



PHOTO: PAHN CHAKMA



ECHOES BY  
**ASRAR CHOWDHURY**

# ONLINE ADDICTION

## Finding an answer to life

In this concluding part, we start with the questionnaire from the last Echoes (published Dec 6, 2018) that tested a participant's online addiction.

Marking on a scale of 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 don't you sleep because of late night log-ins?

**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.

If you scored 0-7, you don't have online addiction. A score of 8-12 shows mild addiction. A score of 13-20 indicates moderate addiction. A score of 21-25 suggests severe online addiction.

Ever since British scientist Tim Berners-Lee gave the world-wide-web as a Christmas present in 1990, the world has increasingly become online. Emails and messages have replaced long waits for a

response by post. YouTube has an endless jukebox and infinite video content. Facebook and Instagram have replaced a private diary with a social diary. Everybody knows what we're all up to. Twitter and Facebook news feed have re-defined breaking news. You no longer have to wait for the next "gossip", be that personal, social, or national and international.

If you've read between the lines, you may have come to the following three results. The first may be obvious. The online world is here to stay. We'll be more and more engulfed in the web of the online world. The second may not be that obvious. Online platforms have killed one human trait: boredom. These platforms are created to keep us constantly hooked. There's no way you'll get "knocked out loaded" like the 1986 Dylan album. The third result is one that's alarming. Online addiction can make us less social and sociable. This is why, it's now high time to talk about online addiction. Let's look at an experiment that happened in Los Angeles in 2012.

Fifty-one children aged 11-12 visited a summer camp. There was an equal mix of boys and girls from different social back-

grounds. Half of the group owned personal mobiles and were used to spending at least one hour daily texting friends; watching TV for two hours; and an hour playing computer games.

During the one-week camp, the kids weren't allowed any gadget or mobile. Although they didn't know each other before, they got along and performed many activities together.

At the end of the camp, one result was evident. The kids relied on eye-to-eye contact rather than screen contact to communicate. With eye-to-eye contact, the kids learned something that was taken for granted by generations before the 21st century: reading emotions of another person. The ability to read emotions of people is essential in developing empathy: understanding a person's perspective through their own eyes. Empathy is vital for group collaboration.

Today only one answer on online addiction was found. There are 101 reasons more than just eye-to-eye contact vs screen contact. The reason to address empathy is a personal one. Nowadays, when I write reference letters for students who try to pursue higher studies abroad, leading universities ask two questions. First: how good is the applicant in group

work? Second: has the applicant been involved in community development? What central message do these questions give? May be: how good is the applicant in a social context?

Think about it. The more screen contact you have online or in social media, the less human contact you'll have. Whatever subject you study in college or in university, you'll have to live and work in some group during studies and then for the rest of your life.

This is the last *Echoes* of 2018. It should finish on a note that will resonate. Is your online addiction something to think about from the questionnaire at the beginning? If yes, then how can you address it? In the words of TS Elliot: *the end is where we start from*. Let's enjoy the moment and laugh into 2019.

**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.*