Nomophobia

Rishi Raj Bahl
Duquesne University, USA

David DeIuliis
Duquesne University, USA

INTRODUCTION

In a society that is saturated with the use of technologies, led by the use of mobile phones, we become more and more dependent on these modern tools to communicate and connect with the world. As a result, nomophobia is perceived as a plausible fear in today's technological society. However, understanding *what* it is as a social-phobia only provides a partial perspective. This article attempts to approach nomophobia as an embodied and culturally embedded practice to shift the focus away from nomophobia itself to the cultural conditions that make it possible. It will provide an overview of the intellectual history as well as the current knowledge on nomophobia. In order to do this, literature in the field of media ecology will be reviewed and applied to elucidate the cultural changes that have led to nomophobia, as well as scholarship done on mobile phone addiction prior to the surveys done by the UK Post Office, when the term originated.

Nomophobia is the fear of being out of mobile phone contact (Evening Standard, 2008). The term was coined in 2008 in a pilot survey conducted by the United Kingdom Post Office. Nomophobia is an abbreviation for "no-mobile-phone phobia" and can be understood as a social phenomenon brought about by the dependence on mobile phones to communicate. YouGov, a UK research organization, was commissioned by the Post Office to analyze the level of anxiety experienced by mobile phone users when their devices were not with them or no longer functional. The study sampled 2,163 people who regularly used their mobile phones to communicate with family and friends, and found that nearly 53% of mobile phone users in Britain were anxious when their phone had been lost, run out of batteries, or had no network coverage. 58% of men and 47% of women suffered from this condition, while 9% experienced stress when they were turned off (*Evening Standard*, 208). The study compared stress levels induced by the average case of nomophobia to be similar with those of "wedding day jitters" and trips to the dentists. This being the first survey into mobile phone addiction makes it important to unpack these results to extend the knowledge on the topic. To do this, we will visit the intellectual history as well as the current knowledge on the topic to provide a comprehensive understanding.

INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

In order to make the shift from nomophobia itself to the cultural conditions that make it possible, understanding the intellectual history in the field of media ecology needs to be explored. The term "media ecology" can be defined as "the study of media environments, the idea that technology and techniques, modes of information and codes of communication play a leading role in human affairs (Media Ecology Association, 2014)." Therefore, theoretically, media ecology centers on the principles that technology not only profoundly influences society, but it also affects virtually all walks of life (Strate, 2004). Neil Postman (1992) first formally introduced the term in 1968, while media ecology as a theory was proposed by

Marshall McLuhan in 1964. To substantiate this theory, McLuhan argues that it is the media of the epoch (time period) that characterizes the spirit of the society by presenting four eras: Tribal Era, Literate Era, Print Era and Electronic Era. These correspond to the dominant mode of communication of the time respectively (McLuhan & Fiore, 1996). McLuhan argues that communication media acts as an extension of the human senses in each era, and communication technology is the primary cause of social change (Gencarelli, 2006).

Media ecology explores ideas and issues that have profound impacts on communication and culture. Renowned media ecologist, Neil Postman (1992), highlights some of the major areas that media ecology addresses: It looks into how medias of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value, and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival (Postman, 1970). The last 20 or so years has allowed the field of media ecology to grow rapidly with the development and implementation of numerous new medias of communication and technologies. The field takes particular interest in how technical processes are replacing human ones, discursive ones, and living ones (Carr, 2011).

If we look at nomophobia through a media ecology lens, there is much that can be extrapolated in terms of the shifts in culture that have led to a shift in the way we depend on mobile technology to communicate. For media ecology, the environment in which these changes occur is an important factor in understanding *why* they occurred in the first place. A common misunderstanding about media ecologists is that they are "anti-technology" or fear the widespread use of it. However, media ecologist are interested in making us aware of these cultural shifts so we are better equipped to function in a society where technology is implicated in every part of our lives.

Though media ecology is very applicable in today's technology filled culture, it is concerned with the various shifts, throughout history, in the ways we communicate. In other words, how cultural conditions have changed, that enabled something like nomophobia to even exist. Two of the leading scholars in the field that are interested in tracing these shifts are Marshall McLuhan (1962, 1964) and Neil Postman (1992). McLuhan is known in communication studies for a multiplicity of other reasons, but he is often noted as the father of media ecology because of his explication of the history of media in his seminal texts *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*. Communication media has penetrated the lives of almost all people on the planet, arranging people into an interconnected human community. McLuhan used the phrase "Global Village" to describe that "humans can no longer live in isolation, but rather will always be connected by continuous and instantaneous electronic media." This global village let mankind step into a new "information age" in which human communication is "growing so fast as to be in fact immeasurable (McLuhan, 1962)."

McLuhan believed that the world was transformed as a result of three inventions: the phonetic alphabet, the printing press, and the telegraph. These technological advancements and changes in the way we communicate expedited the shifts from one era to another. He split history into four periods, similar to the way Walter Ong did: tribal, literate, print, and electronic (McLuhan, 1962). Each age, other than the tribal age, represents a shift in the way we communicate as a result of a technological stimulus.

The *tribal age* describes a time of community because the ear was the dominant sense organ. It was also known as an acoustic era because the senses of hearing, taste, touch, and smell were far more developed than the ability to visualize (McLuhan, Fiore, & Agel, 1996). There were cultural reasons why this was important, most notably, that in order to hunt during this time hearing was a more valuable sense in order to be more properly aware of ones surroundings.

The *literary age* marks a time of private detachment because the eyes became a dominant sense organ. Turning sounds into visible objects radically altered the symbolic environment.

8 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/nomophobia/130188

Related Content

Factors Influencing Mobile Search Engine Users' Continuance Behavior Under the Context of Service Harm Crisis Event

Min Zhang, Guoqing Tangand Yan Zhang (2018). *International Journal of Mobile Human Computer Interaction (pp. 30-48).*

www.irma-international.org/article/factors-influencing-mobile-search-engine-users-continuance-behavior-under-the-context-of-service-harm-crisis-event/207701

Integrating Technology with the Creative Design Process

Joshua Fairchild, Scott Cassidy, Liliya Cushenberyand Samuel T. Hunter (2011). *Technology for Creativity and Innovation: Tools, Techniques and Applications (pp. 26-51).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/integrating-technology-creative-design-process/51983

The Possibility of One-Size-Fits-All in ICT4D Design: A Case Study of the Day-Labour Organisations

Christopher Chepkenand Suzane Nabwire (2015). *International Journal of Information Communication Technologies and Human Development (pp. 37-57).*

www.irma-international.org/article/the-possibility-of-one-size-fits-all-in-ict4d-design/125272

Stepping into the (Social Media) Game: Building Athlete Identity via Twitter

Jimmy Sanderson (2013). *Handbook of Research on Technoself: Identity in a Technological Society (pp. 419-438).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/stepping-into-social-media-game/70367

Leapfrogging the Digital Divide: Myth or Reality for Emerging Regions?

Kavitha Ranganathan (2011). *International Journal of Information Communication Technologies and Human Development (pp. 17-30).*

www.irma-international.org/article/leapfrogging-digital-divide/60156