Are You Addicted to Your Phone?

Your smartphone and all those apps were designed to grab your attention. But now even some in the tech industry say the gadgets have become too addictive.

BY JOE BUBAR

The first thing Alfredo Santos does when he wakes up each morning is check his iPhone. The rest of the day, the 16-year-old from New York City can’t seem to put the device down. He’s always plugged in, whether he’s in class, at the dinner table, or lying in bed trying to fall asleep.

“If I can feel my phone in my pocket, I just want to take it out and check it,” says Santos, a 10th grader at New York Harbor School. “It’s just tempting.”

Santos isn’t alone. Many people feel the constant itch to check an Instagram feed, view a friend’s latest Snapchat story, or play another round of Word Cookies. On average, Americans check their phones once every 12 minutes, according to a recent study by tech company Asurion.

Many psychologists, teachers, and parents have long worried that teens are spending too much time on their phones. These types of devices were designed to get you hooked. But now, even some people within the tech industry are saying that their products are too difficult to put down.

JANA Partners and the California State Teachers’ Retirement System are two of Apple’s largest investors. Together, they own about $2 billion worth of Apple stock. In January, these investors wrote an open letter to the company. They urged Apple to do more to combat what many people see as a growing health crisis among young people: phone addiction.

“The days of just throwing technology out there and washing your hands of the potential impact are over,” says Barry Rosenstein of JANA Partners.

Millions of Apps

There are millions of different apps available on Androids and iPhones, and they’re all competing for attention. After all, the more time users spend on an app, the more companies will pay to advertise on it.

“The people designing these apps are very sophisticated,” says Adam Alter, a psychology professor at

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Here are some of the ways, experts say, that apps keep you coming back for more

LIKES Social media sites like Instagram and Facebook tap into our desire for validation from our peers. It’s one reason you feel a rush every time your post gets a like or your tweet goes viral.

BOTTOMLESS Think about the ability to endlessly scroll on your Instagram and Facebook feeds, or how YouTube automatically starts the next video immediately after the one you were watching ends. Taking away stopping cues, such as a button you have to press to keep reading or watching something, is one way apps and websites keep your attention.

NOTIFICATIONS Those pesky pings, vibrations, and messages are all triggers that get you to build a habit of looking at your phone.

RANDOMNESS Many social media sites promise what psychologists call “variable rewards.” You’re never quite sure when you’re going to see an interesting photo or post, or get your next like. So you keep opening the app again and again, seeking that next rush.

Watch a video on the impact of the iPhone at UPFRONTMAGAZINE.COM
New York University and the author of the book Irresistible. “There’s a lot of them, and they’re doing everything they can to keep us engaged.”

Some companies even apply neuroscience to find ways to get users’ attention. Facebook and others have used At Neurons Inc. This Danish company’s researchers measure the electrical activity of people’s brains while they’re on an app. Through this, they’re able to see which features bring users the most joy and keep them most engaged.

Efforts like these seem to be working, perhaps too well. According to a 2016 survey by Common Sense Media, half of teens say they feel addicted to their phones. Alfredo Santos is one of them.

“If I don’t have my phone, I can’t find anything else to do,” he says. “I don’t feel comfortable with myself. I’m like, ‘What am I going to do now?’”

A Generation of Guinea Pigs?
Phone addiction isn’t listed as a recognized disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. This U.S. reference book is the standard for mental health diagnoses. However, research shows that obsessively checking your phone could have negative side effects. The more time teens spend in front of screens, the less happy they are, according to a 2018 study by Jean Twenge, a psychology professor at San Diego State University. In a 2017 study, Twenge also found that young people who use social media daily are 13 percent more likely to report high levels of depressive symptoms than those who don’t use social media daily.

And all of this technology is very new. That’s why researchers don’t yet know how it might affect the still-developing brains of teens. Says psychologist Edward Spector, “We have an entire generation of guinea pigs in an experiment.”

Some countries treat internet addiction like an addiction to gambling or drugs. A few countries in East Asia have paid special attention to the issue. Both China and South Korea view it as a public health threat. These two nations have opened hundreds of treatment centers.

In China an estimated 24 million people ages 6 to 29 are internet addicts. The country’s treatment centers have earned

HOW I UNPLUGGED
Here are some tricks three teens used

Anne Hoffman, 17
Clintonville, Pennsylvania

THE PROBLEM: “Recently, I’ve been addicted to my phone. Sleep is important to me, yet I give up an hour of it before bed in order to catch up with social media. Once I was so tired I forgot about a band performance and missed it.”

THE SOLUTION: “I keep my phone from taking over my time by creating a list of things I need to do. By keeping busy, I’m not always thinking about it!”

Jordon Mallory, 17
Indianapolis, Indiana

THE PROBLEM: “I was supposed to play in a live-stream charity video gaming event with a team, but I was so hooked on another game, I was an hour late. So there I was, trying to make an excuse as to why I was late, but I couldn’t find one.”

THE SOLUTION: “I schedule gaming time on my calendar to set boundaries. One day I stream, another day I might play alone or record for my YouTube.”

Penelope Andreolas, 15
Jericho, New York

THE PROBLEM: “Sometimes I get so caught up in social media and my phone that an hour feels like just a minute. It’s crazy how time can go by so quickly when you’re so distracted . . . and then I have no time to do the things that are my priorities.”

THE SOLUTION: “When I know I have a big test coming up or a ton of homework, I often will completely turn my phone off and keep it in a separate room.”
BREAKING THE HABIT
Here are some ways experts say you can limit your phone usage.

1. TAKE A BREATHER
One reason our phones are so addictive is that they're on us all the time. Experts say leave your phone in another room while you're doing your homework or eating dinner. And don't take it to bed with you.

2. TURN OFF PUSH NOTIFICATIONS
Apps like Twitter and Snapchat often ping you every time something happens, and that helps ensure that you're constantly checking your phone. Turn off your notifications to make it easier to stop.

3. GO GRAY
Apps use interesting shapes, colors, and designs to grab your attention. You can turn your screen to black-and-white by going to the grayscale option in your phone's settings.

the nickname “boot camps.” That's because teenagers at the facilities wear camouflage uniforms and have to perform military-style drills. Most of the boot camps completely cut teens off from internet access. They've drawn sharp criticism for what many see as overly harsh treatment.

Some less extreme treatment facilities have popped up in the U.S. One is reSTART, a retreat center in Fall City, Washington. The facility treats teens and adults who obsessively use technology. Patients detox from technology while working with counselors to discover the root issues behind their tech dependencies.

The center's CEO, Cosette Rae, says many of the patients there have dropped out of school because they're so hooked on video games or the internet. Some are even malnourished because they can't pull themselves away from their screens.

"The past couple years, we're getting more and more kids that want to come in," says Rae. "They're saying, 'Hey, I've tried to quit, I've tried to manage my use, I've tried to use in healthy ways and I can't. I can't control it at all.'"

Pressuring Facebook
There's a growing push from within the tech industry now to address these problems. In January, Tony Fadell, a former Apple executive who helped create the iPod and iPhone, tweeted that sites like Instagram and Facebook now "have a responsibility & need to start helping us track & manage our digital addictions."

But others say that burden should be on the users, not tech companies, which are trying to make their products as appealing as possible.

"We want these products to be good and engaging and interesting—that's why we use them in the first place," says Nir Eyal, the author of Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products and a frequent consultant for companies looking for ways to attract consumers.

Recently, Facebook came under fire for its new Messenger app aimed at kids under 13. A group of more than 100 child advocates, medical experts, and others called on Facebook to discontinue the app. They argued that it poses health and developmental risks for young children. So far, Facebook is standing behind the app, which it points out has built-in parental controls.

Apple, for its part, responded to the open letter. The company said that it's developing new ways for parents to increase control over their teens' devices.

Some experts think Apple should do more. They say the tech company is in the best position to address the addiction problem. Unlike app makers, Apple's business model doesn't depend on addiction. The company makes most of its money by selling expensive phones and computers. Apple also makes the platforms on which apps live. That means companies that want their apps on iPhones and iPads would have to meet Apple's requirements.

In the meantime, some teens have taken it upon themselves to cut back on their phone usage. Linda Peng, a 17-year-old from Cedar Falls, Iowa, used to procrastinate by watching YouTube videos. Hours would pass without her realizing it.

"Now, I stay away from my phone when I need to," she says. "I'll put it on airplane mode or simply put it on the other side of the room and do my homework."

With reporting by David Gelles of The New York Times; and by Julie Scharper and Bethany Radcliff.
Smartphone Society

In June 2007, Apple released the first-generation iPhone, the first cellphone with a web browser. This “smartphone”—along with the Android models that soon followed—revolutionized the way people used mobile phones. Cellphones were no longer just for calling or texting; now the devices could be used for countless online activities like shopping, streaming music and videos, job hunting, and social networking. It didn’t take long for Americans to get hooked on the new technology. As the line graph at right shows, smartphone use has skyrocketed in recent years and is expected to continue growing. And, as the bar graph suggests, young adults are leading the smartphone charge.

**ANALYZE THE GRAPHS**

1. Based on the line graph, about ___ of the U.S. population currently has a smartphone.
   - a 55 percent
   - b 60 percent
   - c 70 percent
   - d 85 percent

2. Ownership of smartphones reached about ___ of the U.S. population in the year ___.
   - a 2010
   - b 2011
   - c 2012
   - d 2013

3. Which age group has the highest percentage of smartphone ownership?
   - a 12- to 17-year-olds
   - b 18- to 29-year-olds
   - c 30- to 49-year-olds
   - d 50- to 64-year-olds

4. The percentage of smartphone ownership for ages 11 and under is about the same as it is for ages ___.
   - a 12 to 17
   - b 30 to 49
   - c 50 to 64
   - d 65 and over

5. From 2018 to 2022, the percentage of Americans owning smartphones is projected to ___.
   - a more than double
   - b increase steadily
   - c increase by about 20 percentage points
   - d fall slightly

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

6. What factors do you think affect an age group’s smartphone ownership rates? Do you think the percentage of smartphone users in each age group will change over time? Explain.

7. Do you think smartphone addiction affects all age groups? Explain.
PHOTO ANALYSIS

For use with "Are You Addicted to Your Phone?" on p. 6 of the magazine

Analyze the Photo
(Photo appears on page 8 of the magazine.)

1. Who are the people in the photo? Where was this photo taken, and what strikes you about this place?

2. How would you describe the expression of the people in the photo? What do you notice about what they're wearing?

3. Do you think these kinds of activities are effective in breaking internet and phone addiction? Why or why not? What approach would you suggest for dealing with the problem?
Be the Editor

Below is a rough draft of a section of "Are You Addicted to Your Phone?" You’ll notice that certain parts of the excerpt are underlined and numbered. In the column on the right, you’ll find choices or alternatives for each underlined part. Choose the one that makes the most sense, improves the clarity of ideas, or fixes an error in sentence structure, usage, or punctuation. In cases where you think the original version is best, select “no change.”

Phone addiction isn’t listed as a recognized disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the standard U.S. reference book for mental health diagnoses. Furthermore, research shows that obsessively checking your phone could have negative side effects. The more time teens spend in front of screens, the less happy they are. According to a 2018 study by Jean Twenge, a psychology professor at San Diego State University, in a 2017 study, Twenge also found that young people who use social media daily are 13 percent more likely to report high levels of depressive symptoms than those who don’t use social media daily.

And all of this technology is so new that researchers don’t yet know how it might affect the still-developing brains of teens. Says psychologist Edward Spector, “We have an entire generation of guinea pigs in an experiment.”

Some countries, treat internet addiction like an addiction to gambling or drugs. Both China and South Korea view it as a public health threat and have opened hundreds of treatment centers.

In China an estimated 24 million people ages 6 to 29 are internet addicts. The country’s treatment centers have earned the nickname “boot camps” because teenagers at the facilities wear camouflage uniforms and have to perform military-style drills. The boot camps, which mostly cut teens off from internet access entirely, have drawn sharp criticism for what many see as overly harsh treatment.

1. a) no change
   b) Even though
   c) However*
   d) And

2. a) no change
   b) effects*
   c) affects
   d) affect’s

3. a) no change
   b) happy they are; according to
   c) happy they are, according to*
   d) happy they are? According to

4. a) no change*
   b) 'We
   c) : "We
   d) : 'We

5. The author is considering adding additional information to this sentence. What information could be added to aid in the reader’s understanding of the paragraph?
   a) mostly those that have access to cellphones
   b) but not all countries
   c) especially those with a lot of money
   d) especially in East Asia*
# Figuratively Speaking

Authors often use figurative language to emphasize their points. Complete this organizer to analyze the figurative language in the article “Are You Addicted to Your Phone?” For each example in italics, tell whether the author employs an idiom, a metaphor, irony, or personification. Explain what each example means and how it helps the author make a point.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
<th>TYPE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE</th>
<th>MEANING/HOW IT SUPPORTS THE AUTHOR’S CLAIMS</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>4. &quot;...researchers don't yet know how it might affect the still-developing brains of teens. Says psychologist Edward Spector, 'We have an entire generation of guinea pigs in an experiment.'&quot; (p. 8)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5. &quot;Also, Apple makes the platforms on which apps live...&quot; (p. 9)</td>
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**SYNTHESIZE:** Write a paragraph describing the impact that you think figurative language can have on nonfiction texts. Use examples from this organizer to support your claims.
Short Response Questions on the Text

Directions: For the questions below, answer in complete sentences. Make sure you answer all parts of the question.

1. Why do some see young people's increasing reliance on smartphones as a health crisis?

2. What does psychologist Edward Spector mean when he says, "We have an entire generation of guinea pigs in an experiment"?

3. Why do some people argue that tech companies like Apple should do more to address the smartphone addiction problem?

4. Do you think boot-camp-style treatment centers can help young people kick smartphone addictions? Explain and support your answer using textual evidence and the PEEL method.
Are You Addicted to Your Phone?

Choose the best answer for each of the following questions. For the analysis section, refer to the article as needed.

CHECK COMPREHENSION

1. Who made news in January by writing an open letter to Apple, asking the company to do more to combat smartphone addiction?
   a) the American Academy of Pediatrics
   b) two of Apple's largest investors
   c) a group of renowned psychologists
   d) a group of teens and parents

2. Which statement about phone addiction is true, based on the article?
   a) So far, the phenomenon appears to be happening only in the United States.
   b) About half of U.S. teens say they feel addicted to their phones.
   c) Smartphone addiction is a recognized mental disorder.
   d) all of the above

3. According to the article, recent studies suggest that daily use of social media leads to
   a) compromised immune system function.
   b) increased rates of gambling addiction.
   c) an increase in symptoms of depression.
   d) elevated literacy rates.

4. On average, Americans check their phones
   a) twice a day.
   b) once every four hours.
   c) once an hour.
   d) once every 12 minutes.

ANALYZE THE TEXT

5. You can reasonably infer from the section "Millions of Apps" that neuroscience is the study of
   a) addictions.
   b) anxiety.
   c) the brain.
   d) digital technology.

6. Based on the article, you can infer that the longer you spend on an app on your phone or other digital device, the more the ___ profits financially.
   a) app developer
   b) device maker
   c) both a and b
   d) neither a nor b

7. In the article, Edward Spector says, "We have an entire generation of guinea pigs in an experiment." His tone can best be described as
   a) curious.
   b) concerned.
   c) excited.
   d) enraged.

8. Based on the article, which of these would the group JANA Partners be most likely to argue for?
   a) the marketing of Facebook's new Messenger app to kids as young as 8
   b) shutting down China's Internet-addiction boot camps
   c) Apple implementing greater parental controls on iPhones
   d) the elimination of most smartphone parental controls

IN-DEPTH QUESTIONS Please use the other side of this paper for your responses.


10. Based on what you've read, do you think cellphones should be allowed in high school classrooms? What rules, if any, should govern their use in the classroom?
Quiz Questions #9 & #10 for "Are You Addicted to Your Phone?"

Directions: For the questions below, answer in complete sentences. Make sure you answer all parts of the question(s). Your responses should be at least five sentences.


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