

Young Adults' Media Addiction Coping Strategies: A Longitudinal Study

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Abstract : Changes in the current media environment are transforming peoples' everyday media consumption patterns all over the world. Digital media have become a natural, almost unavoidable, part of everyday lives of humans. While this has led to many positive consequences, there is also a growing concern for harmful effects. This paper contributes to knowledge about "the dark side" of media use by considering the topic of media addiction and subsequent coping strategies among young adults. The paper draws on a longitudinal media diary study conducted among young university students between the years 2013 and 2021. A total of 1029 diaries have been collected (approximately 100 each year), aiming at capturing the students' everyday media behavior. In this paper, reflective narratives in the diaries have been analyzed, aiming at answering the following questions: Which of their own media behaviors do the students perceive as particularly destructive, addictive or problematic? How do they cope with such behaviors? Results from the study indicate a noticeable increase in reflections on addictive media behavior over the years. For example, compared to earlier years, the amount of such reflections significantly started to increase in the diaries in 2016 and 2017, and this trend has continued ever since. Furthermore, the nature of these reflections has changed, displaying a growing concern for one's own excessive media use and general wellbeing. Media addiction seems particularly difficult to cope with as digital media is literally everywhere and media use in general is described as consistent and habitual, in terms of regularly repeated routines that are fragmented but performed continuously and often unintentionally throughout the day. Reflections on "the dark side" of everyday media consumption become particularly prominent in times of the Covid -19 pandemic. However, this trend was noticeable well before the pandemic started. The study also identifies a countertrend regarding reflections on how to deal and cope with problematic media behavioral patterns. This countertrend portrays a general development of increased awareness of factors that may trigger compulsive behavior and how to avoid or handle such trigger points. The countertrend is particularly evident in recent years, despite the ongoing pandemic and subsequent increases in time spent using media. Addictive media behavior may lead to severe consequences for students' learning processes and general well-being. Increased awareness of this growing trend and coping strategies are needed on an individual as well as a broader educational level.

Keywords : coping strategies, media addiction, media behavior, well-being

Conference Title : ICMME 2021 : International Conference on Mass Media and Education

Conference Location : Los Angeles, United States

Conference Dates : October 28-29, 2021