

# Chapter 39

## Avoiding Adverse Consequences From Digital Addiction and Retaliatory Feedback: The Role of the Participation Continuum

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter looks at the role of the participation continuum in helping to improve relationships that have been damaged as a result of digital addiction. Digital addiction in this context refers to what happens when a person with a compulsion who is not getting that compulsion fulfilled turns to the Internet and other digital technologies in order to fill the void. The chapter is a case study of two people called Person D and Person G in order to make them anonymous. Using medical and other records, it was found that a number of different interventions using the participation continuum could have resulted in changes in the relationship in either holding it together or preventing one party from posting malicious and defamatory comments. The chapter found that a theoretical model, with algorithmic principles applied, called the transitional flow of persuasion model would be able to understand the impacts of digital addiction and provide a means to remedy it.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, relationships offline are rarely not reflected online. Whilst it was once rude to announce relationship commencements or break-ups online, now it is expected. Regardless of whether a relationship started online, it is likely it will be manifested there during it and after it. This chapter dis-

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cusses some of the problems arising from having relationships in the digital age. This includes the way that excessive use of the Internet can lead to the exclusion of giving attention to one's partner and how one may be abused by a partner after a break-up if they don't feel they had enough closure, for instance. These are called digital addiction and retaliatory feedback, respectively.

## **Conceptualising Digital Addiction**

There have been a number of terms used to describe the phenomena where people spend so much time online that it has an adverse affect on their physical, mental, and social wellbeing. One of the more established is called *Internet addiction* (Young, 1998a; Young, 1998b), which treats the Internet no differently from alcohol or nicotine, and is thus unsuitable as the Internet is an environment that gives off stimuli rather than a stimulus on its own. Indeed it has been found that Internet users are often so immersed in the environment that they lose track of those around them (Bishop, 2007b; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Turkle, 1995). Other terms have included *problematic Internet use* (Caplan, 2003; Yellowlees & Marks, 2007) and *compulsive Internet use* (DeLonga et al., 2011). However, this chapter adopts the term *digital addiction*. The essence behind this term is not that the Internet or computers are seductive or compulsive on their own, but are used as a means to form habits, such as abusing people online through Internet trolling. Therefore, the point is that people are not addicted to digital technologies, but the use of the Internet and other technologies is an alternative not only to nicotine, alcohol, and other substances, but other compulsions such as watching television. In other words, if a person was not getting their kicks from forming habits with digital technologies, they would be forming them in some other way.

## **Conceptualising Retaliatory Feedback**

Retaliatory feedback refers to the situation where if a person feels criticised by someone, whether online or offline, they will post comments and criticisms online to try to redress the balance (Malaga, 2013). For instance, a politician who claims to be a disability champion, but treats disabled people badly, could have articles written about them online which point out such a discrepancy. In this example, such a situation is free speech, as politicians should expect to be held to account for saying one thing and doing another. In some cases, however, it can result in the unfair damaging of a person's reputation, including things that are not true, or otherwise exaggerated (Bishop, 2014d).

## **BACKGROUND: THE PARTICIPATION CONTINUUM**

The participation continuum (Bishop, 2011c) provides an understanding of how users can increase engagement with online communities and transform their negative beliefs about participating into positive thoughts and increased interaction. Crucial to understanding how users change their opinions from not wanting to participate in an e-commerce site, for example, to trusting it enough to engage almost intuitively is the concept of flow. When an actor is engaged in a state of flow, their concentration is so intense that they forget about their fears and become fully immersed in what they are doing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Decision making in such a state becomes more fluid and actors respond almost without thought for the consequences of their actions. This has advantages, particularly in chat rooms, where constructive conversations can flourish and people can have a sense of self-worth and feel their contributions are

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