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The digitally resilient student

Dr Sarah Hodge and Layla Johnson on the hidden struggles with technology use some people can experience at university.

Going to university is a transition – the opportunity for students to develop learning and often to become more independent. Technology has given students the opportunity to interact in new and exciting ways while also opening up many avenues for students to both spend time and money on; from social media to gaming and gambling, with a variety of applications and platforms to engage with. Many offline activities have now transferred to a virtual context (for example online gambling). With more financial independence and much of the University schedule being unstructured, developing good habits and resilience with technology is a particularly important skill for students.

Defining digital resilience

A recent article highlights the methodological issues around conceptualising technology use, including the concept of screen time; the role of time in an individual's technology usage and consumption (Kaye et al., 2020). But that's only one factor involved with how we use technology. For example, technology use can be active and passive, but even these terms have conceptual issues (Trifiro, & Gerson, 2019).

Experiences of video game play can be very different for players due to platform, the genre of the game and, the age rating and more (Hodge et al., 2019, 2020). How might we encapsulate the diversity of technology usage and consumption? We like to take the term 'resilience', and adapt / apply it to technology use. How does the user develop an awareness to cope with adversity and challenges from technology? How might they develop positive strategies for their technology use, whether that would be gaming, social media, or online gambling?

This resilience involves how to balance technology use with other commitments; including other virtual and technology activities (especially those which may have arisen from self-isolation and lockdown). We suggest this could be a fitting approach and terminology to use, as it relates to the psychological factors of how individuals are responding to technology as well as encompassing the diversity of the technology used. Resilience may be a particularly useful concept in a higher education setting, as previous research has suggested that higher resilience levels (from self-reported characteristics of resilience) can support the transition to university life (Rahat, & Ilhan, 2016).

HE and the impacts of technology

There is a growing concern that isolation and loneliness is a frequent part of the university experience. Recent research has suggested that loneliness for university students is increasing (e.g. Hysing et al., 2020). Hence, questions remain around poor digital resilience and using technology in ways which might relate to isolation and loneliness. Many students could feel reserved around discussing issues related to their technology use at university, especially if they feel their experiences could be met with stigma; the expectation to be more independent and be able to manage/balance studies with other commitments. A recent insight report (YGAM, 2019) explored this and found that some student's reported gaming and gambling affecting their university studies and were related to feelings of isolation. Coupled with the current circumstances relating to Covid-19 of self-isolation and lockdown, digital resilience comes to the fore, with the extra technological demands from online delivery which would have been previously a face-to-face experience. In addition to balancing work/life commitments, especially if many of those commitments involve technology.

All in all, It is important that we create these opportunities for students to voice their experiences.

Supporting digital resilience

We have used Cyberpsychology research to support resilience, including running workshops for the local community for parents and secondary school students. We outline diversity between the different forms of technology use, and how this may change, for each individual and based on factors such as age (Hodge, et al, 2019, 2020). We're encouraging balance with their technology use, particularly between using technology for learning and technology for

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