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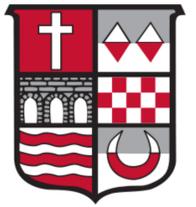
Introduction

This study is concerned with the connection between communication technology and family relationships. In our current society, are people "too busy" to have face to face interactions and instead connect more using social media, phones, tablets, etc.? My research aims to find out if family interaction suffers as communication technology use increases.

Background

In the twenty-first century technology, such as smartphones and the internet, is evermore present and the focal point of millennials' daily life. According to a recent study, 92% of all young adults ages 18-34 have smart phones while 99% of those ages use the internet (Poushter 2016). Another study found work organizations are more demanding with expecting workers to be constantly "on call" and connected to work via email and phone call. Therefore, even after hours workers are expected to be busy with work while at home with their families. Technology has taken over and has forced people to feel the need to be connected to their work or their outside social life more than needed to stay connected with relationships (Adkins & Premeaux 2014).

The impact that the advancement of technology has had on teenagers and children continues to grow. The attachment that adolescents have on mobile devices and gaming systems is what impacts the style of a relationship. Social media continues to prosper and have an effect on families (Singh 2014). A study that was done to determine if interacting through social media and via messaging had a positive impact of individuals found that children who chatted with their parents over technology had more physiological issues because of the trend of being distant physically through communication (Rudi 2014).

Theory

Gerhard Lenski emphasized the importance of technology within a society and how it causes a society to evolve and change. But, communication technologies, while functional, can produce unintended consequences, such as the diminishment of family interaction.

Symbolic interactionism introduced by George Herbet Mead highlights the importance of social interaction to the development of the person, the formation of social roles, and the strengthening of social bonds (Dillion, 2010). It would be very problematic if communication technology use increases isolation and interferes with social interaction, especially the type of family interactions that Mead explained are so crucial for socialization and the integrity of social groups.

Erving Goffman's theory of impression management and dramaturgy holds in essence, people are social actors and perform and play different social roles depending on the social stages. Goffman realized our society is more sophisticated and that with multiple roles being played, some are bound to get mixed up (Dillion 2010). The concern of this study is that technology may introduce "outside" stages, like work, into the family setting which can interfere with social functioning and performance of roles as employees, parents, friends, etc.

Methods

My hypothesis is that as communication technology use increases, face to face family interaction will decrease

The Independent Variable:
Communication Technology: Includes talking, texting, messaging or chatting, playing games and watching videos as well as using Facebook, Instagram and Twitter
The Dependent Variable:
Family Interaction: Includes face to face interaction as well as physical company regarding time spent eating together, doing activities and interacting for entertainment.
The Control Variable:
Correlation between independent and dependent variable: "Did the family in your household need to use technology at home for work?".

Research Methodology

I administered a quantitative, a cross-sectional survey for data collection and conducted a nonprobability sampling, purposive sampling for this research.

Sample

75 undergraduate students from universities and colleges on the East Coast, primarily from Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, CT, who lived at home during the summer of 2016 participated in my study. Something beneficial to the family dynamic of my research is that 86.7% of participants come from two parent households while 13.3% grew up living with one parent.

Results

Table 1
Independent Variable Test - Technology Use Index

Statistics

TechnologyUseIndex

N	Valid	74
	Missing	1
Mean		14.3919
Std. Deviation		9.57425
Range		46.50
Minimum		2.50
Maximum		49.00

Table 2
Dependent Variable Test - Family Interaction Index

Statistics

FamilyInteractionIndex

N	Valid	73
	Missing	2
Mean		6.1370
Std. Deviation		4.62426
Range		28.50
Minimum		1.50
Maximum		30.00

Results Continued

Table 3
Basic Hypothesis Test – Correlation

Correlations

		TechnologyUseIndex	FamilyInteractionIndex
TechnologyUseIndex	Pearson Correlation	1	.184
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.120
	N	74	73
FamilyInteractionIndex	Pearson Correlation	.184	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.120	
	N	73	73

Table 4
Basic Hypothesis Test - Crosstabluation

How much do you enjoy being in your family's company? * How often did you find yourself feeling that you are "addicted" to or rely too much on your technology devices? Crosstabulation

How much do you enjoy being in your family's company?			How often did you find yourself feeling that you are "addicted" to or rely too much on your technology devices?					Total
			Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
How much do you enjoy being in your family's company?	Rarely	Count	0	0	2	0	0	2
		% within How often did you find yourself feeling that you are "addicted" to or rely too much on your technology devices?	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%
	Sometimes	Count	0	2	1	3	1	7
		% within How often did you find yourself feeling that you are "addicted" to or rely too much on your technology devices?	0.0%	15.4%	3.8%	14.3%	20.0%	9.7%
	Often	Count	0	5	11	6	2	24
		% within How often did you find yourself feeling that you are "addicted" to or rely too much on your technology devices?	0.0%	38.5%	42.3%	28.6%	40.0%	33.3%
	Always	Count	7	6	12	12	2	39
		% within How often did you find yourself feeling that you are "addicted" to or rely too much on your technology devices?	100.0%	46.2%	46.2%	57.1%	40.0%	54.2%
Total		Count	7	13	26	21	5	72
		% within How often did you find yourself feeling that you are "addicted" to or rely too much on your technology devices?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5
Advanced Hypothesis Test – Infrequent
"Did the family in your household need to use technology at home for work?"

Correlations

		TechnologyUseIndex	FamilyInteractionIndex
TechnologyUseIndex	Pearson Correlation	1	.330*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.027
	N	45	45
FamilyInteractionIndex	Pearson Correlation	.330*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.027	
	N	45	45

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6
Advanced Hypothesis Test – Frequent
"Did the family in your household need to use technology at home for work?"

Correlations

		TechnologyUseIndex	FamilyInteractionIndex
TechnologyUseIndex	Pearson Correlation	1	-.015
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.939
	N	28	28
FamilyInteractionIndex	Pearson Correlation	-.015	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.939	
	N	28	28

Conclusions

Overall, the study proved to have no direct relationship, therefore my hypothesis was proven wrong. There was a lack of correlation which proved there is no connection between an increase in use of communication technology affecting family interactions. If people are aware they are choosing to use technology over face to face communication because it is easier, they are lazy or face to face interaction gives them anxiety, then at least they are aware of why they grab their devices so frequently. This research only tested one aspect of a person's life, family connections but in general there is no real issue with an increase of technology. Therefore, this information may prove to be beneficial to society in which there is no need for a social policy or change.

Further Studies

For future research, it is necessary to adjust the wording of the questions to provide an accurate representation of usage. There was an overlap of hours in my results with people either misreading the wording of the question or not understanding how to answer the question appropriately with the amount of hours provided. Also, targeting a different age group may be beneficial to figure out who uses technology the most in all aspects of life; such as work, personal, communicating, etc. Targeting those only who use technology constantly would help exemplify the consequences of this technology era. In addition, figuring out more in depth if people can do without their phone as far as activities, staying in touch, etc. and if they only use it because that is how society works now and because it is more comfortable, could be useful. In addition, this survey tested the time participants were living home, which occurred in the summer from May-August. The survey was open from September 12th, 2016 until October 11th, 2016, which made participants have to recall their lifestyle in the prior weeks of summer.

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