Chapter 13

Internet Addiction and Fear of Missing Out: The Gender Difference of Tertiary Students in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Smartphones and the evolution of new ICTs have enabled people, especially the youth, to stay connected to their social and professional network. This has resulted in compulsive checking for status updates and messages, for fear of missing out (FOMO). FOMO, which is a form of internet addiction, has its downside among students. This chapter is an empirical study that seeks to examine the disruptive effect of FOMO on the academic performance of students. Four hundred twenty-two university students were surveyed on their use of internet (social media services) and its result on their academic activities. A Likert scale was used to measure their use of the internet (social media) and its relationship with their academic performance. Chi-square and factor analysis were conducted. The results showed that continuous use of internet had negative effect on students’ academic performance and it affected the female students more than their male counterparts. Tertiary institutions should intensify guidance and counselling sessions for students in order to mitigate the negative effects of use of internet on students.

INTRODUCTION

The invention of Internet has brought various advantages and opportunities in almost every field. The Internet and social media have now taken major aspect of our daily life, especially in the area of education. The primary aim of Internet is sharing of information which is an important aspect in the educational sector. In recent times, people do not have to search for library and in books to get information, which was time-consuming and stressful. With a wealth of and abundant electronic library online, a click of the mouse button will download massive information and literature that will overwhelm you.

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Several studies have been done to show the positive effect or impact of Internet (social media) on students. Barhoumi (2015), in a study, showed how the use of WhatsApp, a social media platform helped students to learn and interact in various contexts and thereby contributing to their academic work. In addition, some studies have also shown that the appropriate use of social media networks (Internet) can encourage students by providing an engaging forum through which they can explore their reflective practice and issues of professionalism and privacy (Brown, 2010). Other benefits such as online examination, teaching and learning materials (e-learning), research and many more provide endless opportunities to students and the academia in general. Apart from the use of Internet in education, students also benefit in using the Internet to shop online for everything they want without going outside to stores and super markets, play games and other entertainment to reduce academic pressure, look for jobs, conduct financial activities, check for bus schedules and book bus or transportation tickets online.

Notwithstanding these great advantages of the Internet to students, there are those who think that the Internet is rather disruptive and has the potential to cause harm in the very long term to the academic performance of students by making them addictive and dependent (Andreassen, Pallesen, & Griffiths, 2017; Alkhalaf, 2018). Some researchers have even identified Internet addiction (IA) as a significant public health threat and have recommended that Internet addiction is included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) as a mental illness (Al-Hadrawi, 2018, Shao, Zheng, & Wang, 2018).

Although, Social media addiction is now observed to a greater extent among the younger generation, especially teenagers and the early adults in secondary and tertiary institutions, it is still not considered as a mental disorder that impairs students’ academic performance (Al-Menayes, 2015). While, special clinics have been set up in most countries to deal with substance abuse, none have been established to deal with Internet addiction or abuse in African countries in general and Ghana in particular. For example, in South Korea, home of the world’s most connected population, have since 2015 set up digital detox camps to treat thousands of children (Kim Se-jeong, 2015). It was not until 2016 that the first Internet addiction clinic in Africa was set up in Algeria to deal with the menace when the government saw it as a national problem (Djamila, 2016). To date, there is no known of such dedicated unit set up to deal with Internet addiction in Ghana.

Fear of missing out (FOMO), formerly known as “keeping up with the Joneses” is a psychological dependence on being online which could result in anxiety when one feels disconnected, thereby leading to a fear of missing out (Jonathan, 1998; Song, Larose, Eastin, & Lin, 2004). The word addiction is not only confined to substance abuse as “when talking about addiction, people usually think about tobacco, drugs, or alcohol dependency but also with the use of the Internet, especially the ‘magic blue’ of Facebook.” For some users, going online is as important in their life as breathing, eating, or sleeping thus literally putting their life at risk (Djamila, 2016). It has been magnified by the new technology of Internet and of Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram etc.

Internet addiction is considered as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent (Przybylski, 2013). This social anxiety is characterized by a desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing (Walter, 2012). FOMO is also considered as a fear of regret which may lead to a compulsive concern that one might miss an opportunity for social interaction, a novel experience, a profitable investment, or other satisfying events (Wortham, 2011). As a consequence, FOMO is perceived to have negative influences on people’s psychological health and well-being because it could contribute to people’s negative mood and depressed feelings and by extension lead to lack of concentration or focus on studies (by students).