



Are We Really More Connected?

Usage of the internet, social media and electronic communication devices are amongst the most common activities of today's world. We spend an enormous amount of time staring at personal devices, shuffling through social media and other applications, to connect and access information. The technology boom has made the world a smaller place. We are more connected, but more lonely and overloaded with unnecessary information. It has linked us to all the people around the world, but disconnected us from those with us and right next to us.

With rampant urbanization and migration, many are living an isolated existence with lack of a confidante and limited support network. Commuting has become increasingly difficult, therefore technology aided interaction

is inevitable. Perhaps it offers a respite for many who are overworked, with little or no time for engagement, meaningful activity, relaxation or fitness programmes.

Virtual Vs Real

Social media is meant to be a communication enhancer not a substitute for human interaction, which is what it seems to have become. Besides, we have surrendered our privacy and tranquillity to be a part of a larger illusionary world. Someone has rightly quoted, "social media creates an illusion of connectivity."

It seems people are living more in the virtual rather than real world. We seek information from the internet via our

devices much more than one-to-one interaction and discussion. Arguably, smartphones have turned into a menace. They are a constant source of distraction, especially when 'notification' is not switched off. Occasional use is turning into, heavy compulsive checking. So maybe, smartphones are becoming smarter than their masters!

Information Chaos And Clutter

Although social media allows rapid dissemination of information, it is also now a potent source of misinformation and rumours. Many believe whatever they receive on social media, and compulsively forward or share without authenticating it. Consequently we see information, chaos and clutter.

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We always reach out for the phone, the moment we wake up and it is also the last thing that we see before we sleep. Most are oblivious to their compulsive automated behaviour of checking updates on several social media apps, be it in a social setting or even in the middle of a conversation. Only some are aware how much it rules their lives and even fewer realise that it's getting out of control. T.S Elliot has aptly quoted - "distracted from distraction by distraction."

The 'Show And Tell' Culture

So one pervasive question that haunts us all is, does technology aided interactions do more harm than good? A study revealed that an average of one person per five, felt depressed due to social media usage. The constant updates and the compulsion to keep up takes a toll. Equally the 'show and tell' culture is feeding the narcissistic desire. Knowing everything about everyone is stressful. Also, the other potential problems like cyber bullying, 'Facebook depression,' 'sexting,' and exposure to inappropriate content is a consequence of this addiction. Our younger text/ message savvy generation are rapidly losing the ability to communicate, if not through their smartphones.

One-To-One Connection

Social interaction is all about relating with the other. Our personality, sense of 'self' and emotional resilience is consequence of healthy consistent



attachment. For example, stable upbringing and relations enables development of coping resource and skills to form and maintain relationships. Whereas fragmented formative years and relations can make one fragile and isolative, thereby less able to deal with an inevitably stressful life. The ability to relate, is what makes us more human. And this must come from the real world one-to-one connection.

Dealing With This Growing Menace

- ◆ Families must educate and encourage kids about healthy use of social media and monitor them for potential problems and exposure to inappropriate content.
- ◆ Be a role model, especially for your kids, by reducing time spent on devices while they are around.
- ◆ Parent who excessively use devices are first to complain about their kids doing the same. Remember, 'monkey see monkey do!'
- ◆ Reduce the number of social media apps and refrain from accessing them when in a social setting.
- ◆ Come out of groups on WhatsApp/ FB once the purpose of the group is served.

- ◆ Avoid mindless updating / forwarding /sharing and discourage others whenever possible.
- ◆ Choose real world interaction such as a meeting or calling someone over, above messaging/texting.
- ◆ Be progressive by having a 'digital-free dinner' creating an opportunity for quality time together. Perhaps consider 'digital-free' homes, where you have automation but not distracting technology in family spaces.

Go Gadget-Free

Sometime we just need to switch off! So consider unplugging, much in line with UK's largest digital detox movement - National Unplugging Day (held on Sunday 26th June 2016). A gadget-free day meant for fun and celebration with loved ones and re-connecting in the real world as compared to the virtual space. A recommendation that we do this once a month if not every week.

Above all, reconnect with nature and choose real world activities as the benefits are all yours to reap. A social media update stated, "I used to have a life, now I have Facebook." The time is ripe to take charge, declutter and reclaim your lives.

