

User-Unfriendly Technology: A Phenomenological Study of Undesirable Encounters with Information and Communications Technology

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Ubiquity of information and communications technology (ICT) is a fact. What was perceived decades ago as a technological breakthrough, the ICTs we know of today are common and pervasive not only in the workplace, but also in our homes and in the very fabric of our social and personal lives. ICTs today appear in many forms such as e-mail, smart phones, video conferencing tools, and social network sites, and are far more powerful and sophisticated than those used decades ago, extending human capabilities farther than before. Connecting with friends and family is no longer restricted by time nor space. Doing work and conducting business today would be unthinkable without them. Indeed, the *raison d'être* of ICTs is to make human tasks simpler and easier to perform, and to better human lives. *Or, do they really?*

In this TREO talk, we share results of our phenomenological study, which describes the essence of people's experiences that result from their undesirable encounters associated with the use of ICT. An undesirable encounter may pertain to any unintended or unexpected consequences of a person's use of ICT, which brought about difficulty or challenges to the individual, negative, distressful emotions, or an unwanted social relational outcome.

The purpose of the study is to provide the audience an increased understanding of these negative experiences with technology, the different reactions that users exhibit when an undesirable circumstance with technology has occurred, and the coping mechanisms and back-up plans that users devise in order to handle successfully similar situations in the future. Following Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological research approach, we share details about four concepts, which are based on themes that emerged in our study:

1. *User Immediate Responses*. This concept consolidates the immediate reactions and emotions that individuals felt when encountering an undesirable experience with technology.
2. *Impact to Lives*. This concept consolidates consequences to individuals after the undesirable encounter has taken place.
3. *Coping Mechanisms*. This concept consolidates coping mechanisms that individuals devise to move forward with their lives after the undesirable encounter.
4. *Lessons Learned*. This concept consolidates lessons learned and back-up plans in case similar undesirable incidents with technology manifest in the future.

By mindfully considering potential undesirable impacts of ICT-use to people's lives, we hope this research sheds better light on the extent and limits of ICT capabilities, complex human reactions, and designing better technology solutions towards increasing the quality of people's experiences with ICT.

Reference

Moustakas, C. E. 1994. *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.