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My Virtual friend: A qualitative analysis of the attitudes and experiences of Smartphone users: Implications for Smartphone attachment

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Abstract

As mobile phones have evolved into Smartphones, they have become more than simple communication tools; transforming into personal assistants, entertainment devices and information gateways. There is a need to understand how this rapid transformation and complexity of Smartphone uses have impacted on users' relationship with their phones. This study presents a thematic analysis of three focus group discussions around attitudes and experiences of owning and using Smartphones. Themes that emerged included a bifurcation in attitudes to Smartphones as simultaneously materialistic objects, and ones which users express anthropomorphic and sentimental views about. Participant accounts reflected the evolution of Smartphones from functional communication devices, to informational and recreational tools. Participants discussed using Smartphones to alleviate boredom and that device usage had become habituated for some users. However, context determined Smartphone use with some participants using them to feel secure while away from familiar settings. Participant accounts provide rich insights into different Smartphones uses and infer numerous implications for understanding why some users develop strong psychological attachments to them. Findings also imply that users may not be attached to the device itself, but rather the affordances on offer. The implications of these findings, for example in the assessment of Smartphone addiction, are discussed.

Keywords: Smartphones, focus group, thematic analysis, attitudes, experiences, attachment.

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