EPRA
Vienna University Workshop

Evidence Based Regulation - Youth Engagement in the Digital Environment

Dr. Anja Stevic
Advertising and Media Psychology Research Group
Department of Communication
University of Vienna

Research and Policy Partnership
EPRA & Comms Policy Collaborative
University of Vienna

24 November 2021
Relevance

The most used applications on smartphones are social media networking sites, 89% of reported usage rates.

Sources: Gfk, 2018; JIM-Studie, 2020; Global Web Index, 2019; Tenzer, 2020
Overview of presentation and studies

- **Study 1. Nighttime smartphone use among children and early adolescents**
  - 29% of teens keep their smartphone in bed
  - 36% check their smartphone at least once at night (Common Sense Media, 2019)
  - Sleep deficit or frequent sleep interruptions could result in negative outcomes
    - difficulties with **sustained attention** during the day (Dahl, 1996)
    - children’s **school performance** might suffer
Overview of presentation and studies

- **Study 2. Phubbing behaviors among late adolescents**
  
  - **Phubbing** → a situation when a person starts using their smartphone, while interacting with other people in real-life situations
  
  - During face-to-face interactions → almost constant **smartphone interruptions**
  
  - 85% of smartphone owners indicate using smartphones while talking to friends or family (Richter, 2018)
Overview of presentation and studies

- **Study 3. Reflective smartphone disengagement**
  - One of the projects in AdMe Research Group is developing a scale for smartphone disengagement
  - Efforts to disconnect from smartphone $\rightarrow$ attitudes and behaviors of disengagement in certain situations

Study 1: Nighttime smartphone use

- Longitudinal study with parent-child pairs
- Parents‘ reports of children‘s attentional problems
- Children‘s reports of subjective and graded school performance
Method

- **Two-wave panel survey** in Germany (four-month interval)
- **Quota-sampling** based on parents’ age and gender collected by polling institute
- **Children between 10 and 14 years** who possessed a smartphone and had used a SNS on their smartphone
- $N_{T2} = 384$ parent-child dyads
Results

Discussion

- **Children’s nighttime smartphone use** increased their **attentional problems** over time → in line with previous cross-sectional parent-reported findings
  - This result suggests that postponed and impaired sleep is harmful to children’s cognitive development after 4 months

- **Parent-reported children’s attentional problems** negatively predicted **school performance**
  - Slightly stronger effect on subjective than on achieved school performance; children’s own competence beliefs are more sensitive to parent-reports than to teacher-given grades

- **Using the smartphone at night** was related to **higher school performance**
  - One reason could be that children use smartphones at night for talking and chatting about school-related content and topics (e.g., Gikas & Grant, 2013)
Implications for regulation

- **Parents** could ensure **optimal (nighttime) smartphone use** and provide effective home learning environments for children and adolescents → having easily **accessible intervention programs** that help parents gain knowledge of how to monitor and regulate children’s smartphone use.

- **Teachers/educators** could make children aware of the negative consequences of nighttime smartphone use → intervention programs for children that help them gain **digital literacy skills** specific for online contexts should be designed and implemented through schools.
Study 2: Phubbing among adolescents

- Longitudinal study with late adolescents
- Adolescents’ reports of own and others’ smartphone use in social presence
Method

- **Two-wave panel survey** in Germany \( (N_{T2} = 294) \)
- Two-month interval
- **Adolescents between 16 and 19 years**, who possessed a **smartphone** and had used a **SNS** on their smartphone
Results

Discussion

- Adolescents might engage in **phubbing** others because they may receive **social gratification** from their online contacts instead of their face-to-face partners.

- Relatedness need satisfaction in online communication is not sufficient for friendship satisfaction over time, suggesting that face-to-face communication matters more.

- In line with the **ostracism** theory (Williams, 2009), being with friends who frequently use smartphones might be one of the reasons why adolescents feel isolated and less satisfied in their relationships.
Implications for regulation

- Raising awareness about the mobile etiquette for social situations → through digital literacy programs in schools
- Increase focus on digital well-being (Vanden Abeele, 2020) and disconnection from devices
- Positive outcomes of sharing screens and co-use of smartphones in youth and parent-child pairs (Floegel et al., 2021)
Study 3: Reflective smartphone disengagement in youth

- Sample of 16 to 20 year olds

Table 1. Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M(SD)</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reflective Smartphone Disengagement</td>
<td>3.73 (0.86)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nomophobia</td>
<td>2.61 (0.98)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-.19***</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Self-reflection</td>
<td>3.59 (0.88)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>.15***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 760, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Future research outlook

- Focus on individual social media use and content → benefits and risks
- Device requires attention → regulate or decrease attention given to the social media and/or smartphones
- Research on causes and implications of disengagement processes → taking a break from device or certain applications and disconnecting intentionally, switching applications or limiting time spent on applications
Conclusion

- Understanding benefits and risks of social media and mobile devices remains one of the most important challenges and continues to be a long-term research goal.
- At times when digital technologies overtake most of individuals’ daily time, the main objective is to understand and ensure optimal use that contributes to well-being.
Thank you for your online attention!

anja.stevic@univie.ac.at
References


