

ONLINE ADDICTION

Asking Yourself Questions



ECHOES BY
ASRAR
CHOWDHURY

Marking yourself on a scale 0 to 5, answer the following questions.

Q1: How often do you find yourself staying online longer than planned?
 Q2: How often do others complain that you stay online too long?
 Q3: How often do you check email or other inboxes before something else you need to do?
 Q4: How often do you not sleep because of late night logins?
 Q5: How often do you find yourself saying "just a few more minutes" when online?

0: Not applicable; 1: Rarely; 2: Occasionally; 3: Frequently; 4: Often; 5: Always

In January 2010, Steve Jobs unveiled Apple's first iPad. For more than one hour, Jobs tried to argue that everybody should own an iPad. Later that year, in an interview, Jobs confessed to the *New York Times* that at home, his kids were limited to the time they can use technology. Jobs wasn't a loner among tech giants. Evan Williams, co-founder of Twitter, made his two sons read books and denied them access to an iPad. Chris Anderson, former editor of *Wired*, ensured none of his children could use screens of any kind in their bedroom. Tech giants are aware of online addiction much more than many of us.

All online platforms have three things in common. First, they need a device to connect: a mobile, pad, e-reader, pc or laptop. Second, the content they show is endless. Third, anonymous interaction.

THE DEVICE

Continuous use of a device can lead to sleep deprivation. We're aware of the radiation a device emits. Are we aware of the light that devices emit? Majority of studies report that most people use a device that emits light at least one hour before they sleep. At least half of these people check emails, messages, and other prompts through the night.

The other half keeps their mobile phones near to them. Why could this be a problem? One reason lies in evolution.

For thousands of years our bodies have evolved to identify blue light as daylight. Night fire produces reddish-yellow light. Our bodies have evolved to identify red light (or no light) as light for bed time. Did you know, mobile devices emit blue light? Accessing the mobile as you fall asleep sends signals that it's not bedtime. Long-time exposure to blue light from devices deteriorates eye-sight.

ENDLESS CONTENT

Online platforms have endless content. You finish one content, then another appears. If you're connected to people you know in the real world, how mentally strong are you to avoid seeing what they posted? Before you know, your planned "last five minutes" becomes one hour. Even worse, the platforms are designed to ensure hogging your attention at all times. And with this attention, keep you constantly exposed to emitting blue light.

ANONYMOUS INTERACTION

Virtual interactivity has a striking feature of anonymity. Even if you're interacting with people you know in the real world, there's no human contact. Anonymous interactions lack empathy. 'Empathy' is trying to understand another person's perspective through their own eyes. Empathy is crucial in the mental development of young people. A review of 72 studies found that empathy declined in university students between 1979 and 2009. Other studies further showed that teens are inclined to texting more than voice or video contact.

The Washington Post featured an article in May 2016 "13, right now". It narrated the story of Katherine Pommerening. As Katherine experiences the change from a child to a teen, she sadly confesses she doesn't feel like a child anymore. When all her friends got a phone and connected to different social platforms, she and her friends stopped playing during breaks; stopped playing with toys and stopped almost everything else. Teenage came in virtual reality. A world that lacks human and face to face contact.

How did you fare in the five questions? If you scored 0-7, you don't have online addiction. A score of 8-12 shows mild addiction; maybe you're in control of yourself. A score of 13-20 indicates moderate addiction. Is your time spent online causing "occasional or frequent problems"? A score of 21-25 suggests severe online addiction. Is your time spent online causing "significant problems"? If you belong to the last two groups, let's see what a future Echoes can say.

Source

Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked. By Adam Alter. Penguin Books. March 2018.

Asrar Chowdhury teaches economic theory in the classroom. Outside he listens to music and BBC Radio; follows Test Cricket; and plays the flute. He can be reached at: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com.