Motives for Smartphone Use as Predictors of Absent Presence Situations among University Students in Pakistan

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Abstract

The smartphone is becoming the most useable medium in recent history because of the 24/7 access, portability, revenues spent for the sale of this technology and the availability of multiple applications converged in this single palm top. The current study contributes to the notions of absent presence and mere presence hypothesis and a theoretical framework is proposed. The objectives are to explore the effects of the independent variables of political, business, educational, religious, communication, companionship, social interaction, passing time, escapist, relaxation, and entertainment motives for smartphone usage on the dependent variable of perceived absent presence situations among youth. The population for the study is the youth of Pakistan. By using quota sampling technique university students are selected from the four provinces of Pakistan (N=756). The online questionnaire is used for the analysis of data. Multiple regressions are applied to explain the results. The independent variables explain the variance of 45.5 percent in the dependent variable of absent presence situations which is quite respectable. The companionship and passing time motives make unique contributions to absence presence situations. The use of smartphones for finding companions and passing time are leading university students to less engagement in offline communication where they ignore the people around them. It is recommended to parents be friends with their adult children to know their preferences online. The parents will have to be media literate to be with their adult children. The students also should check their time for smartphone use and pay attention to their studies which is their prime objective. It is also suggested to replicate the model in different cultural settings with different samples for validity confirmation.

Keyword: *Motives, smartphone use, absent presence, university students.*

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Introduction

The rapid development of communication technology has affected culture globally and changed how societies socialize and communicate. This advancement is diffusing rapidly in society. The smartphone is one such technology that is expanding in the whole world. There are so many features in mobile phones and the advent of Android technology is the newest inclination in this series whose usage is growing by leaps and bounds (Kumar & Rathi, 2013).

The mobile phone era is divided into three main phases. The first phase began with the dawn of The Simon from International Business Machines (IBM) in 1993 where Blackberry was an innovative and targeted enterprise (Niccolai & Gohring 2010). The second stage was the marketing of the iPhone in 2007 by Apple for its general consumers (Querashi, 2012). At the same time, Google uncovered the Android operating system to reach the smartphone consumer market introducing new features at lower cost that enticed many customers to use it (Costello, 2012).

Smartphones have become predominant in recent years among many age groups specifically youth in Pakistan. While people of various ages find it expedient and useful but young generation has a tendency to hang on to it for the gratifications of different needs of lives. These innovations are impacting cultures, creating sub-cultures, and bringing changes in the socialization patterns of youth.

It is a fact that youth socialize with cell phones and overlook peer groups in offline settings. They also become intolerant in manners towards elders. It is therefore the objective

of the current research to explain the effects of motives for smartphone usage on the absent presence situations. These absent-presence situations are the new form of problematic culture in which the presence of the people around often goes unnoticed by smartphone users because of the interactive features of this emerging device. The research is of interest because the diverse motives and their effects on the perceived absent presence situations are studied.

Literature Review

Specified the rushing expansion of absent presence both through nomological and dialogical technologies, it is important to consider more fully the impact on cultural life. This account is pivotal, in as much as we shall find telephone technology functions in such a way as to bounce or change these tendencies in significant ways and by producing significant changes in cultural life (Paré & Sutherland, 2012).

There is a paradigm shift in the digital era where individuals above nineteen years old are switching from traditional social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to messenger Apps WhatsApp, Viber WeChat and Kakao Talk, and Snap Chat (Olson, 2013). They use the internet on their smartphone, and tablets in place of their computer and laptop. They use the internet on smartphones and interact with friends and family.

Goggin (2012) writes about the usage of cell phone culture. He explains the usage of cell phones and their link with culture: "Cell phones, mobile technologies, and wireless networks play an essential role in the everyday lives of cellphone users. A

lot of cultural activities turn around cell phones remaining in constant contact, text messaging, fashion, identity construction, music, mundane daily work routines, remote parenting, interacting with television programs, watching videos, surfing the Internet, meeting new people, dating, flirting, loving, bullying, mobile commerce, and tracing people (p.17)."

Tran (2012) explores that there is social influence on the users of smartphones. He conducted qualitative research (observation and semi-structured interviews). The results of the study show that users have a dependency on the mobile phone their behavior co-present situations and social norms. They remain occupied and this usage causes the co-present situation. He concluded that excessive use of mobile phones creates addiction and users neglect their physical surroundings, they also show improper social behavior. Thus, Users show the emergence of new social norms and create an abnormal social interaction.

Westlund, (2010) argues that the mobile phone has evolved from essentially an interpersonal communication device to a multimedia machine providing an always-on Internet connection. This article focuses on questions related to usability and the cost of using mobile as a news medium, drawing upon cross-cultural data gathered in Sweden and Japan during the fall of 2007. Although Japan and Sweden have superficially equivalent news media systems, the Japanese more favorably perceive the usefulness of accessing news on mobile than do the Swedes. However, the Japanese judge mobile news as more expensive and are less willing to pay for it. In reporting on this research, the article illustrates some of the methodological

challenges in doing cross-cultural comparisons. Many Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) had a deep impact on cultures and lifestyles in the past. What is commonly referred to as mobile phones clearly represent such an ICT. This article uses the term 'mobile device' (rather than 'mobile phone') to emphasize that mobile have developed into a technology that integrated multimedia functions. Multimedia functionality means that the mobile device can handle audio, video, graphics, text, and animation in an interactive manner. The diffusion of handsets capable of functioning as mobile multimedia devices is constantly increasing worldwide. This diffusion is a consequence of the improved technological architecture of mobile devices and the pace of replacements.

Modality can refer to the communication channel (i.e. text) and its temporal (e.g., synchronous versus asynchronous) and spatial characteristics for example the distance and the location (Chan, 2014, p.5). A smartphone is used in minutes and hours with a difference in frequency for diverse functions and multiple features (Haug et al., 2015). The smartphone has all these multimodal characteristics. Chan (2018) has researched the most common uses of smartphones for social interactions with close friends including social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp is found to be the most frequent form of communication for the 18-34 and 35-55 cohorts.

A smartphone is not only a technological device but rather has turned into an emotional digital companion because youth today keep constantly in touch with its screen thus the

human-human-relationships are turning into human-smart phone-relationships (Thulin, Vilhelmson, & Schwanen, 2019).

Smartphone merges everything, especially the phone and the internet into a single device. On the other hand, it includes text messaging, voice calling, sharing pictures, listening to music, arranging personal schedules, checking emails, and exploring social networking applications as defined by Kukulska-Hulma and Traxler (2005). A smartphone or a cellular phone may perform many of the functions of a computer. These functions include having a touchscreen interface, Internet access, and an operating system capable of running and downloading apps.

With the extensive use of digital technology, there is a social change among Pakistani youth. While doing virtual socialization how an individual is isolated from the natural environment and the gatherings are the point of problem to analyze and research in a microscopic context.

Handheld smartphone devices engage students in more dynamic ways than a laptop or tablet computer (Hingorani, Woodard, & Askar-Danesh, 2012). The smartphone is enabled by the social media applications like Facebook, and What's App and the email applications like Yahoo and Gmail which is leading to a nonstop flow of social engagement online. In fact, mobile digital media have afforded new ways of socializing in space and time with youth. The virtual groups enabled by smart phone usage are the online groups which are always-open places where youth and students can socialize not only with family at the domestic level but also with outside friends, teacher's and the class fellows and this process of virtual socialization with the help of smart phone

applications like Facebook, WhatsApp is conceptualized as the virtual socialization for the current study. Smart phone today is perceived as the most useful communication device as a mean to contact friends and families (Ahad & Anshari, 2017). Smart phones are used in different parts of the day. These uses can lead to the gratification of the contents of the smart phone like mobile applications of Facebook and WhatsApp for virtual socialization. The case under consideration is the university students in the urban city of Lahore who are digitally privileged and have access to the internet everywhere.

The significant number of undergraduate students have reported that they use apps to find academic information (Bomhold, 2013). Smart phones are found to be getting their way into our daily lives and the smart phone applications that require interaction with others, such as social media and instant messaging, have found to have a serious impact on day-to-day routines of people, "as a result, appropriation is core in incorporating smart phones in daily life routines (de Reuver et al., 2016).

The motives of smart phone usage are found to be positively related to bonding social relations among college students (Park & Lee, 2012), however, the generic factors of "caring for others;" "trend;" "communication;" "information;" "accessibility;" and "pass time" are researched by Park and Lee. Sundar and Limperos (2013) have introduced the possible new gratifications from media technology like modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability. However, smart phones are giving rise to new and distinctive gratifications. The specific dimensions

of interaction either with friends, family, class fellows and teachers are not considered by Park and Lee (2012) and Sunder and Limperson (2013). Park and Lee (2012) have used the quantitative design but in a qualitative study by Ahad and Anshari (2017) the authors have found that all the respondents in the age group of youth between the ages of 13 and 19 years have "perceived the smart phone as the most useful communication device as a mean to contact their friends and families (p.65)."

There is a divided consciousness enabled by mobile communication. Gergen in this context (2002) introduced the idea of absent presence by setting of a scene of a group of people sitting in a room together engrossed in their own individual spaces like working on computer, Walkman listening, publication reading, watching, or listening to radio or television. Presence in such and such situations among each other thus is unacknowledged. The audience may be present but simultaneously rendered absent, they are in fact erased by an absent presence. According to Gergen a world in which one is physically present but absorbed by the mediated world of elsewhere, a world of both active and vicarious relationships, within which meaning is created or sustained.

It is observed by the researcher, when an individual is busy in text messaging and attending the calls on cell phone he /she ignores the persons sitting in front of his / her and pay attention and give response to the cell phone contacts. Users become isolated from their surroundings and remain busy in the virtual world. Individuals are completely disconnected from the physical world because they have been seen interacting with their

relatives, friends, and colleagues in newer and electrifying routes. Explaining absent presence situations, Gergen (2002) argues that youth while using smartphones are detached from their natural environment and contacted with their friends or relatives in an online or digital environment. They are found physically present but mentally absent. They ignore contact with people in natural environment.

It was at the beginning of the twenty first century that the cell phone would function like a small computer, enabling access to internet and the world wide web and this rapid expansion of cell phone will increase the absent presence situations (Gergen, 2002).

In a recent experimental study the presence of cell phones did not significantly influence relational quality or empathy, nor did the meaningfulness of the conversation moderate any effects of presence on these conversation out comes (Crowley, Allred, Follon, & Volkmer, 2018). The mere presence or spending time only with the smart phone is a growing concern. The lack of clarity concerning the effects of cell phone presence on face-to-face conversations warrants additional investigations.

There is empirical evidence that increased use of smart phone is affecting the quality of face-to-face conversations in Pakistan. Family and friends are often found to be absorbed by their media i.e. computer screen or television, perhaps they welcome someone without hesitation; but sometimes there is a pause, accompanied even by a look of slight irritation; and at times the presences of people around may go unacknowledged; in this way people are present by simultaneously rendered absent;

in fact people around us are erased by an "absent presence" situations (Gergen, 2002).

During interpersonal communication if someone is using smart phone. They may ignore their friends in group communication. In a similar situation, they can even ignore the parents because something is catchier on the screen than the face-to-face talk with parents. Students in the classrooms are observed to communicate with their class fellows that they ignore the presence of teachers. Outside the classroom the same situation is observed when students are sitting with their class fellows and their class fellows sitting next to them get their attention by a waving hand in front of their face, by clapping or pinching. In this way the face-to-face conversation is compromised.

There are contradictory findings related to effects of cell phone on conversation out comes. Przybylski and Weinstein (2012) find that strangers likely to report lower levels of relational quality and empathy when cell phone is placed. However, Crowley, Allred, Follon and Volkmer (2018) explained that cell phones do not significantly influence relational quality.

Theoretical Framework

Triangulation is the idea that looking at something from multiple points of view improves accuracy (Neuman, 2014). The theoretical framework is proposed by extending theories of uses and gratifications, mere hypothesis, and absent presence.

Uses and Gratifications

Uses and gratifications approach represents an attempt to explain something of the way in which individuals use communications, among other resources in their environment, to satisfy their needs

and to achieve their goals, and to do so by simply asking them (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). For the last 50 years various lists of the motives have been submitted by people and researchers have been complied them. Why do people voluntarily expose themselves to different media. Rubin (1984) explained eight motives reported by people for Uses and Gratifications or why they watch television? These motives are passing time; companionship; escape; enjoyment; social Interaction; relaxation; information and excitement (Griffin, 2012, p.361). These motives are extended and the motives for smartphone use selected for the study are political, business, social interaction, communication, entertainment, passing time, escapist, educational, companionship, religious and relaxation.

Mere Presence Hypothesis

According to mere presence hypothesis cell phones act as an environmental distraction for conversation partners (Crowley et al., 2018). People have described the erosion of boundaries between the real and virtual as they move in and out of their lives on the screen, the digital natives or people through their early twenties are growing up with cell phones (Turkle, 2011). WhatsApp is a new extension for building these relations. Facebook and WhatsApp are now available on smart phones which increases smart phone usage. Because of this increased use of smart phones, a new kind of "look busy" culture is evolving by glancing at the screens and ignoring the people around which has given rise to absent present situation.

The Notion of Absent Presence

The absent presence situation is the act of one being physically present but at the same time absent when someone is absorbed by a mediated world of elsewhere enabled by technology (Gergen, 2002). The negative effects of cell phones are found on the relational quality (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013). It is hypothesized that smart phones are not only empowering individuals but also are the reasons for the distraction in the quality of social relationships.

The theoretical concepts of uses and gratifications, mere presence and absent presence are extended to propose a theoretical framework to explain the effects of political, business, educational, religious, communication, social interaction, entertainment, passing time, escapist, relaxation and companionship motives gratified from smartphone, on the perceived absent presence situations among university students in Pakistan.

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┌─────────────────────┐                    ┌─────────────────────┐
│   Motives for       │───────────────────▶│ Behaviour of Absent │
│  Smartphone Usage   │                    │  Present Situations │
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Figure 1: Conceptual Model for Motives as Predictors of Absent Presence Situations
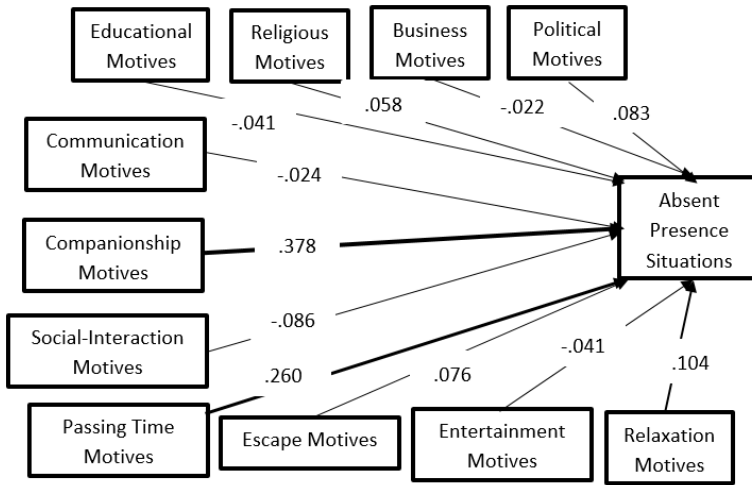
Figure 2. Motives as Predictors of Absent Presence Situations

Methodology

The study utilizes the post-positivist paradigm which is based on empirical observation and inter-subjective agreement (Baran & Davis, 2013). This paradigm uses quantitative methods for the analysis with hypotheses. The universe for the study is youth of Pakistan. The quota sampling technique is used for the selection of samples. To ensure the representation of all students of Pakistan who roughly correspond to the category of youth between the ages of 18 and 25, at first, the categories of one university from four provinces of Pakistan (e.g., Baluchistan, Khyberpakhtunkhawa, Punjab and Sindh) are established. Then students from each university are selected. The sample for the study was 756. The method used for the study is survey. The tool for the data collection is the questionnaire. The conceptualization and the operationalization of variables will be provided upon request. The responses are taken from university students through an online questionnaire consisting of 60 items index for

the main variables discussed in the theoretical framework section. The response format for all the variables except for the time for smart phone usage is the 9-point ordinal scale ranging from, "1 = strongly disagree;" "2 = disagree;" "3 = moderately disagree;" "4 = mildly disagree;" "5 = undecided;" "6 = mildly agree;" "7 = moderately agree;" "8 = agree;" and "9 = strongly agree." The Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 21 is utilized to analyze data. The Cronbach Alpha values of the continuous scales are reported. Descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentage are reported for the sample characteristics or the demographics of the students. Multiple regressions are applied to explain the best predictors and the model fit.

Results and Discussion

For checking the reliability of the scales, the sample size taken is 50 students. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of a scale should be above 0.7 (DeVellis, 2003). It is evident that the reliability of the scale ranges between 0.716 and 0.970 which are above 0.7. The respondents (N = 763) had ranged between less than 18 years of age and more than 26 years; however, the mean age of respondents was 21 years (M = 21, SD = 2.736). The respondents (N = 756) had belonged to Punjab (26%), Sindh (25%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (25%) and Baluchistan (24%). The male students (52%) are more than the female respondents (48%). Sixty nine percent of respondents belong to bachelor level of studies and 31% belong to other levels of educational studies. Many university students, with 20% belong to eighth semester, 18% belong to fourth semester, 17 % belong to second and rest of the students belong to other semesters.

First, the conditions for regression are met by taking guidelines from Pallant (2007). The correlations of all independent variables with the dependent variable of absence presence situations are near and above .3 and all the correlations are not above .7. It is therefore all variables are retained. There are no multi-collinearity issues. The tolerance values are below 10 and the variance inflation factor values are above .10. The outliers are identified from scatter plot and are removed.

Table 1: *Model for Motives as Predictors of Absent Presence Situations (N = 756)*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.674	.455	.447	7.22832	.455	56.441	11	744	.000	1.910

Predictors: (Constant), Escapist Motives, Business Motives , Political Motives , Religious Motives , Passing Time Motives , Companionship Motives , Educational Motives , Entertainment Motives , Communication Motives , Relaxation Motives , Social Interaction Motives
Dependent Variable: Absent Presence Situations

The proposed model—which includes the independent variables of political, business, educational, religious, social interaction, communication, escapist, entertainment, relaxation passing time and companionship for smartphone use—explains the variance of 45.5 percent in the dependent variable of perceived absent presence situations among university students in Pakistan.

Table 2 : *Significant Predictors of Absent Presence Situations (N = 756)*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	4.654	1.647		2.825	.005	1.420	7.887					
Political	.084	.032	.083	2.603	.009	.021	.147	.350	.095	.070	.718	1.392
Business	-.026	.052	-.022	-.508	.611	-.128	.076	.325	-.019	-.014	.399	2.505
Educational	-.048	.048	-.041	-.993	.321	-.143	.047	.280	-.036	-.027	.422	2.371
Religious	.062	.036	.058	1.730	.084	-.008	.132	.335	.063	.047	.660	1.514
Communication	-.030	.059	-.024	-.513	.608	-.145	.085	.278	-.019	-.014	.346	2.888
Companionship	.401	.038	.378	10.451	.000	.326	.477	.578	.358	.283	.559	1.787
Social Interaction	-.126	.068	-.086	-1.851	.065	-.259	.008	.321	-.068	-.050	.337	2.964
Entertainment	.065	.044	.061	1.474	.141	-.022	.152	.476	.054	.040	.427	2.341
Passing Time	.283	.043	.260	6.666	.000	.200	.367	.506	.237	.180	.481	2.080
Relaxation	.096	.040	.104	2.410	.016	.018	.175	.452	.088	.065	.391	2.558
Escapist	.073	.040	.076	1.813	.070	-.006	.151	.432	.066	.049	.415	2.408

Dependent Variable: Absent Presence Situations

The companionship, passing time and political motives for smartphone usage significantly predict the absent presence situations among university students in Pakistan. The companionship motives for smartphone usage make the most unique contribution to the dependent variable of absent presence situations. The second most unique contribution is made by the variable of passing time motives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The companionship and passing time motives for smartphone use significantly predict the absent presence situations among university students in Pakistan which means that university students who are in search for partners and use smartphone just for passing time are more likely to be absent in real life situations and face-to-face communication scenarios. It is recommended to parents that they should be friends of their university students to keep an eye on the online behavior of their children and for this they should be media literate. There is need for the media literacy workshops for the parents of university students in Pakistan. However, university students should also check their time for

smart phone usage to save themselves from drifting into online environment just for passing time. The proposed model is quite respectable and can be replicated in different cultures.

Limitations

University students are considered as youth, but the future studies should focus on the non-university students. The model can also be explained Smart Partial Least Square for more sophisticated analysis and summarizing the results.

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