



Trauma  
Care

# Newsletter

## TraumaCare

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## Technology and Addiction

Despite using science and technology to better our lives, we are the real slaves to technology.

We indulge in the need to always have something electronic in our hands – a tool that connects us to the Internet, our games or to our social networks. We're bypassing the real world to get a digital quick-fix; our work, play and plans for stress release seem to depend on a broadband connection.



It's only a matter of time before the same need compels today's generations to act, react, think and behave so much differently from the pre-connected generations, for instance...

### 1. A new kind of danger on the road

Have you ever found yourself checking your smartphone for updates while still behind the wheel? I do; when I stop at a red light, queue up at a drive-thru, or while waiting to pick someone up. It's a silly thing to do, I admit, but I'd never do the same when the vehicle I'm driving is moving, but that's just me.

While we're on the subject, drivers on the road are getting younger and younger; and the cars are getting bigger and more powerful. In many countries in the world, a 16-year-old who can barely hold his beer can legally go behind the wheel and speed 50 mph down the highway. Add the lethal dose of an addiction to their phones, a sense of reckless abandonment, and you have a recipe for disaster.

### The Impact

Well, so many people are actually texting while driving, and getting into accidents that there is now a call by the National Transportation Safety Board (in the US) to ban texting or the use of electronic devices while driving a vehicle. Watch the news report and the video embedded in the link to get an inside view of how dangerous this phenomenon is.



## 2. The digital divide – at home

Individuals at every stage of their lives are now (over) exposed to technological gadgets. iPads are unashamedly used to babysit or pacify rowdy children from as young as 4 years old. Its easy-to-use interface, and colourful, entertaining and engaging apps attract the attention of these little ones, who reciprocate with the need of a constant feed of entertainment, day and night. Try taking the iPad away from the kid and you'll see what I mean. It's no wonder that the iPad can easily be classified as a toy for this reason.

Now, fast forward this situation to a decade from now. You see adults sitting around a table in a Wi-Fi-enabled café. Chances are they are not going to be talking to each other, not in the real world at least. At home, fights and arguments will occur a lot more often between spouses due to a lack of communication, and it's not going to get any better when this generation have kids of their own.



Come to think of it, all of this is already happening right now.

Technology has slowly eased its way into our lives and formed glass walls between individuals who *can* communicate with each other but instead chose not to. As a result, well, you might want to read this and this.

### The Impact

The good news is much of the world still operates on a non-virtual basis; the bad news is we are prepping the younger generation to function better online than off. You may view this as a good thing, with the world getting smaller and tech tools getting more powerful and everything, but our youths are not retaining general knowledge in their heads (you can thank Google for that), there is no need to be grammatically correct in textspeak (you can thank the 140 char limit for that) and well, social networks – they open up a new can of worms.



### 3. Searching for the 'Like' button offline

Ever wonder why social networking sites are so popular? My theory is that we have the burning desire to be the 'popular kid'. In school, the unwritten goal was to have loads of friends, being able to share our 'deep' thoughts, have followers, and to a childish extent, show off the assets that we have – a pretty face, the latest tech gadget, a nice ride etc. Sound familiar?

Social networking sites are apparent, virtual replacements of this. You have the friend's list or followers; you get to post status updates or quotes, as well as pictures depicting fragments of your life or the things you encounter. It's like high school all over again, without the classes, of course. The one thing that this virtual counterpart does better than the conservative way is the spreading of information which is as easy as clicking 'Share'.

#### The impact

These systems have made it so easy to post these bits and pieces of your life online that if you stumble upon anything worthy of posting, you'd drop *everything* and do it. See a car accident, *it goes online*, see a dog begging for food with its master, *shared*, see someone trying to jump off a building, *posted*.

Suddenly, even in the real world, you're a surfer. You don't stop to help the victim get out of the car, actually drop some coins into the beggar's cup, or call the police to come stop the hapless jumper. Nope, it's all about accommodating these urges to have the post of the day.



#### 4. All things short and sweet

Our attention spans are getting shorter and shorter. Personally, I can no longer sit through a full movie, which would explain why I haven't been to the cinema for the longest time... but that's not the point.

The point is I can no longer concentrate on a single task at hand. That does not automatically mean that I am a multi-tasker, or that I am good at it. It just means that I have too many things, at home, at work, at school that needed my attention. Again, that's not the point.

The fact that I can't concentrate on one single task for a long enough period, is a source for worry. And I'm not the only one with the problem. And *that* is the point. We are turning into digital goldfish!

While we're on the subject of 'short' things, let's talk about short fuses. This is my most hated icon of all time because it indicates that I have to act like a grown up and wait. Patience is a virtue, one that this generation finds hard to pursue. And can you blame us? We read news all around the clock, not only on a finite batch of papers that contains news that happened 24 hours ago. True, those articles contain more details which are confirmed and checked through but when it comes to getting the news first, it's Twitter for us. Straight from the horses' mouth, 140 chars, and easy to spread and share.

#### The impact

"So4those of u who weren't payg attntn, 1)our attntn spans r gettg shortr, 2)we hv short fuses 3) we prefr 2absorb reli short bits of info." – 136 chars and you can read this.

#### 5. Argh, matey!

Read this the other day: an "A" student was failed by his English teacher for choosing to distinguish **piracy** from **stealing** in an essay. Not sure what to make of it, really, I'm no expert in Internet ethics.

But try image Googling "piracy vs stealing" and you will be given a visual guide to the core of the debate. The gist of it was that while stealing removes the original item – like how shoplifting works – piracy makes a copy of the original item but leaves only with the copy. It's an attempt to differentiate between the two but I'm not sure if it drives the point home.

Not that the differentiation matters. *Everyone* is making copies of things they didn't pay for: movie torrents, mp3 songs, e-books, and college assignments. It's a worldwide phenomenon and even though their lips may say it is not right to do so, their actions speak otherwise. If piracy is stealing, then the world is filled with thieves.

#### The impact

If you think that you don't want to side with the major film or music studios, or major book publishers, that's your choice. But I'd like to remind you that sometimes it isn't about the money. It's about the credit and the acknowledgement of all the hard work one puts into something: an invention, a piece of work, an article, a music score, an infographic, a template, a theme, heck, even the idea behind the "piracy vs stealing" image has to come from someone.



But when the item is shared, copied, reused, repackaged, submitted or sold by someone other than the creator, it just doesn't feel right. Pretty much like how a classmate blatantly takes your assignment and passes it up as his own, then gets an A for it (or an award), wouldn't the feeling make you feel sick to your stomach as well? On the long run, this would spell an end to originality and creativity, because if somebody else is going to take the credit, why would anyone come up with anything new anymore?

### **Addition Study**

Student 'addiction' to technology 'similar to drug cravings', study finds...Withdrawal symptoms experienced by young people deprived of gadgets and technology is compared to those felt by drug addicts or smokers going "cold turkey", a study has concluded

**Researchers found nearly** four in five students had significant mental and physical distress, panic, confusion and extreme isolation when forced to unplug from technology for an entire day. They found college students at campuses across the globe admitted being "addicted" to modern technology such as mobile phones, laptops and television as well as social networking such as Facebook and Twitter.

A "clear majority" of almost 1,000 university students, interviewed at 12 campuses in 10 countries, including Britain, America and China, were unable to voluntarily avoid their gadgets for one full day, they concluded. The University of Maryland research described students' thoughts in vivid detail, in which they admit to cravings, anxiety attacks and depression when forced to abstain from using media. One unnamed American college student told of their overwhelming cravings, which they confessed was similar to "itching like a crackhead (crack cocaine addict)".

The study, **published by the university's International Centre for Media & the Public Agenda (ICMPA) and the Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change**, concluded that "most students... failed to go the full 24 hours without media".

The research, titled *The world Unplugged*, also found students' used "virtually the same words to describe their reactions".

**These included emotions such as fretful, confused, anxious, irritable, insecure, nervous, restless, crazy, addicted, panicked, jealous, angry, lonely, dependent, depressed, jittery and paranoid.**

Prof Susan Moeller, who led the research, said technology had changed the students' relationships.

"Students talked about how scary it was, how addicted they were," she said.

"They expected the frustration. But they didn't expect to have the psychological effects, to be lonely, to be panicked, the anxiety, literally heart palpitations.

"Technology provides the social network for young people today and they have spent their entire lives being 'plugged in'."

The study interviewed young people, aged between 17 and 23, including about 150 students from Bournemouth University, who were asked to keep a diary of their thoughts. They were told to give up their mobile phones, the internet, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and they were not allowed to watch television. They were, however, permitted to use landline telephones and read books. The study found that one in five reported feelings of withdrawal akin to addiction while more than one in 10 admitted being left confused and feeling like a failure.

Just 21 per cent said they could feel the benefits of being unplugged.

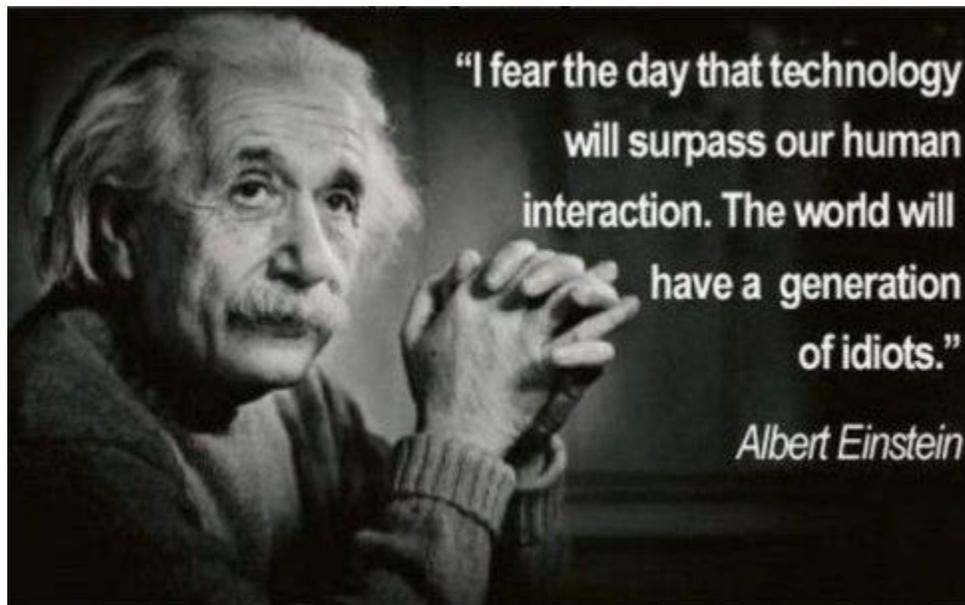
- One British participant reported: "I am an addict. I don't need alcohol, cocaine or any other derailing form of social depravity... Media is my drug; without it I was lost.

- Another wrote: 'I literally didn't know what to do with myself. Going down to the kitchen to pointlessly look in the cupboards became regular routine, as did getting a drink.'

- A third said: 'I became bulimic with my media; I starved myself for a full 15 hours and then had a full-on binge.' While a fourth student added: "I felt like a helpless man on a lonely deserted island in the big ocean".

Prof Moeller added: "Some said they wanted to go without technology for a while but they could not as they could be ostracised by their friends.' "When the students did not have their mobile phones and other gadgets, they did report that they did get into more in-depth conversations. "Quite a number reported quite a difference in conversation in terms of quality and depth as a result."

**Despite the gloomy outlook painted in this article, I'm sure that the technology that keeps us connected to the Internet has done much good for our lives. However, do remember who is in control and act like it. When your digital devices are taking up too much of your life, you know it's time to switch it off and enjoy life unplugged.**



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