

We Need to Actually do something about our phone addictions

Ladies, gentleman, everyone both & inbetween, I have to tell you about my *pinterest paralysis*. I was introduced to the drug at age 12. I was mesmerised by the platform's ability to connect me to art, visuals, aesthetics, and by extension, ideas. It had quotes, fashion, paintings, and of course the memes. I have to use the app for school now in art, to create moodboards and map out ideas. Upon first using the app in year 7, I was starting to use it pretty much every day after school. I also began to use it when I first woke up in the morning. Now it's at the point where I'm still on that app, 4 years later, in the middle of the night, hypnotised by fanart and 1930s ball gowns, when I should be asleep. I always have to wake up at 4am for reasons to do with my sport, yet I'm scrolling away looking at memes about Queen, yes, the 80s rock band, with full knowledge that what I'm doing is not beneficial to me in the short or long-term!

You probably think it's *very funny*. *Excellent hyperbole there*. And I suppose my simultaneous addiction to classic rock memes and 1930s ball gowns is a bit humorous. You're probably thinking that my anecdote was all over-dramatisation, overly embellished to bolster my shaky contention. "Because everyone has a phone addiction." So I'm going to continue on:

I started to notice that there was a more serious problem between me and pinterest, when I would 'scroll on' despite being bored. There have been times when Pinterest had shown me everything I wanted to look at that day, yet I couldn't move myself away from the app, even though I wanted to. It became this depressing rabbit hole that I couldn't leave.

This becomes even more problematic when we say that 'everyone has a phone addiction' or is 'chronically online,' as it's also been coined. Because I don't even have a twitter, or a snapchat, or facebook, which are all almost certainly more fast paced and divisive than Pinterest. And if that selection of app users are addicted, imagine how people with a tiktok are affected.

I think we need to reexamine the role of digital technology in the 21st century. And that might sound dramatic too, but; it's honestly true. Because we're all making jokes about being chronically online or attached to our phones rather than actually addressing how technological dependance affects us.

In a world where everyone is straddling between 'irl' and the digital world, technology has altered our ability to digest reality, it has made us depressed and even suicidal in the cases of some people. The promise of the internet, innovation and new tech leading us to a better and more prosperous future, has instead served to worsen our health and wellbeing. This is why we

should reduce our dependence on the internet and our phones.

In case you've been living under a rock, here's a brief overview of the rise in short form content, and why it's happening: Tiktok is one of the most popular social media apps in the world, having 1 billion users and being available in over 150 countries. It's centred around the watching and sharing of videos that usually go for less than a minute. In most cases its algorithms track everything, from your location, keystrokes, audio and sometimes even your camera roll, to create your 'for you' page. The data joins together to form a personality profile and content selection tailored to one's personal interests. The app makes money off of its popularity, as brands will pay a lot of money to be able to advertise to an audience as large as tiktok. The app's primary goal is to keep as many eyeballs on the screen as possible at all times. Content creators have the same goal in keeping audiences engaged, leading to the prevalence of 'Sludge content.'

Its a genre that can have as many as 3 videos playing on split screens, subtitles in multiple languages and loud music blaring on top of all that. Video essayist Lily Alexandre described the genre as "predigested slurry, where no one component can be considered on its own merit." These videos however are becoming more and more popular for their addictive quality, despite their lack of substance and purpose. When you combine this with the mainstream popularity and profitability of Tiktok, it becomes very clear that our society is becoming more and more reliant on short-form content, as our main method of communicating information and expressing ourselves.

In her latest piece *Drowning in entertainment: The Age of Distraction*, Video Essayist and youtube user OliSunVia justifies that we are now living in an audio/visual based society. She argues that the imagery of tiktok and the overwhelming speed at which users are fed content leaves little room for us to question information. Therefore we are "Losing our sense of what it means to be well informed." With this in mind, it makes sense as to why someone like self-proclaimed misogynist, Andrew Tate would encourage his followers to post sludge content with his interviews as the primary audio. Users are put in an incredibly easy position to jump down a sludge content rabbit hole and see videos that happen to feature Andrew Tate. With the tendency of sludge content to flood the senses, overwhelm and hypnotise, it would be hard for someone to question his message if they were not informed enough, and received enough exposure to his harmful rhetoric.

I know you may respond with *I'm smarter than that!* But that only takes into account half of my

argument. If living in an audio/visual based society can destroy our ability to think critically, and limit the time we have to process information, then none of us are immune. Regardless of whether you think you're immune to the voices of Andrew Tate or conspiracy theories, why else would we watch sludge content when we have better things to do, and it's not giving us anything if not our critical thinking being disrupted? This also applies to tiktok and social media content on a broader scale, when you realise that you've been scrolling endlessly and can't seem to stop.

Because you know that by the time you've been scrolling for over an half an hour, all of the ballgown pictures and important updates from friends and things that really matter have all been looked at already. We need to be more conscious of social media having a corporate agenda, and remind ourselves that these apps are designed to be addictive. The average tiktok user spends around an hour a day on the app. Can you imagine the amount of hours they spend in a week or a month? Its so depressing that we're literally giving our time away to these companies and receiving little benefit in return.

Of course our health and wellness are being rotted away by social media along with our critical thinking. The 2020 Documentary "The Social Dilemma" details how digital tech corporations can manipulate us, to the point where our perception of reality has changed. One of the most disturbing parts of this is influencer culture, and how we react to highly filtered images of celebrities. Despite a wider spread knowledge of filters and face tuning apps, the amount of people suffering from 'Snapchat dysmorphia' is on the rise; As in, people getting plastic surgery to look like their snapchat and instagram filters in real life-Well you've seen it on tiktok. It took off when every second user had the extremely dangerous 'BBL' operation, and now they're removing fat from their faces (To look simultaneously like a runway model and a hollowed out corpse! How fabulous!)

"The Social Dilemma" points out that the number of U.S hospital admissions for non-fatal self-harm started to go up in 2010. In 2020, the amount grew by 62% for girls aged 15-19, and 189% for girls aged 10-14. The pattern is eerily similar for suicide rates. U.S suicide rates were up 70% in girls aged 15-19 compared to the 2001-2009 average. The rate went up 151% in girls aged 10-14.

There is something horrifically wrong with these numbers, in that they blatantly show that tech is controlling how we feel about ourselves. Gender aside, the documentary commented that "a whole generation is more fragile, anxious and depressed" demonstrating that all demographics of young people are affected by expectations from social media. Yet we make it the centre of

our lives?!

Generation Z has created a whole culture of memes, and online connection. We even have a trademarked “Gen Z humour” (well its not trademarked but it might as well be!) From discord, to Tumblr and *how could we forget* tiktok, we have made technology the centre of our world. We didn’t even create the technology, we inherited it, yet we’ve accepted and accommodated it uncritically. We look sceptically at adults that say we spend too much time on our phones, and Baby Boomers that watch sketchy news channels. Yet we are chronically online, destroying ourselves over not looking like Bella Hadid and there is a seriously alarming amount of people that believe every ‘hot take’ they see on tiktok!

I get that it can be difficult to stay sane when you’re swimming in information and media. We live in a society that drowns us in it, to the point where we’re overwhelmed and can’t think. There’s almost no choice but to keep surfing the internet, continually getting the newest content dumped onto us.

But, there do seem to be some viable solutions!

I’ve been trying to monitor my own online activity. I try to be more aware of my technology usage, when I’m on my phone for no reason, or when I’m in one of my Pinterest comas. This has been coined by some as “regulating your media diet.” This involves much more consciously picking and choosing what you look at online, rather than getting sucked into the ‘for you page’ void. By aiming for more conscious media consumption, I actually discovered a lot of the video essay content that I used to research this piece. The people making these videos don’t always have degrees, but they do usually work in technology. They seem to be highly in touch with the world around them, and make thoughtful academic pieces that comment on trends, history, sociology and the cultural zeitgeist. I find that if I only watch a few videos a week, I can be informed about the world without feeling bombarded. And if you give yourself TIME between watching videos, you’re in a much better position to evaluate what it means, and whether it’s trustworthy.

Obviously, digital technology has worked its way into becoming crucial for our worlds to function, it’s not going anywhere. School and work would need to be completely reworked for us to truly become less dependent on it. However, we can still be more conscious about the media we consume, and what pace we consume it at. We can avoid watching short video after short video at break-neck speed, and invest more energy into finding personal balance and wellbeing.

Seeing as we've already recognised our collective addiction, Gen Z is truly capable of stopping it in its tracks. We have more control over being chronically online than we think we do.