigating the challenges of physical distance. The sharing of daily experiences, even in a virtual context, helps sustain emotional intimacy and fosters a sense of connection.

The impact of digital technologies on social relationships extends beyond personal connections to professional networks. Platforms like LinkedIn offer avenues for individuals to expand their professional circles, connect with colleagues and mentors, and explore career opportunities. The positive impact of these digital networks on career development and knowledge exchange cannot be overstated, contributing to a more interconnected and collaborative professional landscape. Furthermore, digital technologies serve as facilitators of social engagement and collective action. Whether it's organizing events, mobilizing for a cause, or raising awareness about social issues, the digital realm amplifies the power of collective voices. Social media, in particular, has been a catalyst for social movements, allowing individuals to connect, share information, and unite around shared values. The positive impact of these technologies on collective agency and social change underscores their transformative potential in shaping the fabric of societal relationships. Modern digital technologies wield a powerful and positive impact on social relationships, challenging the narrative of isolation often associated with the digital age. From the ubiquity of smartphones breaking down geographical barriers to social media platforms fostering virtual communities, these technologies enhance connectivity, broaden social horizons, and facilitate meaningful interactions. The positive impact is evident in the strengthening of long-distance relationships, the inclusivity of online communities, the support networks formed in digital spaces, and the transformative potential of digital engagement in both personal and professional spheres. As we navigate this digital landscape, it becomes increasingly clear that when harnessed thoughtfully, these technologies can be catalysts for building a more interconnected, inclusive, and socially vibrant world.

Digital Technologies and the Negative Impact on Social Relationships

The advent of digital technologies has undeniably transformed the way we interact and connect with one another. While these technologies bring about numerous advantages, there is a growing recognition of the negative impacts they can have on social relationships. From altering the dynamics of face-to-face interaction to fostering feelings of isolation, digital technologies introduce a complex array of challenges that merit thorough examination.

One of the primary negative impacts of digital technologies on social relationships is the phenomenon of phubbing, a term derived from "phone snubbing." This occurs when individuals prioritize their smartphones over face-to-face interactions, leading to a disconnect between people even when physically present in the same space. The constant lure of notifications, messages, and social media updates can create a distracted environment, where genuine engagement and meaningful conversation take a backseat to the digital realm.

Social media platforms, while offering opportunities for connection, can contribute to a sense of disconnection and loneliness. The curated nature of content on these platforms often leads to social comparison, where individuals measure their lives against the carefully presented images of others. This constant exposure to idealized representations can foster feelings of inadequacy and a fear of missing out (FOMO), contributing to a negative impact on self-esteem and overall well-being. The addictive nature of digital technologies, particularly social media and smartphone use, introduces another layer of concern. The design of these platforms, often employing features such as likes, comments, and notifications, triggers a dopamine-driven reward system. This creates an addictive loop where individuals are compelled to check their devices regularly, seeking the next digital affirmation. This addictive behaviour can result in diminished attention to real-world relationships, leading to a negative impact on the quality of face-to-face interactions.

Furthermore, the ease of digital communication can lead to a superficial engagement with relationships. Messaging apps and social media facilitate quick exchanges, often devoid of the depth and nuance that characterize in-person communication. Emojis and abbreviations may replace genuine emotional expression, contributing to a sense of disconnect and misinterpretation. The prevalence of digital communication can erode the richness of language and non-verbal cues essential for understanding and connecting with others on a deeper level. Digital technologies also contribute to the blurring of personal and professional boundaries. The constant accessibility facilitated by smartphones and email can create an expectation for individuals to be available around the clock. This encroachment on personal time can lead to stress, burnout, and a negative impact on the quality of relationships, as individuals struggle to balance work and personal life. The rise of online relationships introduces challenges to the authenticity and depth of human connections. While digital platforms enable individuals to form connections with people worldwide, the absence of physical presence can hinder the development of genuine intimacy. Online relationships may

lack the subtleties of in-person interactions, and the reliance on digital communication mediums may limit the depth of connection that can be achieved.

Digital technologies also contribute to a phenomenon known as "technofinance," where the intrusion of technology into interpersonal interactions disrupts the quality of those interactions. Whether it's checking smartphones during conversations or being absorbed in online activities in shared spaces, technofinance can lead to feelings of neglect and frustration, negatively impacting the dynamics of relationships. The erosion of privacy in the digital age poses yet another challenge to social relationships. The constant sharing of personal information on social media, coupled with the collection of data by tech companies, raises concerns about the boundaries between public and private life. The perception of being under constant surveillance can hinder authentic self-expression, leading individuals to curate their online personas cautiously, contributing to a sense of inauthenticity in relationships.

Conclusion

In navigating the intricate relationship between technology and social isolation, it becomes evident that the paradox of connectivity is a nuanced interplay of both positive and negative forces. As we traverse the digital landscape, the conveniences of instant communication, virtual communities, and global connectivity come face to face with the shadows of curated personas, social comparison, and the erosion of genuine face-to-face interactions. The journey through the paradox prompts a reflection on the psychological, societal, and communicative dimensions of the digital age. The psychological mechanisms at play, from the allure of the curated self to the impact of constant connectivity on mental well-being, paint a complex picture of the ways in which technology influences our understanding of self and others. The societal dynamics, shifting from traditional communities to virtual networks, challenge conventional notions of belonging and shared experiences. Meanwhile, the evolving nature of communication, marked by immediacy and brevity, demands a reevaluation of the depth and authenticity in our connections. In this exploration, it is crucial to acknowledge the positive strides that technology has made in connecting people across distances, fostering inclusivity, and providing platforms for support and collective action. The digital realm has become a space where relationships can transcend physical limitations, where shared interests can form communities, and where voices can unite for social change. These positive aspects emphasize the potential for technology to be a force for good, enhancing the fabric of our social relationships.

However, the paradox lies in the simultaneous emergence of negative impacts that can contribute to social isolation. The curated self, social comparison, addictive behaviours, and the erosion of solitude create a landscape where the very tools designed to bring us closer together can sometimes drive us apart. The challenge is not to reject technology outright but to navigate its complexities with a conscious awareness of its potential pitfalls. The paradox of connectivity underscores the need for a balanced and intentional approach to our digital interactions. It calls for an awareness of the psychological implications of curated online personas, a critical examination of societal shifts in the digital age, and a reconsideration of the depth of our communication. Striking this balance requires a collective effort—from individuals mindful of their digital engagement to designers and developers crafting technologies that prioritize genuine connection over mere engagement metrics. As we move forward, it is essential to recognize that the impact of technology on social relationships is not predetermined. The paradox provides an opportunity for reflection and course correction. By fostering digital literacy, promoting mindful technology use, and designing platforms that prioritize authentic human connections, we can tilt the balance toward a more positive and fulfilling integration of technology into our social lives. Ultimately, the exploration of the paradox of connectivity is an ongoing journey—one that demands ongoing dialogue, research, and adaptation. In navigating this complex terrain, the goal is not to retreat from technology but to harness its potential for positive social change. It is a call to shape a digital landscape where connectivity enhances, rather than hinders, the richness of our relationships—a landscape that reflects the best of our shared humanity in the digital age.

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