The Cellphone Addiction

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# Introduction

Technological advancement in the modern world has unarguably led to many conveniences, yet the same technological advancements are responsible for a number of issues that lead us to our detriment. Cellphones are an inescapable part of modern life, yet, with growing prevalence, it left many with an inability to disengage from their devices. The added functionality offered by smartphones combined various into a single device led to an unprecedented public reliance on the technology. The essay will examine the extent of cell phone addiction currently present in society, explore its impacts and analyze the causes behind the phenomena in order to arrive at suitable solutions.

# Description of Phenomena

The growing human reliance on smartphones has led many to investigate whether increased usage could lead an individual to develop a behavioral addiction similar to that of shopping, gambling, or food addictions. In the case of cell phone addiction, the drastic increase in the functionality of these devices along with their rapid proliferation in the market has led it to become a global epidemic, with people in nearly all parts of the world exhibiting known addiction symptoms. It is not surprising to find a majority of cell phone users checking their devices for instant messages, updates, or calls even if they did not produce a notification.   
 In only a decade, the rapidly expanding functionality of mobile devices and smartphones have led it to become integral to how Individuals operate in their daily lives, essentially becoming an extension of their self. Thus, any possibility of being separated from their devices produces psychological symptoms such as irritability, or anxiety, in a manner similar to substance addictions. Consequently individuals, and in particular adolescents, are spending a substantial portion of their time not just conversing with other people but on social networking platforms such as snapchat and Instagram. Such digital platforms have become a cultural phenomenon which not only serves as pastimes for these individuals but also give the illusion of connectivity and social interaction. In reality, this engagement completely contrasts real-life socialization and networking and frequently results in individuals reporting depressive symptoms and mental health issues.

# Analysis

In general, the number of cell phone users estimated to be addicted in the U.S. range between 10 to 12% according to the Center of Technology and Internet Addiction; however, the number of Americans estimated to be misusing or overusing their devices is a staggering 90%. Self-reported addiction rates among teenagers and adolescents are nearly 50% according to a recent study[[1]](#footnote-1). Furthermore, these addicted individuals were found to have reduced performance on cognitive tasks when they experienced withdrawal symptoms after being asked to give up their phones. Additionally, physiological symptoms such as decreased cognition, increased blood pressure, and heart rate were also accompanied by feelings of anxiety, and a sense of loss when they were separated from their cell phones[[2]](#footnote-2).

Besides withdrawal symptoms, studies have also found correlations between excessive cell phone use and reduced sleep, a lack of ability to engage a task attentively, and reduced quality of social interaction[[3]](#footnote-3). In addition, younger cell phone addicts report a substantial rise in depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts, especially among young girls in whose case the rate of suicide rose by 65% in a 5-year period wherein smartphones became a household commodity everywhere. Likewise, self-reported depressive symptoms rise by 58% during the same period[[4]](#footnote-4).

A number of similar studies point towards an association between physical and mental health and cell phone addiction, however, direct causation has not been established with certainty. According to Shoukat (2019), two different sets of results have been found in a range of reviewed studies, in which one set of data directly indicates a causative relationship between psychological health and cell phone addiction. In these studies, cell phone addiction directly affects mental health and causes anxiety, anger, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Conversely, other studies indicate an indirect correlation between psychological health and cell phone use. In these studies, the excessive use of cell phones at night time contributes to insomnia which in turn leads to depressive symptoms and anxiety. Nevertheless, a relationship between an adolescent’s physical and mental health and their cell phone use is grounded on evidence, and thus its adverse effects cannot be neglected[[5]](#footnote-5).

The process by which cell phone addictions impact the brain is explained by Greenfield, who suggests that smartphones fundamentally work on a variable reinforcement schedule, operating similar to a slot machine. Each update, text, email, or any information that an individual finds pleasurable or salient triggers a reward mechanism since the receiver is unaware when that information will be received, what it will contain, and how good and pleasurable it may be[[6]](#footnote-6). Thus, the neurobiological expectation of a reward creates that addictive aspect and leads people to compulsively use their cell phones. Experts in application development point to the way smartphone applications are engineered so that they continually feed the interaction neediness of the user[[7]](#footnote-7). At times, behavioral psychologists suggest specific features to be integrated that can draw users in repeatedly.

As a consequence of triggering the reward mechanism by means of social media updates, likes, notifications, and texts, the pleasure centers of the brain are activated, which lead to a release of dopamine in the brain’s receptors. The release of dopamine creates a feel-good sensation and urges the person to continue to pursue the activity which boosts dopamine levels. A similar dopamine release is achieved through sexual intimacy or eating delicious food. It explains why cell phone users find themselves scrolling through content for extended time periods when they initially just used the phone to respond to a quick text message[[8]](#footnote-8). The dopamine loop created as a result combines with a ‘forecast error’, which keeps encouraging the user to come back to the pleasurable activity; however, engaging repeatedly in this cycle is known to adversely affect mental health[[9]](#footnote-9). It explains why it has become a social habit to scroll through one's phone in the midst of another activity and has led to increased cultural acceptance of spending substantial time on smartphones even during the course of an important social activity. However, the consequences of this cycle are similar to other classic addictions.

Despite the existence of substantial withdrawal symptoms in cases where an addicted user is unable to reach for his/her cell phone, it is still possible for that individual to withdraw from this compulsive habit through a variety of ways. Digital detoxication programs have recently seen a surge in popularity wherein experts attempt to curb the participants’ addiction to their digital devices and replace that with a more pleasurable and real-world experience. The first step involved in such programs is to resist endless browsing and setting limits for information consumption regardless of how exciting, intriguing, or alluring it is[[10]](#footnote-10). Some suggest making use of a minimalist cell phone which only provides essential functions, which can interrupt compulsive screen glancing and notification checking habits, without experiencing the pain of an immediate cease. Furthermore, experts suggest individuals to begin the process of separation one hour at a time, in order to train their eyes and brain to pay attention to other surrounding events. Practicing controlling the impulse little by little will eventually expand the digital downtime from that one hour to extended periods until the user can start feeling interested in other neglected yet important activities that he/she may have given up[[11]](#footnote-11).

# Conclusion

To conclude, cell phones have now become an integral and prominent part of our personal lives. With the implosion of smart devices that have given users the ability to stay connected and access information at any moment, has created an unprecedented cultural shift wherein people are exposed to endless information. The process has led to adverse psychological and physiological impacts and has fueled stress, anxiety, attention-deficit, and insomnia symptoms. Its ability to trigger the reward mechanism of our brains indicates the potential for excessive usage turning into an addiction. In this case, gradually cutting one's self off from the information-stimulus is necessary to achieve a digital detoxication.

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