

Cy Bergado

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My Phone is My Only Roommate: The Links Between Mobile Video, Social Interaction,
and Depression

Recording yourself doing “A Day in The Life” TikTok on your phone versus recording a live studio production are two extremely different methods, of course, not only because of the intentions behind the respective productions, but the means of the production as well. Many distinguishable differences lie in the fact that one is a form of mobile video, while the other is a form of non-mobile video content. Additionally, producing and watching my own short film, titled “my phone is my only roommate”, helped me experience these differences firsthand. The topic of my film – the link between overconsumption of social media and depression, in this case, further complicated by the situation of living alone – explored ideas of the Uses & Gratifications theory (Omar and Dequan 2020) social cohesion (Ling 2014) and social interactions with mobile media content (Humphreys 2012). Allow me to explain further.

In this day and age, the first thing you may think of when you hear “mobile video” may be TikTok. At least it is, for me. The Uses & Gratification Theory (Omar and Dequan 2020) suggests that social media apps such as TikTok are so popular because of the gratification that creators receive when posting their videos. Specifically, these gratifications come in the forms of likes, comments, reactions, etc. These are all also instant forms of gratification. This is one way mobile video content differs from non-

mobile video content. Non-mobile video content, such as shooting a live show in a television studio, don't offer these forms of instant gratification. The same goes for other forms of non-mobile video such as watching a film in a movie theater, and projected advertisements (i.e. Times Square). In all of these instances, the creator of the content is not receiving instant, direct gratification (praise, feedback, comments, etc.) on the same platform that it is airing. When watching a film in a movie theater, you can't communicate to the director how great you think the movie is while it's airing. An argument could be made for TV shows filmed with a live studio audience, like Saturday Night Live, but even then, the "gratifications" are limited to concise cheers, laughs, and "BOO"s. These short interactions differ from the wide-ranging and less limiting interactions of social media.

Many forms of social interaction can be explored through mobile video. For one, mobile interactions with social media "center on connecting or communing with people through mobile media". (Humphreys 2012) Specific examples of this in mobile video include live-streaming, TikToks, Instagram Reels, FaceTime, and Zoom. I will say, forms such as live-streaming, TikToks, and Instagram Reels broadcast to a wide audience, with less direct interaction from those consuming the media. Consumers may comment, like, react, etc. to the content, however, they are not side-by-side interacting with the other person like in Facetime and Zoom. Instead, they connect by living vicariously through the content creator. Either way, all of these are forms of connection and interaction, albeit on different spectrums. I will elaborate on how this specifically relates to my video later on in this essay.

Social interactions in public, or the "perception that one is being perceived by

others” (Humphreys 2012), can be exemplified through public stunts, pranks, and skits intentionally arranged for the public perception. In these cases, creators will specifically act out a fake outlandish situation, say, starting a fake fight in public, in order to capture the surrounding public’s reactions, which are often humorous. These kinds of skits have been around since the beginnings of digital media (i.e. on YouTube, The Eric Andre Show), but I have noticed a current resurgence of this type of content on TikTok.

My video, a short film titled “my phone is my only roommate”, follows a girl living alone, left to the overconsumption of social media, with no other housemates to distract her and give her more meaningful interactions. It is about the overconsumption of social media causing people like me to compare themselves to the achievements of their peers, contributing to their depression. It explores themes of vicarious interaction, isolation, toxicity of social media consumption, depression and insecurity. I filmed my video entirely on my iPhone 12 and edited it on Adobe Rush. I used hand-held methods as well as had my roommate record the shots of me at the end. I also made a makeshift tripod, getting the shots of me on my bed, using my cat tree. With Adobe Rush, I added audio elements of background music from freesound.org. I also recorded voiceover using the iPhone Voice Memo app and imported those files through Rush. I also used Rush to adjust the brightness and exposure for some shots, mostly making them dark to match the depressing theme of the video. I added opening titles and credits through Rush as well. My video embodies mobility through its production, having been entirely filmed on a mobile phone and a mobile-friendly software. Having uploaded to YouTube, I imagine the consumption to be mobile because the viewers will be watching it through mobile platforms such as phones and laptops. The first viewers of the video besides

myself, my roommates, watched the video through the mobile platforms of their cell phones.

I stated earlier that my video explores the concept of mobile interactions with social media (Humphreys 2012). It does this because the protagonist is interacting with social media by allowing it to contribute to her depression and insecurity, comparing herself to the achievements of those on social media, feeling as if her achievements aren't enough. This leads into my next link: as I mentioned, my video explored the theme of vicarious interaction and toxicity of social media overconsumption. This goes hand-in-hand with the concept of mobility through social cohesion. "[...] mobile phones gave us connected presence to the members of our social circle." (Ling 2014) I explored this theme in the sense that while the intention of the people posting their achievements on social media, which the protagonist is scrolling through, is to connect and create social cohesion, overconsumption and mental illness can also contribute social media to the opposite, exemplified in my video. She connects with the social media content in the sense that she is insecurely comparing herself to it.

I also stated earlier that my video explored the Uses & Gratifications theory (Omar and Dequan 2020). The gratifications can be shown by those posting their achievements on social media – they are posting their achievements because they want the gratification, or praise, of their followers. The perception of this gratification of her peers resulted in a depressed state of my protagonist. This depression was opposed by the “hero” or “resolution” of my video, or the protagonist’s friend, Morgan, who comes in and saves her from her depression at the end. This resolution is to symbolize that despite what others are posting on social media, you have to remember that everything

isn't as it seems, and it can't stop you from living and enjoying your own life.

All in all, mobile video offers unique and distinguishable features, such as instant gratification, which I also explored in my video — and the perception of others' gratifications. There are many links between mobile video, social media, perception, interaction, connection and depression, which I learned more about first-hand through this project.

Works Cited

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