

Use of digital technology can have negative effects on mental and physical health

January 27 2017



Credit: Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels

Researchers have found that our increasing thirst for digital technology can have negative effects on our mental and physical health, neurological development and personal relationships.

Moby music lovers might be in quandary about what to make of his 'These Systems Are Failing' album and the 'Are You Lost In The World Like Me' video but there is growing evidence that we are becoming digitally addicted with our battery life rapidly suffering.

Researchers at the University of Derby in the United Kingdom examined 256 smartphone users to establish their personality traits. The results published in the 'International Journal of Cyber Behaviour, Psychology and Learning', showed that 13 percent of participants in the study were addicted, with the average user spending 3.6 hours per day on devices such as smartphone, often causing severe distraction from relationships and 'real life'. Social networking sites were the most popularly used apps (87 percent), followed by instant messaging apps (52 percent) and then news apps (51 percent).

Everywhere we go we seem to be increasingly glued to our 'phablets', [social networking sites](#) or 'iPhone Scrabbling' games and cannot resist the lure of being digitally active around-the-clock. This almost universal access to technology, starting at a young age, is now transforming our societies, not to mention our pavements and even toilets.

You have probably seen one (or are one) but 'smombies' (a person walking whilst simultaneously using a smartphone) are such an increasing social phenomenon that a mobile lane for 'smombies' in Chongqing, China has now been created. Elsewhere, Japan has introduced interactive toilet paper for smartphones at its Narita International Airport to allow smartphone users to give their phone screens a germ-busting polish whilst using the lavatory.

New York psychotherapist Nancy Colier in her 'The Power of Off' book states that 'many people are disconnected from what really matters, from what makes us feel nourished and grounded as human beings.' She goes on to say that 'Our presence, our full attention is the most important

thing we can give each other. Digital communications don't result in deeper connections, in feeling loved and supported.'

To hammer home this point, researchers at the University of Maryland reported in their 2010 'The World Unplugged Project,' that a clear majority of students in the 10 countries surveyed experienced distress when they tried to go without their devices for 24 hours, and often preferred to go without moments of intimacy with their partners rather than leave their smartphones.

With this rising addiction being met with new innovative and personalised gadgets on the market place, government regulatory agencies are now starting to raise concerns on the safety of using such applications.

Devices such as the smartphone provide us with unparalleled access and discoveries but studies such as the one conducted by the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's (RPI) Lighting Research Center (LRC) demonstrate that there are costs involved, with smartphones potentially seriously affecting sleep cycles, and some people becoming too psychologically attached and thus suffering from anxiety separation.

So while Moby's take on systems that were supposed to serve us but instead are killing us might still seem a bit extreme at present, if we continue to ignore the growing number of health concerns, our digital addiction will soon need swift medical advice.

'People need to know the potential addictive properties of new technologies,' said co-author Dr Zaheer Hussain, from the University of Derby's psychology department.

Your medical advice is to keep things in moderation - 'Il Dolce Far Niente' (The sweetness of doing nothing), so you can reboot and

essentially remain human.

Provided by CORDIS

Citation: Use of digital technology can have negative effects on mental and physical health (2017, January 27) retrieved 23 April 2024 from

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