

The positive and negative impact of digital communication

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Do you imagine your life without your phone? Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, digital communication devices, applications, and platforms have flooded the world of interpersonal communication among individuals all over the world. On the one hand, such connection may hold positive implications for the socialization of the involved individuals, engaging them in social as well as political life of the society.

However, on the other hand, the negative effects also take place, impacting harmfully the families, decreasing the level of emotional intelligence as well as exposing the profile to cyber bullying. Among the most important positive effects of digital communication that will be analyzed are enhancing the social action, political engagement, and improvement of socialization conversely, the negative aspect to being analyzed are ruining of relationships, destroying of emotional intelligence, cyber bullying, and reliance on technology as a means of communication.

The paper evidences that loneliness correlates with digital communication due to the fact that it establishes an illusion of the real relationship between people, however the relations are not real. According to my survey, a paradox occurs: while digital communication is called to unite people, 83% of respondents believe that people have become unsocial. 65% of respondents think, digital communication makes them connected but lonely.

It must be understood that digital communication refers to the electronic transmission of information through different media. The development of digital communication started with the introduction of MSN Messenger - a messaging platform that changed the speed of communication and borders.

Later appeared more relevant and complete forms of communication such as Skype, which included real-time video, and the modern social platforms as Facebook and WhatsApp.

Digital devices widely in use today include phones, tablets, personal computers, and smartphones. Other traditional but critical forms of digital communication include e-mails. It means that technological advancements in communication are drastically changing and influencing how people communicate in their lives.

Little by little, digital communication has slowly displaced face-to-face communication and become an integral part of interaction among individuals. It has been argued that this takeover has affected relationships and at times led to their breakdown. In most cases, it has been shown that on-line interaction improves connectedness over short and long distance although individuals may appear lonelier than when physical interaction takes place.

Some of the scholars noticed that what bothers them most about the constant presence of social media is just how noisy it is (Murphy-Gill 41). However, the fact that digital communication has improved connectedness and networking among diverse people cannot be gainsaid at this point.

Digital communication has been responsible for ruining numerous relationships because of their distractive nature. In this context, relationships may refer to mutual friendships, workplace, familial, or interpersonal relationships with other people. For example, Kemp argues that he has 422

friends but still feels lonely. It means that Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) is increasingly making people insensitive to how others feel or desire to interact.

According to Yollin, a recent study showed that “ nine out of 10 participants said that, at least once a week, friends or relatives stop paying attention to them because they’d rather check out what’s happening on their digital devices” (Yollin). It means that people are increasingly becoming withdrawn from what is happening around, which could potentially damage critical relationships. As stated earlier, digital communications are highly disruptive especially when they pop out on digital devices.

In the same study, Yollin argues that 89% of respondents reported that their relationships were damaged by the inappropriate use of digital devices by their partners or friends (Yollin). The findings suggest that EDI has the potential to cause rifts in relationships and eventually lead to their breakdown.

In my survey, 78% of the respondents indicated that people using digital communications used their time with other people instead of family.

According to Turk, the little devices in people’s pockets have been shown to be so psychologically powerful to the extent that they influence individuals to do or think (Turk). For this reason, individuals tend to focus so much on the messages and other interactive information displayed on their digital devices and avoid interacting directly with their peers.

Digital communication also has the potential to destroy people's emotional intelligence by making it impossible to read nonverbal cues. According to Harmon, " up to 93 percent of communication is conveyed in a tone of voice and body language, while only 7 percent is conveyed in words" (Harmon).

However, digital communication typically eliminates the possibility of conveying emotion or the feelings of the sender. The lack of an emotional tone in a message can lead to misunderstanding between the people. In the survey, 84% of the respondents indicated that digital communications can change the nature of people's communication. According to Harmon, digital communications such as e-mails and texts allow people to hide the tone of their voice, feelings, and facial expressions (Harmon).

In other words, an individual can avoid being directly involved with the feelings of others and maintain a significant distance from them. Kemp contends that when people open their computers and enter the virtual world, they are shut out of the real world. It must be understood that human beings are social animals, which signifies the importance of conveying one's emotions and feelings to strengthen the message being transmitted.

According to Harmon, one psychological effect of over-reliance on digital messaging is that it compromises one's ability " to develop the emotional intelligence skills associated with interpersonal relationships". Without face-to-face interaction, people gradually lose their ability to use the correct type of tone and style in interpersonal communications.

According to Bauerlein, digital communications reduce emotional intelligence because people do not “ read each other’s posture, hand gestures, eye movements, shifts in personal space and other nonverbal and expressive behaviors” (Bauerlein). This has led to the increasing disengagement in the way people to interact and the inability to understand the nonverbal cues of others.

Besides, over reliance on digital technology for communication has increased the cases of cyberbullying and on-line harassment. Cyber bullying refers to the deliberate use of digital media to communicate frequently false, hostile, or embarrassing information regarding another individual. It must be understood that cyber bullying is a risk that affects most teenagers and typically occurs in peer-to-peer networking. Both cyber bullying and on-line harassment have the potential to cause profound psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, severe isolation, and suicidal tendencies.

However, cyber bullying and on-line harassment are mostly different although the two terms are often used in place of one another. In this regard, cyber bullying is more common compared to on-line harassment. Cyber bullying and on-line harassment can lower the self-esteem of the victims involved even in their off-line lives.

When this happens, even their interpersonal relationships off-line are adversely affected. According to Turk, individuals need to develop a sense of self-awareness in their interactions with technology and selves. However, individuals affected by instances of cyber bullying or on-line harassment

frequently fail this test and succumb to the negative messages thrown at them.

Moreover, digital communications have increasingly caused privacy concerns and the reality of leaving digital footprints. The primary risks facing people of all age groups in their on-line interactions include lack of privacy, sharing excessive information, improper use of technology, and posting false information regarding their lives. While using different websites, individuals typically leave evidence directing one to the sites, which have been visited recently.

Also, the biggest threat of utilizing digital communication is related to the digital footprints left and their effects on future reputations. In most instances, messages posted on-line remain on-line unless an individual employs other means of pulling such messages down. Among young people, their poorly considered and rash posting of messages on-line may put at risk future college acceptance and jobs.

The lack of privacy regarding one's life and thoughts may expose one instance of cyber bullying discussed in the previous section. Besides, the lack of privacy may increase one's vulnerability to invasive market adverts and on-line fraud. Additionally, increasing evidence has emerged that digital communications have increasingly caused adverse behaviors such as sexting and Facebook depression. Sexting involves the sharing of sexually explicit photographs and messages via digital devices such as cell phones and

computers. When such messages or images are shared, they go viral in a short time through Internet based digital platforms.

However, despite the numerous adverse effects of digital communications, some scholars have highlighted their potential benefits to human life. One of the potential benefits of digital communication is the possibility of enhancing the social action and political engagement through on-line platforms.

According to Wyn, Cuervo, Woodman and Stokes, evidence exists, which shows that on-line interaction can speed up people's ability to enhance political engagement and social action on issues that affect them at a particular time (Wyn et al. 4). In this way, people improve their sense of belonging, overcome the feelings of powerlessness through widespread social support, and allow them to transform individualized action into collective action with increased social capital.

According to Wyn, Cuervo, Woodman and Stokes, digital communications are critical in the community and social action because they are " immediate, interactive, and international"(Wyn et al. 30). In other words, individuals can quickly transmit the intended message to millions of people with the click of the mouse. The messages are then shared and re-shared on other digital platforms thus exposing the social issue to the local and international community.

Lastly, digital communications can also improve socialization and communication among different people. Social media sites have been shown to enable teenagers to accomplish numerous tasks on-line, which are vital to

them off-line. For example, they can stay connected to friends and family, exchange ideas, share pictures and videos, and make new friends.

In this way, individuals can feel connected with other people who are far away or unavailable because of other factors. Moreover, Wyn, Cuervo, Woodman and Stokes argue that the anonymity provided by the digital communications can help individuals unable to establish face-to-face relationships to express themselves easily and improve their confidence in social connections. Such people can establish long and lasting relationships through social media or other media (Wyn et al. 23).

In conclusion, it is evident that different scholars have advanced various opinions regarding the effects of digital communications on human interactions. In this regard, most of the effects have been shown to adversely affect interpersonal relationships. For example, digital communications can disrupt communication in families and lead to the breakdown. Besides, may lose their emotional intelligence or be exposed to cyber bullying instances.

However, some scholars argue that digital communication is beneficial and may improve socialization and ability to engage in political and social action. In this regard, each of the social network users should be careful with the replacement of the real life with the digital one. Despite the fact the world is in the era of the informational society, there still are emotions and feelings, which cannot be seen through the liquid crystal screen.

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