

Connected, but Are We Really Connecting?

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Addiction or responsible use?

I'm thinking about social media addiction and the newest phenomenon of AI persona dependence without real world relationships.

[Yesterday](#) I talked about the five most significant people in your life, probably the five most prominent people in your life, having the most influence on who you are, and who you become. I took the next step to suggest that even virtual relationships, on-line meetings and social media connections could be one of those five significant relationships.

So this morning I was contemplating a phenomenon I read and heard about of young people falling in love with an AI generated persona, feeling completely understood and accepted and developing a dependent relationship, some cases who even wanted to marry their AI lover and others who were driven to suicide.

What times we are living in!

Virtual Relationships

I wanted to differentiate between virtual relationships with real people, in other words, real relationships taking place over social media and with communication using digital technologies versus exclusive singular exchange with an AI LLM leading to dependency traits.

As a 72 year old retiree with mobility and energy issues, I gratefully embrace the advantage that modern technology offers me to connect to people I know, even across to the other end of the globe.

My monthly zoom meetings with my four brothers and their families in Australia;

My bi-weekly meetings with colleagues in Geneva and New York;

My weekly meetings with partners even here in Vienna, where we do occasionally meet in

person, generally also once a week, and we stage on-line events, plan hybrid meetings at the UN and

My all too infrequent contact to my own children via Signal, WhatsApp, mobile phone, email and occasionally in person.

All this, from the comfort of my own home, in my own office, with my own laptop, computer or mobile phone.

Then there are the social media connections to people I know in person and others, the mentors I follow both since attending an on-line course and meeting them in person and the others whom I've discovered over YouTube, Instagram and Facebook who seemed to offer me some common sense advice.

I also access these with my phone, my computer. Now I've mentioned family and this appears to me to be the pivotal point. At our UN/NGO events, we stress the importance of family in preventing crime, the value of community in providing support structures.

Working on an international level we come to appreciate that the extent and types of these support structures are many and varied. Yes, I said working on an international level because, even after retirement from the UN, I am involved with an international NGO and my weekly and monthly meetings put me in contact with people in completely different situations than my own.

It takes a village to raise a child is an African saying. But perhaps we never really outgrow the need for that village.

We all need people around us who know us, challenge us, encourage us and sometimes tell us what we may not want to hear. We need people with different experiences, perspectives and personalities who can help us see something we cannot see for ourselves.

That is why I believe we need to be intentional about investing in real relationships with real people.

Use social media to connect. Use Zoom to overcome distance. Use AI to learn, explore ideas, ask questions and even to challenge your thinking. There is enormous value in all of this. But don't let convenience turn into isolation, or artificial understanding into a substitute for human connection.

Find real mentors. Seek out people whose experience you respect and whose character you admire. Spend time with people who are further along a path you want to explore. Exchange ideas with people who think differently from you. Build relationships with personalities who encourage your growth, challenge your assumptions and support your further development.

And don't only look for people who make you feel understood. Look for people who help you become more of who you can be.

Perhaps the question is not whether we should use social media or AI. The question is: What place do we give them in our lives?

Technology should expand our world, not shrink it.

Let's use it to reach further, learn more and connect across distances - while making sure that, at the end of the day, we still have a village of real people around us.