

Review Article

Reflections on Digital Addiction and its Governance

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Abstract

The fundamental reason for digital addiction is that humans seek the construction and realization of subject value in the atomized state in the digital virtual space. Digital addiction may have potential harm to human physiological evolution and may also lead to personality split between the virtual world and the real world becoming a common phenomenon. To deal with digital addiction, a global consensus and unified action should be formed.

Keywords: Digital addiction; Global governance; Human beings; Long term harm; Reason

Introduction

In the digital age, countries around the world, from the elderly to children, from men to women, are facing the harm of digital addiction. Digital addiction has become a global public issue, and become an emerging research field [1]. In March 2024, the author participated in the 3rd International Conference on Educational Innovation and Multimedia Technology held in Wuhan, China, and published an article titled "On the Governance of Digital Addiction and the Educational Government". The article focused on the harm of digital addiction to individual physical and mental health, the dilemma between the consumer and supply sides in the process of digital addiction governance, and the rationality of government intervention in private life to address human digital addiction issues. The article proposed that the government plays a role as an educator in this process, and designed the intervention path of this government role as "teaching, learning, persuading and acting". In the article 'On the Governance of Digital Addiction and the Educational Government', the main focus is on the government's assistance in helping individuals overcome digital addiction through the 'cognitive self-control' mechanism [2]. However, due to space limitations, this article does not discuss the

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profound human reasons for individual digital addiction, the long-term harm of digital addiction to humanity, and corresponding governance measures. This article aims to further discuss digital addiction and its governance from the above three aspects.

The Profound Human Reasons for Digital Addiction

The independence of human beings brought about by technological progress, the "socialization" of human beings in the Tennis sense [3], and the torrent of world historical evolution have resulted in the so-called "atomization" of human social existence. But humans, as Aristotle said in his book *The Politics*, are inherently political and social beings, and require emotional communication. But the atomization of people brought about by technology and social development hinders emotional communication, thereby threatening the subjective value of human beings.

The rapid advancement of digital technology has provided humanity with rich virtual platforms and spaces. These platforms and spaces have quickly become efficient ways and means for individuals in modern society to engage in spiritual communication between subjects and seek the realization of subject values. The digital virtual platforms and spaces represented by Elon Mask's X platform, Zhang Yiming's Tiktok, and Zuckerberg's Facebook, which are popular around the world, are all global, with users all over the world. This kind of global spiritual communication space can only match the global market economy division of labor and cooperation system, and the instrumental value of human beings and the subjective value of human beings can achieve symmetry and balance in the realization space.

In the evolution of the digital age, more and more people are releasing their subjective value in the digital virtual space during non-working hours. A large number of individuals spend more and more time wandering in the digital space, and their leisure time involuntarily enters the digital space, becoming addicted to it and unable to extricate themselves, thus falling into a state of digital addiction. Currently, digital addiction has become a social phenomenon that is difficult to fundamentally avoid in the digital age based on individual human behavioral choices. In previous history, it was technology that entered human life and became a part of it; in the digital age, humans are entering the virtual world constructed by digital technology and becoming a part of it. The fundamental reason for digital addiction is that people seek the construction and realization of subject value in the atomized state in the digital virtual space. According to the theory of American psychologist Maslow, people cannot only stay at the level of physiological and economic basic needs, but will seek the realization of spiritual values. In a sense, as digital addiction is based on human factors, it may be difficult to eradicate. What humans can do is to try their best to control its harm within the necessary range.

The Long term Harms of Digital Addiction

Potential harm to human physiological evolution

The archaeological results of human tracing have confirmed that humans around the world today evolved from simple ancient

organisms. The development of biotechnology, especially the research results of molecular anthropology, indicate that human populations around the world today originated in Africa and share a common ancestor. This confirms Darwin's theory of human origins, which states that human ancestors evolved continuously during the long process of adapting to their environment to form today's humans. Engels believed in his book "The Role of Labor in the Transition from Apes to Humans" that labor played a decisive role in the formation and survival of humanity, and it was labor that created humans. In today's era of deepening digitalization, human beings have been deeply reconstructed by digitization, including labor processes, learning processes, daily life processes, and interpersonal communication processes. This means a huge change in the human living environment, and digital addiction may become a problem that exists to varying degrees among most human members. In the long run, this will inevitably have a Darwinian impact on human physiological evolution. Preliminary research has confirmed that digital addiction is harmful to physical health [4] and has some clear pathological effects on human brain function [5]. Allowing digital addiction to spread and worsen among humans may have potential negative effects on the evolution of this advanced animal from a historical perspective. The most worrying thing is that humans in the digital virtual world often pursue fast food style cultural consumption and interpersonal communication, lack profound thinking about things, and are highly invested in their spirit and brain, even in a state of sustained tension and excitement. Their hands, eyes, cervical vertebrae, etc. are constantly in a state of fatigue, which may damage their own vitality and creativity, and become a species with gradually deteriorating physical and intellectual abilities. If humans gradually move towards low abilities after entering the virtual world they have built, it will make people who care about the future of humanity deeply worried.

Causing personality splitting between the virtual world and the real world to become a common phenomenon in humans

Previous studies have preliminarily confirmed the negative effects of digital addiction on human psychology and personality [6]. The interactive influence of the id, ego, and superego of personality described by Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud in his book "The Self and the Id" is able to construct the healthy personality of the vast majority of human members in the real world, thus also constructing the overall psychological behavioral order for human society. The digital world is a virtual world that is a reflection of the real world, but with significant differences. In the real world, humans are being exploited for their instrumental value by technology and social systems, subject to a series of mandatory rules and constraints, and even disguise or compromise themselves for survival or other competitive goals. This reflects more of the egoistic in personality. That is why the virtual world provided by digitization has such a huge appeal to humanity that more and more people of all ages are addicted to digital technology and unable to extricate themselves. Even the elderly population, who were previously trapped in the so-called digital divide, are increasingly falling into the quagmire of digital addiction [7]. Human behavior in the digital virtual world is closer to their true psychology and motivation. On the one hand, humans are more likely to unleash their true nature, wildness, and even animalistic instincts, known as the id, in the digital virtual world. On the other hand, humans may also sincerely contribute their love, sympathy, and support for justice to others in the digital virtual world, known as the superego. In the

real world, ordinary individuals may not be as brave or have the ability and opportunity to do so. The arrival of digital virtual environments and the spread of human digital addiction will strengthen the id and superego, while weakening the rational ego, which may disrupt the three components of the personality that were previously balanced in the real world. Personality split may become an increasingly common phenomenon. The widespread and severe imbalance between the id, ego, and superego can lead to a crisis of personality division for individuals. With the accelerated spread and increasing severity of digital addiction, it will also pose psychological behavioral challenges to the order of the entire human society.

Forming a Consensus and Action for Global Digital Addiction Governance

The benefits of digitization cannot be ignored, and the harm of digital addiction must also be addressed. This has become a consensus among many scholars, government agencies, and others, and some actions have been taken. But in reality, the spread of digital addiction continues. Given the long-term harm of digital addiction, a global consensus and action on digital addiction governance should be formed.

Various global, regional, or local digital platforms are the main spaces for digital addiction. These digital platforms utilize big data, cloud computing, targeted algorithms, and powerful computing power to provide a digital space that is highly attractive to users. Powerful digital platforms are the supply side cause of digital addiction. Governments of various countries, including the European Union and other intergovernmental organizations, have recognized the enormous risk of powerful digital platforms using data, algorithms, and computing power to control users and induce digital addiction, and have taken many regulatory measures. But we know that although different digital platforms have users worldwide, they still have their own countries. Considering that digital platforms in the digital era must be an important carrier of comprehensive national strength, especially culture, information, values and economic influence, governments of all countries may maintain sufficient flexibility in the supervision of digital platforms founded by their own people. In this way, there is no sufficient moral reason for strict supervision of platforms in other countries. Moreover, regulatory standards may vary among different countries, with some countries allowing them to be lax while others may be relatively strict. In addition, digitalization, as a current trend in human social development, governments around the world are also concerned that overly strict regulation may harm the ability of enterprises to innovate, and damage the development of domestic industries and international competitiveness. In short, digitization and digital addiction are common problems faced by humanity, and there are deficiencies in decentralized governance in various countries. Therefore, governments of all countries should form an international cooperation mechanism to reach a global consensus on the standards, strength, fairness, and other aspects of regulating digital platforms, and take consistent global unified actions to enhance the effectiveness of global governance of digital addiction.

Conclusion

Digital addiction is closely related to the loneliness of atomized individuals and has potential long-term harm to human evolution and personality traits. These hazards may not be significant in the short term, but they have important implications for the future of human populations. Digitization is the trend of the times, and its positive

value comes first. Countries should and will continue to promote it. But the harm of digital addiction cannot be ignored. However, the degree of attention given to the two may differ, as the achievements of digitalization can be easily confirmed, while the results of addressing digital addiction may be intangible. Human rationality should go beyond short-term effects on performance and strengthen the governance of digital addiction. In the governance of digital addiction, unified human action is needed, and governments of various countries need to play a central role and guide various social structural entities to form a joint force. The concept and action framework that we should adhere to in the governance of digital addiction is: to globally address the harm of digital addiction, but to promote the deep adoption of digitalization in various regions.

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