

WHO BETRAYED ANNE FRANK? | MODERN-DAY SLAVERY

MARCH 12, 2018 • \$5.15
THE NEWSMAGAZINE FOR TEENS

The New York Times®

upfront

www.upfrontmagazine.com

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. p. 6



ISSN # 15251292 VOL. # 150 No. 0

 SCHOLASTIC



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, 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 is far from alone in succumbing to 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 the tech company Asurion.

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

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

"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 them.

"The people designing these apps are very sophisticated," says Adam Alter, a psychology professor at New York University and the author of the book *Irresistible*. "There's a



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

MARCH 12, 2018 7

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. At Neurons Inc., a Danish company that Facebook and others have used, researchers measure the electrical activity of people's brains while they're on an app to see which features bring them 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*, the standard U.S. reference book 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



Boot camps, like this one in China, use military-style drills to break teens' tech addictions.

It's not yet clear how phone use affects teens' developing brains.

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, especially in East Asia, 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

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!"



Jordan 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."

KIM KYUNG HOON/REUTERS (BOOT CAMP); PHATTANUN/R/Shutterstock.com (BLUE BACKGROUND); TEEN PHOTOS COURTESY OF FAMILIES

BREAKING THE HABIT

Here are some ways experts say you can limit your phone usage



1. TAKE A BREATH

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” 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.

Some less extreme treatment facilities have popped up in the U.S. One is reSTART, a retreat center in Fall City, Washington, for 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 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, saying 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, saying 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; it makes most of its money by selling expensive phones and computers. Also, Apple makes the platforms on which apps live, so 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.

Phone Usage BY THE NUMBERS

**4 hours,
38 minutes**

THE AVERAGE
teen's smartphone use
per day.

55

AVERAGE number
of texts teens send
per day.

50%

PERCENTAGE of teens
who feel addicted to
their phones.

SOURCE: COMMON SENSE MEDIA