

ADDICTION TO A VIRTUAL LIFE



With the global proliferation of mobile devices – especially Smartphones – we are seeing more and more people addicted to them. How do you know if you’re a “mobile addict”? An addiction is defined as that thing you are addicted to controlling your life and interfering with your daily activities, work, and relationships. The classical definition of an alcoholic is someone who wakes up to a glass of vodka instead of a cup of coffee while a true addiction entails a growing tolerance to a substance so you need more to get "high." Computer technologies can be addictive because they're "psychoactive", i.e. they alter your mood and often trigger enjoyable feelings. In a study of 1,600 managers and professionals, Leslie Perlow, PhD, the Konosuke Matsushita professor of leadership at the Harvard Business School, found that:

- 70% said they check their Smartphone within an hour of getting up.
- 56% check their phone within an hour of going to sleep.
- 48% check over the weekend, including on Friday and Saturday nights.
- 51% check continuously during vacation.
- 44% said they would experience "a great deal of anxiety" if they lost their phone and couldn't replace it for a week.

So if you find yourself checking your phone first thing in the morning—before even getting out of bed, you may be addicted; if you’re text-messaging while driving (totally

unsafe!), checking your phone instead of working on an important assignment, or checking **Facebook** during a romantic dinner—your phone is interfering with your life and you are addicted. How often have you witnessed pedestrians bump into people, trip or walk into immobile objects as they “**WhatsApp**”, or observed those at a dinner table staring into their phones rather than eating or actually conversing? No one has an excuse – not even business people – for losing their social skills and being fixated on an object. If you find yourself guilty of this addiction, you can learn to discipline yourself better.

- **Be conscious** of the situations and emotions that make you want to check your phone.
- **Be strong** when your phone beeps or rings – it need not always be answered.
- **Be disciplined** about not using your device in certain situations or at certain hours
- **Start the first 30 minutes** of your day without checking your phone
- **Use your device only in safe conditions** - not while driving, walking, cooking or operating another machine
- **Deal with real LIVE people in person** – over a meal, cup of coffee, on the train. A real addiction is when we prefer VIRTUAL people over REAL ones.
- **Get some sleep** – power off your device or leave it in another room; it isn’t worth losing sleep over.

Nicholas Carr, author of *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*” summarizes it best saying, devices like the Smartphone “steal from us the opportunity to maintain our attention, to engage in contemplation and reflection, or even to be alone with our thoughts.”