

Chapter 7

Virtual Happiness: ICT, FtF Communication, and Wellbeing

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines characteristics of information and communication technology (ICT) and face-to-face communication and their associations with subjective wellbeing among students. The participants were N=500 students who reported average time they spent in face-to-face (FtF) and ICT communications. They also reported dominant communication in two types of communication contexts (communication purpose and persons involved in communication) and estimated their happiness and life satisfaction. Students spent more time in FtF communication than in ICT. Those who spent more time in FtF communication with friends were happier and more satisfied with their lives. FtF communication was dominant when meeting new people, for personal talk, and for flirting, while ICT communication was dominant for casual and informative chat. Students most frequently communicated with close persons FtF. Students who use dominantly FtF communication for personal talk and with people from their private lives (i.e., parents, friends, partners) were happier and more satisfied with their lives.

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INTRODUCTION

Every significant change in communication technologies, such as the invention of the radio and the invention of television, has significantly impacted human daily lives and consequently affected the quality of human lives. In the last few decades, information and communication technology (ICT) has grown rapidly, influencing all domains of humans' lives. It has considerably changed the way people learn, work, and socialize. It has also influenced the way people deal with everyday tasks, such as shopping, receiving information, and paying bills. It has made these activities faster and easier, therefore leaving more time for leisure activities. Because ICT offers endless possibilities of entertainment, it also occupies the time that was previously spent on other activities.

Internet world statistics (2017) report that over 80% of Europeans, and over 88% of Americans use the Internet. Therefore, it is not surprising that internet usage makes a significant impact society and everyday life (Jelfs, & Richardson, 2012).

Using the Internet is found to be related to higher levels of well-being (e.g. Kavetsos, & Koutroumpis, 2011; Ford, & Ford, 2009). Penard, Poussing and Suire (2013) found that people who don't use the Internet are less satisfied in their lives than Internet users. The positive influence of Internet use was stronger for younger people and for those not satisfied with their income. Poushter (2015) studied attitudes towards the Internet among people in 32 emerging and developing nations, such as Croatia. Most of the participants considered the increasing use of the Internet to be a good influence in the realms of education, personal relationships, and the economy, but considered it to be a negative influence on morality.

Hall (2016) revealed three components of Internet use: time spent on the Internet, use of the Internet for information gathering, and use of the Internet for affective expression. Hall found that time spent on the Internet was negatively related to happiness. Information gathering was positively related to happiness. Affective expression was unrelated to happiness.

PURPOSE AND ROLE OF THE ICT COMMUNICATION

Some research suggests that during '90s the Internet was used mostly for entertainment such as surfing and playing games (Valkenburg, & Soeters, 2001). However, with the new millennium it has become increasingly used for interpersonal communication in the forms of chat, e-mails, forums, blogs, and especially social networks (Gross, 2004; Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005). Poushter (2015) found that in emerging and developing countries, the Internet is most often used for social networking and staying in touch with friends and family. Sinkkonen, Puhakka and Merilainen

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