

The phenomenon of nomophobia behaviour among students: a perspective of interpersonal communication

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How to Cite This Article: Oknita, O. et al. (2023). The phenomenon of nomophobia behaviour among students: a perspective of interpersonal communication. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi*, 7(1). doi: 10.25139/jsk.v7i1.6153

Received: 02-01-2023, Revision: 01-02-2023, Acceptance: 18-03-2023, Published online: 31-03-2023

Abstract This research aims to analyse the phenomenon of nomophobia behaviour and the effectiveness of interpersonal communication and identify prevention measures among students at the State Islamic University of Lhokseumawe. This is a qualitative research study. The data collection techniques used are interviews, observation, and document study. Next, the data is processed and analysed using Miles & Huberman's analysis model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This research uses source, method, and time triangulation techniques to obtain relatively valid conclusions. The research findings indicate that the phenomenon of nomophobia behaviour among students at IAIN Lhokseumawe is characterised by (1) ignoring conversation partners (phubbing), (2) feeling anxious when without a smartphone, (3) spending more than 7-12 hours a day on their smartphone, (4) preferring to be alone or isolated, (5) prioritising buying gadgets over other things, and (6) repeatedly checking their smartphone. The effectiveness of interpersonal communication of people living with nomophobia is measured using the humanistic approach proposed by Devito, which includes (1) openness, (2) empathy, (3) positive attitude, and (4) supportive attitude. Prevention measures for overcoming nomophobia behaviour include (1) parental supervision, (2) strong individual willpower, (3) time management, and (4) engaging in positive activities or utilising personal talents. The research discovered a novel finding that nomophobia behaviour has become a new norm and that there needs to be ethics in interpersonal communication.

Kata Kunci: nomophobia behaviour; interpersonal communication; smartphone.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the foundation of human survival. Since birth, humans have been engaging in communication activities (Enke & Borchers, 2019; Susilo, 2022a; Wood, 2009). Communication existed even before the world was created, as evidenced by the Quran, a guide and knowledge source for Muslims. The essence of values in the Quran is eternal and always relevant without any change (Awalia, 2017; Rachman, 2017; Winarti, 2017). Changes may only occur in matters of interpretation regarding instrumental values and operational techniques (Lubbis & Asry, 2020).

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Humans need communication to convey their ideas, thoughts and desires to others (Meithiana Indrasari, Hapsari, & Sukesu, 2019; Mahardika & Farida, 2019; Suryana, Agustin, & Hidayat, 2019; Yuliarti & Jatimurti, 2019). Communication, according to communication scholars, is a symbolic transactional process that requires people to organise their environment by (1) building relationships among fellow humans, (2) through the exchange of information, (3) reinforcing attitudes and behaviours, (4) and to try to change attitudes and behaviours (Mulyana, 2015).

According to Everett M. Rogers, communication is transferring an idea from one person to one or more receivers to change their behaviour (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor, 2001; Berger, 2005; DeVito, 2013; Johnston & Everett, 2012). There are several forms of communication, including personal communication, which consists of intrapersonal and interpersonal communication, group communication, mass communication, and online communication. Interpersonal communication, or interpersonal communication, is the communication process that occurs between two or more people face-to-face (Afrilia & Arifina, 2020).

Alvin Toffler, in his writing "The Third Wave," divided the development of human civilisation with its technology into three parts, namely (1) the first wave, called the agricultural phase, (2) the second wave, the industrial phase, and (3) the third wave called the post-industrial phase. Furthermore, this third phase, the post-industrial phase, is the one we are currently experiencing. This third wave, the post-industrial phase, began from 1979-2000 and continues until now. One of the developments in science and communication technology is the invention of communication tools to facilitate human life in meeting their needs (Nuruddin, 2018b, p. h. 26-28).

As the development of science and communication technology progressed towards the end of the 1990s, mobile communication media such as smartphones began to emerge in society. However, not all segments of society were able to afford them. Smartphones are owned by some members of society, and only a few university students are considered middle to upper-class economically (Sobry, 2017). The sophistication of mobile technology continues to improve with the emergence of smartphones (Fatria & Christantyawati, 2018; Gikas & Grant, 2013; Youn, 2019). With more advanced capabilities ranging from higher resolution and features to computerisation, including mobile operating systems (Didik Dwi Prasetya, 2013, p. h. 1.).

Technological innovations such as smartphones have been able to change the way humans live from time to time (Baden-Fuller & Haefliger, 2013; Hauser, Tellis, & Griffin, 2006; Susilo, 2020, 2021; Susilo, Hidayat, & Marta, 2021). This change touches every aspect of human life, including the economy, politics, culture, society, religion, etc. It cannot be denied that the shifts have changed the order of human life. Every technology that emerges always brings positive and negative

impacts. For the future generation, students must be smart and able to respond to the impact of communication technology such as smartphones. However, most of them have not been able to filter it (Jaeger, Bertot, Thompson, Katz, & Decoster, 2012; Pérez-Escoda, Pedrero-Esteban, Rubio-Romero, & Jiménez-Narros, 2021). This can be seen from the fact that students spend more time holding their smartphones than doing other activities (Jamun & Ntelok, 2022).

Smartphones will always be present in everyday life, from waking up to bed. Anxiety, fear, worry, curiosity, and other disturbances if one does not look at or check their smartphone. Some people spend their time playing online games, updating their status on WhatsApp or Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, checking who has liked, commented, or read their posts, and so on (Iivari, Sharma, & Ventä-Olkkonen, 2020; Prasetya & Susilo, 2022; Susilo, 2022b). Some people only look at or check the activities of others from the updates posted by their friends. Some students are active as YouTubers, and some use smartphones to search for lecture materials (Resti & Indrawati, 2015).

Smartphones have become a primary need for a student who is supposed to prioritise learning. Nowadays, in the corridors of campuses, students are busy with their smartphones, even in groups. They are engrossed, in a position of looking down and focused. Sometimes when their friends talk to them, they do not hear or respond until a few moments later. Unfortunately, when the lecturer walks past them, they are not acknowledged because they are busy with their smartphones. (Munawaroh, 2019).

This phenomenon is not only happening on campus but also when they are at home with their parents. Similar incidents occur there as well. It is rare to see a student caring about their parents' difficulties or work. They become anxious when they forget their smartphone or lack internet data (Fadhilurrohman & Purnomo, 2020; M Indrasari, Hapsari, & Sukesu, 2019; Irnando, 2021). Therefore, it is not uncommon for students to spend several hours in cafes or coffee shops to get free internet access (Indriani, Rahayuningsih, & Sufriani, 2021).

The presence of smartphones with the applications provided inside has caused new social problems. Holding and using smartphones for daily needs is very difficult to avoid. Continuous smartphone usage has many effects, both in terms of physical and mental health. Experts suggest that currently, students and humans, in general, have been infected with smartphone addiction syndrome, known as nomophobia.

Nomophobia is an abbreviation of "no mobile phone phobia." The essence of people who have nomophobia is feeling anxious, worried, and afraid when they are far away from their smartphones. If their phone battery runs out, they feel they are missing calls and constantly check their WhatsApp messages. Sometimes, they even check their phone right after praying. Even in learning and teaching situations, students may secretly or openly check their smartphones (Tripa, 2019, p. h. 55.).

The nomophobic behaviour in communication between lecturers and students or between students is an interpersonal communication process. This means face-to-face communication occurs between two or more people (Karlina & Gautama, 2021). Based on the phenomenon mentioned above, the researcher wants to analyse the phenomenon of nomophobia in the study of interpersonal communication and the effectiveness of communication among nomophobia individuals in interpersonal communication among students at Public Islamic College (IAIN) Lhokseumawe. Additionally, the researcher wants to explore preventive measures to address nomophobic behaviour among students at IAIN Lhokseumawe.

METHODOLOGY

This type of qualitative research aims to explain a phenomenon in depth by collecting data as deeply as possible (Kriyantono, 2008, p. h. 56.). This research uses a qualitative method because the research process focuses on social issues and phenomena in society. The data produced are descriptive, verbal, and nonverbal data taken from field observations (Gonçalves, 2009; Jaggar, 2015; Neuman, 2011; Patton, 2014). Qualitative research is naturalistic, in line with society's development and the field's conditions. This research is also called a naturalistic research method because it is conducted in a natural setting, and it is also referred to as an ethnographic method because its origins are in cultural anthropology. Additionally, it is referred to as a qualitative method because the data collected and analysed are qualitative (Sugiyono, 2017, p. h. 8.). This research was conducted at the State Islamic Institute of Lhokseumawe and the research period lasted for 9 (nine) months, starting from March to November 2022.

The primary data in this research were obtained from students, lecturers, and academic staff of the State Islamic Institute of Lhokseumawe. Meanwhile, secondary data were collected from books, theories that support the research, documentation, scientific journals, websites, and other sources to complement the data obtained directly at the research location. To obtain the necessary data, the researcher obtained information from research informants. In selecting research informants, the researcher used the purposive sampling technique, a targeted sampling method (Kholil, 2006, p. h. 78.). The data collection techniques used in this research are interviews, observations, and documentation. The analysis used in the research refers to Miles and Huberman's analysis model. The analysis process is grouped into several steps, including data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing (Judistira, 1999, p. h. 121-123.). To ensure data validity in this research, the researcher used triangulation techniques. Data triangulation is the process of cross-checking data through rechecking or reviewing. There are three types of triangulation techniques: source triangulation, method triangulation, and time triangulation (Helaluddin & Wijaya, 2019, p. h. 22.).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication Technology and the Impact to Society

Science and communication technology development will undoubtedly significantly impact daily human life. These changes occur very quickly and drastically. Some of these changes are positive, while others are negative. The development is further enhanced by the existence of the internet network, which is capable of expanding communication networks. Therefore, we can access the latest information from all over the world without time and space limitations. This development has made humans increasingly in need of up-to-date information. Our awareness as a society regarding the right to access information has also increased. Information has become an integral part of us. With the emergence of the internet network, there is an unlimited time and space to obtain information (Muhammad Mufid, 2009, p. h. 124.).

The above phenomenon is in line with the theory proposed by McLuhan (1911-1980), technological determinism. This means that the invention or development of communication technology can change culture and human behaviour. Until now, almost all aspects of human life have used communication technology. Em Griffin called it, "nothing remains untouched by communication technology." According to McLuhan, for humans, the medium is considered more important than the content of the message conveyed by the medium. Therefore, humans are increasingly dominated by the technology they have created, and humans do not control communication technology, but humans are controlled by technology (Ridwan, 2016, p. h. 22-23.).

According to him, technology is determinant in shaping human beings. Therefore, technology greatly influences society or human life, which is determined by technology. Mc. Luhan believed that communication technology is the main cause of societal and cultural change. He argued that "we shape our tools, and they, in turn, shape us" (Morisson, 2014, p. h. 486-487.).

One example is using smartphones, which people cannot control, leading to nomophobia. With the advancement of communication technology, more and more people rely on media to the point where it significantly affects their lives. Media seems to drive our reasoning for how we experience the world. Electronic communication technology has made the world a global village, and any worldwide event can be quickly known. Tools or media created by humans subsequently bring about changes in behaviour in themselves (humans). Technology drives civilisation and changes in human life because of the dependence of humans on the technology itself (Mulyadi, 2020, p. h. 11.).

Nomophobia is a fear of being without one's smartphone or internet access. It is also defined as anxiety caused by the unavailability of devices such as computers or virtual communication tools. Someone is considered addicted to smartphones if they spend most of their time using smartphones, gadgets, tablets, laptops, or portable gaming

devices. This behaviour is also known as nomophobia (no mobile phobia), which means the fear of everyday activities without a smartphone or similar device (Rahayuningrum & Sary, 2019).

The emergence of nomophobia in Indonesian society has caused social life to die. Several negative impacts arise from smartphone addiction. Firstly, people tend to hallucinate too much, making them measure the real world with the virtual world. As we know, the real and virtual worlds are very different things. Secondly, smartphone addicts will decrease their social sensitivity because all problems, living needs, and so on are solved through their smartphones. This will give the impression that we do not need social conditions in the surrounding community. Thirdly, the presence of smartphones will make someone lose control of accurate information. Someone will easily send and forward unclear information that can lead to false or hoax information (Nuruddin, 2018a, p. h. 15-18.).

Human communication activities are carried out to fulfil basic needs, defend oneself, or establish one's existence. To achieve that, humans engage in communication which is then referred to as interpersonal communication. Communication occurs between students, students and lecturers, and among the academic community at IAIN Lhokseumawe, both in general and private settings. In the communication process, ignoring the interlocutor is often seen. This phenomenon of ignoring the interlocutor is now known as Phubbing. This behaviour is described as an individual who looks at their smartphone while talking to others and ignores interpersonal communication (Suharyanto & Yunus, 2020, p. h. 106.).

Since the advent of smartphone communication media, interpersonal communication often experiences disturbances or obstacles. Based on observations conducted by researchers at the IAIN Lhokseumawe campus, many students outside their respective class hours are busy with their smartphones even though they are sitting with their friends. Many are busy with their activities and ignore their friends or conversation partners. Even in a group, everyone is busy with their smartphone activities. This condition also occurs outside of class hours, where some students secretly read or respond to chat messages in the classroom, cafeteria, or other places around the campus.

Based on the interview results, the reasons for ignoring the interlocutor during communication vary due to smartphones' different uses. First, they often ignore the interlocutor because phone calls through smartphones are also considered important. It is unlikely that someone would call if it is unimportant, but if it is not urgent, it can be done by chatting. Second, being ignored or ignoring others in interpersonal communication is unavoidable and understandable. Sometimes, we must answer calls because they may be from parents, relatives, or urgent matters. Third, due to online gaming addiction. In addition to causing nomophobia, online gaming also greatly disturbs and harms interpersonal communication processes. Game players will be

focused on their smartphones and wear headsets to focus more on the game. As a result, they cannot hear what is being said and are not concerned about their surroundings. If there is communication, they communicate with other players within the game.

Nomophobia and Interpersonal Communication

Nomophobia is a modern-world fear that describes the discomfort or anxiety caused by the unavailability of smartphones, computers or other virtual communication devices. Since the World Health Organisation (WHO) officially declared coronavirus (COVID-19) as a pandemic on March 9, 2020, the government has implemented policies for higher education institutions to conduct online learning. Every student is required to have a smartphone as lectures are conducted via Zoom, and all information is delivered through WhatsApp groups. It is impossible not to have a smartphone, which can cause anxiety if it is not present, if the battery runs out, or if there is no Wi-Fi connection (Feri & Jahrir, 2020).

Based on the research, it is known that people feel anxious if they do not have their smartphones with them or cannot live without them. Smartphones have become a basic human need. From the respondents' answers, it was found that, on average, they are addicted to smartphones, which was known from the characteristics obtained by the researcher. Among these characteristics are feeling anxious if the smartphone is not with them, not being able to live a day without a smartphone, frequently checking statuses or postings at unusual times (at night, while driving, etc.), interacting more with smartphones than with other people, spending much time on social media such as Twitter, responding to Facebook statuses, posting pictures on Instagram, or sending messages rather than having face-to-face conversations.

The emergence of worries and anxieties when not with a smartphone is caused by the fact that smartphones, in addition to being a communication medium, are also used as an online gaming platform. Online games currently have an appeal and trend among teenagers and even adults. The main reason for playing online games is to fill their free time when there are no classes and to replace the role of television that is not available in dormitories. However, playing any game will always have a positive or negative impact. For IAIN Lhokseumawe students, playing online games only reduces boredom and relieves their tired minds from academic activities, such as completing several course assignments that must be completed in a short time, attending lectures from morning until evening, and so on.

In addition to being a form of entertainment, online games can also help players make new friends and become part of gaming communities. One informant says playing online games can generate income by participating in tournaments. He also mentioned that there are regulations to prevent players from becoming too absorbed in the game. Players are given a limit of 4-5 hours per day and will receive a warning

if they exceed that limit. Failure to comply with the rules will result in sanctions, such as being banned from playing for a few days.

Another informant believes smartphones, besides functioning as communication tools, are used as online business media. The anxiety and worry of always checking their smartphone are caused by the desire to know about their business orders. To fill their time, students engage in online businesses to help meet their needs. So, their smartphones are often checked, opened, and viewed for notifications.

The current phenomenon cannot deny the occurrence of a cultural shift. The presence of smartphones has created a dependency on technology, even if it is according to their needs. From interviews with informants, their daily activities now consist of waking up and immediately opening their smartphones to turn off the sound of the newly set azan and then proceeding to other activities. Daily, they can spend 7-12 hours using their smartphones. Almost every aspect of human life now uses communication technology. Humans are increasingly dominated by the technology they create. If observed, each student will spend more time with their smartphones than doing other activities. Smartphones are always brought everywhere, whether to campus, the market, the supermarket, or even before bedtime. The main reason is to check calls, WhatsApp, and social media or incoming messages.

One of the informants mentioned that owning a smartphone was initially only for learning purposes to support their studies during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the next stage, there was a shift in function to become a source of entertainment, in addition to communication and learning media. For example, using the alarm for the azan, listening to lectures on Youtube, playing murottal, accessing social media, and so on. Recently, they have been using and spending their time scrolling through Instagram and TikTok. In essence, the smartphone has become a part of their life that is inseparable from waking up until going back to sleep.

The emergence of the culture of checking smartphones has become a habit of society today. If calculated daily, it can take up to around 10 hours of their time with the smartphone. If their smartphone is left behind, they will return to retrieve it (Sudardjo & Purnamaningsih, 2003). Students also do this at IAIN Lhokseumawe. They say many of their assignments and course materials are stored on their smartphones. This creates a feeling of anxiety and worry if they do not have their smartphone with them. The anxiety arises because of their curiosity about whether there are new messages, calls, and so on. Today's students cannot resist the urge to check their smartphones because it has become a necessity and a habit.

Technology has limited social interaction in society. Even our friends next to us are busy with their smartphones. Technology seems to be an extension of the human body and senses themselves. As a result, technology makes the world seem to be in our grasp. Smartphones seem

to narrow the world down to a global village, and any events that happen worldwide can be quickly known. Technology is the driving force of civilisation and changes in human life due to people's dependence on technology. However, smartphone users are aware that excessive usage can have negative effects. Being engrossed in certain applications can cause a lack of direct communication with friends. Excessive use of smartphones and inability to control oneself can lead to someone becoming nomophobic. Ultimately, with the progress and development of communication technology, more and more people depend on their media for "life" (Kurnia, Satiadarma, & Wati, 2021).

At the beginning of the emergence of mobile phones, the technology was only used for SMS or making and receiving calls from parents or family. However, with the advancement and innovations in communication technology, mobile phones have become increasingly sophisticated. The sophistication or completeness of its features is now called a smartphone or smartphone. This is also agreed upon by one of the informants, who uses it not only as a means of communication but also to access the internet, for learning purposes, and play online games. He spends around 15 thousand rupiahs per month on his internet needs.

Based on the data from the informant, each student has different levels of dependence on their smartphone. This aligns with the media dependency theory, which states that the more someone depends on a media to fulfil their needs, the more important it becomes. Therefore, students tend to use media that provide information that meets their needs compared to other media that only provides little information about their needs or desires. On average, students use smartphones as communication, learning, and entertainment media. With average usage of smartphones above 7-12 hours/day, this harms health. Some informants mentioned that the effects of excessive smartphone use on health include eye pain, causing nearsightedness, headaches, and radiation (MB, Madhukumar, Murthy, & Bangalore-India, 2015).

Some students at IAIN Lhokseumawe prefer to be alone and comfortable with their online activities. Whether consciously or not, this is the effect of social media. The presence of smartphones has reduced direct communication with friends around them, as many activities are more interesting than just talking to friends or people around them, except when necessary or during classroom discussions. Only then can we briefly detach ourselves from holding or activating our smartphones? However, some lecturers allow and provide access to connect to Wi-Fi networks for the smooth running of learning processes. Social media is the first choice during free time or when there are no classes. Some upload photos, give comments, or even open online stores, and so on. It is not uncommon for us to prefer to stay away from crowds and focus on our smartphones.

An informant mentioned that they use their smartphone for online selling activities. This is done in their spare time without disturbing their

academic activities and processes. According to them, the results of their online selling efforts help ease the burden on both parents in meeting their academic needs. Therefore, they prefer to be alone rather than joining friends just for a gathering because time is money. They sell fruit salads, clothes, and almost all of their needs through Instagram social media.

Smartphones have become a long-distance communication medium that provides convenience for interacting from afar. For example, many students come from outside Aceh, and smartphones make it easier for them to communicate with their parents back in their hometown. To access this convenience, smartphones today must be supported by an internet connection. As a result, all users who want to connect to the internet must purchase internet credit (quota) (Nengsih, 2021).

According to the results of interviews conducted by researchers with students at IAIN Lhokseumawe, they prefer to buy internet data packages rather than other items. This indicates that smartphones and internet networks are very important for students, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic when they had to have data packages for online learning using Zoom applications. Almost all information related to the learning process is conveyed through WhatsApp groups. In addition, internet data packages are also needed to search for lecture materials and complete assignments for each course. They can use cafes that provide free Wi-Fi if they do not have data packages. If they had to choose between their wallet and smartphone, they would choose the smartphone because all their data and needs, such as mobile banking applications, are on it. The details of the characteristics can be seen in Figure 1.

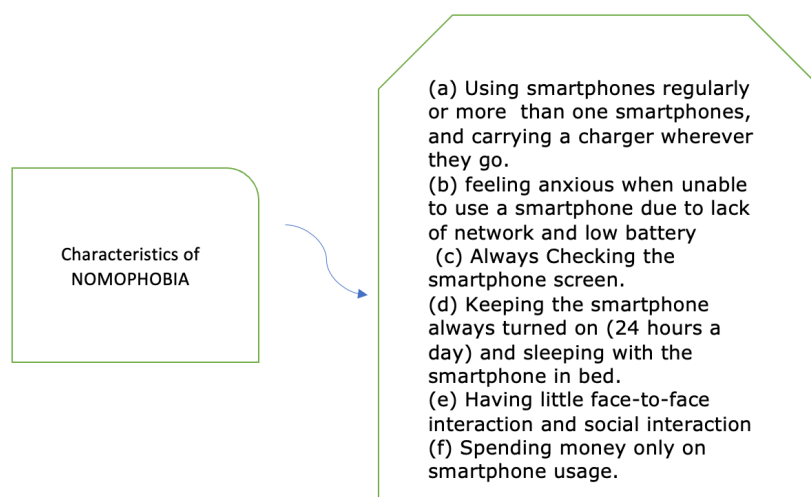


Figure 1. Characteristics of NOMOPHOBIA
Source: Author (2023)

Nomophobia behaviour is the effect of dependence on media, causing students to rely heavily on smartphones. This dependence on smartphones makes students prefer to fill their data quota or keep their phones connected to the internet. Dependence on smartphones

sometimes makes them indifferent to their surroundings. They are already addicted to media such as smartphones. Ideally, the presence of any media should provide convenience in human life rather than the opposite, where the presence of technological media has a negative impact (Hestia, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Someone is said to be addicted to smartphones if most of their time is spent using smartphones, gadgets, tablets, laptops, or portable gaming devices. This behaviour is also known as nomophobia (no mobile phobia), which means the fear of daily activities without a smartphone or similar device. The characteristics of nomophobia disorder are: (a) Using smartphones regularly and spending much time playing with them, having one or more smartphones, and always carrying a charger wherever they go. (b) Feeling anxious and nervous when thinking about losing or being unable to use a smartphone due to lack of network, low battery, and trying to avoid as many places and situations as possible where smartphone use is prohibited (such as cinemas and airports). (c) Checking the smartphone screen to see or ensure that messages or calls have been received. (d) Keeping the smartphone always turned on (24 hours a day) and sleeping with the smartphone in bed. (e) Having little face-to-face interaction and social interaction with humans cause anxiety and stress, so preferring to communicate with smartphones. (f) Spending money only on smartphone usage. As mentioned earlier, one of the symptoms or characteristics of nomophobia is minimal face-to-face interaction and socialisation or preferring to be alone with their smartphone. Since the emergence of smartphones, it has brought significant changes in human life. The shift has occurred in various fields of human life, including the economy, politics, religion, and socio-cultural aspects. These changes and influences also affect students striving to educate themselves, such as those on the IAIN Lhokseumawe campus. Communication media has always been the main reason for smartphone ownership. However, this reason has also shifted according to the increasingly sophisticated features available—furthermore, ownership of communication media.

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