

User (Over) Attachment to Social Media

Re-framing the Policy Conversation

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Addiction, considered an attachment disorder to social media is a serious problem for iGen users, i.e. users born between 1995 and 2012. (Lichtenstein et al. 2014). A recent cross-sectional study of social media use patterns of more than 10,000 iGen users found that 36% were on social media sites for 2 to 4 hours daily, and 11% for more than 5 hours. It was also found that users who reported spending more time on social media were significantly more likely to rate their mental health as poor or fair than to report a moderate or high level (CAMH 2015). With the increasing awareness of the potentially dire consequences of addiction to social media, there have been calls to take action against its continued proliferation in our daily lives. For example, Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., proposed a ban on elements of social media platforms that he views as addictive (Mak 2019). Instead of bans on social media, we call for mild policy-based interventions (Kahan 2000) to guide appropriate social media use, protecting positive experiences, while minimizing harm. Therefore, Attachment Theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby 1991) is adopted to study the attachment of iGen to social media, identifying the individual values and feelings of attachment. Keeney's (1992) Value-focused Thinking process is used to organize these values and define iGen's attachment objectives. Kahan (2000) informs the policy development process, demonstrating how and why moderate policy-based interventions are superior to heavy-handed approaches, providing an informed foundation for the ethical use of social media to combat the predicted or unpredicted hazards of social media use and over-attachment. The following research questions guide this work: First, what underlying values facilitate iGen social media attachment? Second, what objectives guide appropriate iGen user attachment and provide a framework for policy? Lastly, what are the policy and societal implications regarding proper social media use by the iGen?

References

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