Phonoholism
as a Personal Safety Threat

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ABSTRACT

Using modern devices and global access to information have become one of the most important areas of people's lives, especially in case of young people who have been dealing with technology and new media since they were very young. It is hard to imagine life without new information communication technologies. Communicating, making friends, gaining information, entertainment, pursuing hobbies and interests – it all happens through these technologies. Is virtual reality becoming the space of creativity of the young or their escape from real tasks that they should face in everyday life? The paper presents research on the compulsive usage of mobile phones and gives a detailed characteristics of the phenomenon of phonoholism in Masovian voivodship. The underlying research objective is the analysis of the negative effects of the excessive immersion of the users in the Internet

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and the ubiquitous presence thereof in people's lives, with a particular emphasis being put on the impact the Internet has on young people. Among others, the research results have displayed low perception of the harmfulness of addiction to a mobile phone among the investigated youth.

ARTICLE INFO

(…) on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (teenage edition), access to internet browsing, an email account, Facebook, iTunes, Nintendo and a cellphone sits somewhere between 'Safety' and 'Love/Belonging'

S. Maushart

Introduction

There is no doubt that we live in a time of rapid technological development. We are constantly bombarded with novelties and technological solutions, innovative devices that are to help us live or provide us with constructive ways of spending leisure time. The producers of new technologies, taking into account customer requirements, design new devices, modernize the current ones or anticipate emerging trends in order to gain as many users as possible. Digital media, mostly those available from mobile devices, have become communication tools, they control numerous areas of life, and they are used practically every day. The addictive usage of a mobile phone called phonoholism, which is one of the 21st century threats, brings about

serious negative effects on the individual. New as it is, the phenomenon is based on an analogous mechanism that occurs in case of drugs, cigarettes or alcohol addiction. There is no doubt that this usage poses a threat to human safety. It disturbs an individual's proper functioning and exposes them to its negative consequences. Any abnormality that deviates from the generally accepted norm may cause development disorders in the physical, psychological and emotional sphere of a human being, leading to their destruction and thus disturbing their sense of safety.

It can therefore be noted that the emergence of modern communication technologies, i.e. the Internet, mobile phones, tablets, social media etc., have irreversibly changed the image of contemporary reality, and at the same time have dramatically lowered the sense of safety of a human individual. Disturbances occur in the balance between particular life spheres, and the individual is unable to consciously control the negative factors arising from such behavioral addiction. Such addiction also causes that an addicted person is more prone to undertake risky actions, due to which the person's security is more endangered. These types of behavior, which are typical of behavioral addictions, should now be explained from an existential position.

A human being lives in a continuous drama of decision-making, often having weak and uncertain reasons for making these decisions, and generally lacking reliable directions in their lives. Modern times of change and acceleration make one cope with new tasks, which is additionally made more difficult by the depreciation of old values and the unsuitability of old mechanisms of dealing with life. This may be conducive to making bad decisions and to adverse adaptive behavior.[1] In literature, however, there is no official name for this phenomenon.

There are, however, such terms as: phonoholism, netoholism, netaddiction, cyberaddiction, Internet dependence, infoholism, and computer addiction. Determining the dependence on the use of modern information and communication technologies captures the problem in many aspects. Many people, especially young ones, cannot imagine life without using a mobile phone or belonging to a social networking site. Online reality does not only fill up their free time, but it also provides an opportunity to create a new reality without a necessity to leave one's home. Young

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[1] B.K. Alexander, *Addiction or existential malaise? Same or different?*, "Addiction Research and Theory", no. 17, 2009, pp. 109–112.

people intensively using new media are referred to as "digital natives". Technological achievements – smartphones, mobile applications, computer programs – do not constitute any barriers for them in the process of virtual communication.

This article is only to signal an emerging threat to the safety of an individual posed by the excessive usage of a mobile phone.

Human safety and addiction

Technological development and its negative impact on a human being raises more and more concerns. An excellent theoretician and researcher of contemporary social changes, M. Marody, writes that the way in which an individual functions in given conditions is always the resultant of complex external and internal influences. In the conditions of accelerated, comprehensive change, one's personality, or more generally, the psychological factors acting in an individual take on special significance. They are not only a specific filter that shapes one's perception of reality and gives meaning to individual experiences, but they are also modified by new experiences, becoming a kind of mirror in which social processes are reflected.[2] The human understanding of contemporary threats is very wide, with an individual having a great impact on most of them, but there are also threats that people are unable to predict, and even such ones on which they have no influence.

In the literature of the subject, one most often comes across the definition of safety as the negation of the absence of threats or as a set of positive conditions experienced by an individual, such as peace, self-confidence and freedom. But as a matter of fact, there is no explicit, comprehensive or generally accepted definition of safety. The issue can also be related to the modern developments in technology, which bring about as many benefits as multidimensional threats. Thus, the issue of safety covers an extremely wide range of areas of life,[3] ranging from environmental issues, through biological ones, up to the threats caused by civilization.

The issue of safety in social sciences is currently experiencing a real flourishing, but its social perspective is relatively rarely discussed. Although

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[2] M. Marody, *Psychospołeczne nastawienia w zmieniającej się rzeczywistości*, [in:] *Oswajanie rzeczywistości. Między realnym socjalizmem a realną demokracją*, M. Marody (ed.), Warszawa 1996, p. 214.

[3] M. Kamiński, W. Kuźniar, M. Leszczyński, M. Lisiecki, I. Oleksiewicz, P. Perz, *Wymiar bezpieczeństwa państwa w dzisiejszym świecie*, Warszawa 2016, p. 21.

different types of safety are discussed, e.g. public, political or economic, incidentally a cognitive gap as regards the subject approach is perceptible in security sciences. Some definitions also place safety in the category of needs.[4] It is one of the fundamental needs of every human being. It is a state that provides a human being with a sense of existence and guarantees the maintenance thereof, and it also provides a human with a chance of self-improvement. Human safety is a complex phenomenon, a system of mechanical solutions securing people's lives and property, which is adapted to their needs. It is also a series of actions and decisions that a person undertakes to minimize the risk of widespread danger. It is one of the human needs, a condition that gives a sense of confidence, a situation characterized by lack of risk of losing something that a person particularly values, for example respect or feelings.[5] The authors of this paper support Karen Horney's view, who claims that the need for safety is the basic motivation for a way of life and human activity.[6] This activity is connected with continuous protection against a threat that may be associated with, for example, loss of social position. With the increase of affordability and assimilation of modern technologies, the scale of threats increases, which may have a negative impact on the proper development and functioning of the individual. Technologies are a social product, and social products are culturally-based.

A mobile phone is no exception to this rule. It has been shaped by the culture of its creators who were also its first users. However, due to the current global coverage of the network, it is worth distinguishing between users-creators and users-consumers.[7] The commonness of using mobile phones or the Internet, as well as the possibility of contacting people around the world, have created new spheres of perceived threats.[8] A mobile phone is not only a communication tool, but also a device whose

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[4] D. Zbroszczyk, *The Feeling of Safety of ACOA in the Alcoholic Family*, "Security Dimensions. International & National Studies", 2017, no. 24, p. 164–176, DOI: 10.24356/SD/24/10, p. 165.

[5] *Dictionary of terms in command and management psychology*, Warszawa 2000, p. 17.

[6] K. Horney, *Neurotyczna osobowość naszych czasów*, Poznań 2007.

[7] M. Castells, *Galaktyka Internetu. Refleksje nad Internetem, biznesem i społeczeństwem*, transl. by T. Hornowski, Poznań, p. 47.

[8] D. Zbroszczyk, K. Zaremba, *Problem bezpieczeństwa młodzieży w świecie płynnej nowoczesności*, [in:] *Edukacja dziecka i rodziny w epoce technologii informacyjnej*, K. Nowak, K. Ziębakowska-Cecot (eds), Radom 2015, p. 87.

irrational usage disrupts everyday life and creates a significant problem, i.e. an addiction. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines addiction as a mental and physical condition resulting from the interaction between a living organism and a chemical substance (e.g. alcohol, nicotine, drugs), characterized by changes and other reactions, such as the need to receive given substances in a continuous or periodic manner in order to experience its effect on the psyche or to avoid the symptoms accompanying the lack of the substance. Colloquially, the term 'addiction' is used for people who abuse alcohol, cigarettes, drugs or medicines. In a wider context, it applies to many other behaviors, for example: sex, shopping, watching TV, using the Internet, mobile phones, gambling. These addictions are often less known and less discussed, not always even defined as disorders in official disease classifications.[9] According to Kozak, "a mobile phone for many people is an integral part of life today. Initially, the problem of addiction seemed marginal, however over time, it has gained strength in the world and is increasingly more threatening, especially for the younger generation (though not only for them), also in Poland. Like any addiction, it poses a serious threat to the physical and mental health of a human being".[10] Research and behavior analysis conducted in Italy shows that there are several basic forms of dependence on a mobile phone:[11]

– users *addicted to new phone models* – a compulsion to possess the latest model of a mobile phone equipped with the most modern functions. The person purchases a new phone every five months and depends on the social group to which the users belong;
– users *addicted to text messages* – feeling the continuous compulsion of writing and reading text messages; the number of received text messages affects the user's mood.
– people suffering from *nomophobia* are afraid to turn off their phone even for a few minutes; they always have a charged battery in order not to deprive themselves of the possibility of using the telephone;
– *players* – they spend every free moment on playing games on a mobile phone, which becomes a game console. They do not stop playing until they beat the new record;

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[9] A. Belcer, A. Wojnarowska, *Fonoholizm – nowe uzależnienie młodzieży*, [in:] *Patologie i uzależnienia* (*wybrane problemy teorii i praktyki*), B. Skwarek, E. Wulbach, I. Lewicka (eds), Warszawa – Łódź 2014, p. 42.

[10] S. Kozak, *Patologia fonoholizmu*, Warszawa 2013, pp.77–78.

[11] C. Guerreschi, *Nowe uzależnienia*, Kraków 2010, pp. 210–212.

– "*mobile exhibitionists*" attach a lot of attention to the color, design and price of the phone. They always hold it in their hand, presenting to others the functions with which it is equipped. While making a call, they speak very loudly and before they answer the phone, they let it ring for a long time so that everyone nearby can hear it. Sometimes, they deliberately make calls to each other while in public, and pretend to talk.

According to the researchers, although cell phones facilitate being constantly in touch with relatives and friends, their uncontrolled usage "may lead to atrophy of social ties, negatively affecting the psychological well-being and the somatic health of the user. In extreme cases, lack of control can generate strong addiction and problems such as gambling, poverty, mental disorders or homelessness".[12] This issue seems to be important since human behavior largely determines their current and future condition of safety.

The need for social development in the young generation requires the formation of not only personality and needs, but, above all, values. The appropriate shaping of attitudes, plans and values requires that they are first learned, and then, owing to proper organization of educational activities, they develop in a socially desirable direction.[13]

Own research

The object of research has been the usage of a mobile phone, which may pose a threat to individual safety. The basic research problem is included in the following questions:

1. What is young people's activity intensity level in using the phone?
2. What are young people's motives for using the telephone?
3. What are the consequences of excessive usage of a mobile phone?

In the research, the method of a diagnostic survey and a survey technique were used. The research was carried out in 2017 in Mazowieckie region. 120 young people from Mazowieckie region took part in it. The age of the respondents was between 15 and 18 years.

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[12] https://www.cyfrowobezpieczni.pl/aktualnosci/99-fonoholizm-nalogowe-korzysta-nie-ze-smartfonow (accessed:19.04.2018).

[13] J. Grubicka, D. Zbroszczyk, *Bezpieczeństwo adolescenta wobec zagrożeń w cyber-przestrzeni*, [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo człowieka a miłosierdzie. Opieka i ochrona*, Z. Jarmoch, A. W. Świderski (eds), Drohiczyn 2016, p. 236.

Table 1. First contact with a mobile phone

First contact with a mobile phone	Number of surveyed respondents N=120			
	M		F	
	N=57	%	N=63	%
6–7 years old	9	16%	16	25%
8–9 years old	12	21%	20	32%
10–11 years old	17	30%	19	30%
12–13 years old	19	33%	8	13%
14–15 years old	–	–	–	–
16–17 years old	–	–	–	–
Above 17	–	–	–	–

Source: Own elaboration

The figures concerning the first usage of a mobile phone are similar. The average age at which children start using their own mobile phones is between 6 and 13 years. The age of initiation is similar for women and men. 37% of the surveyed men indicated that their first contact with a mobile phone was between 6 and 9 years of age, the result was slightly higher in girls – 57%.

The usage of new technologies, particularly digital communication tools, is permanently inscribed in the daily functioning of young people. (Table 2) All students surveyed use mobile phones regularly. The relationship between the sex and the time of using the phone during the day is noticeable. Whereas as many as 62% of girls spend from 4 to more than 8 hours holding a phone in their hands, there is slightly less men that spend this much time on this activity – 54%.

Table 2. Using a mobile phone

Time spent on using a mobile phone during the day	Number of surveyed respondents N=120			
	M		F	
	N=57	%	N=63	%
0 hours	–	–	–	–
1–2 hours	9	16%	7	11%
2–4 hours	17	30%	17	27%
4–6 hours	11	19%	13	21%
6–8 hours	12	21%	15	24%
More than 8 hours	8	14%	11	17%

Source: Own elaboration

The research conducted among students shows that spending a day without a mobile phone or a smart phone is unimaginable. Over one third of the surveyed youth cannot imagine daily functioning without it. (Table 3) It seems to be important in many spheres of the everyday life of young people, such as communication with others, educational purposes, better time management, or entertainment.

TABLE 3. MOTIVES FOR USING MOBILE PHONES

Motives for using mobile phones	Number of surveyed respondents N=120	
	M	F
	N=57	N=63
Text messages/ MMS	31	38
Phone connections	42	41
Games	21	15
Music	16	27
Photos	28	39
Internet	48	48

BE CAREFUL: there is no percentage data because of multiple choice questions

Source: Own elaboration

What is the phone so much needed for? First of all, respondents use it to surf the Internet and to chat on the phone, which applies to both men and women surveyed and reveals similar frequency in both sexes. The respondents indicate that they use the telephone to communicate with other people – that is, to send text messages (31M // 38F) and to make telephone calls (42M // 41F). However, the most frequent activity among the respondents was using the Internet (48M // 48F). Further activities indicated by the respondents were taking pictures (28M // 39K) and listening to music – for that purpose the phone is used every or almost every day (16M // 27 F).

The above data show that the Internet is mainly used by young people to communicate via instant messaging / chat rooms, as well as in order to view social networks or watch movies.

The attractiveness of reality presented by the media is a huge threat to the proper development of a young person. Long-term usage of cutting-edge IT devices negatively affects the human body, causing many troublesome symptoms, e.g. dizziness and headaches, eye fatigue, the adverse impact of the electromagnetic field, or anger and aggression. While pointing out the physical effects of using digital media, one should remember about the emission of electromagnetic waves, which in extreme cases can result in pain defined by doctors as chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). In addition to physical effects, they also affect people's mental health. Observing how popular digital media are, it can be assumed that they have a significant impact on the recipient's emotions and behavior. The following table shows the consequences of overusing a mobile phone.

Table 4. The consequences of overusing a mobile phone

The consequences of overusing a mobile phone	Number of surveyed respondents N=120			
	M		F	
	N=57	%	N=63	%
Agression	6	10%	7	11%

The consequences of overusing a mobile phone	Number of surveyed respondents N=120			
	M		F	
	N=57	%	N=63	%
Health problems	22	38%	31	49%
Problems in school performance	11	19%	8	13%
Problems in family relationships	17	30%	14	22%
Problems in interpersonal contacts	2	3%	3	5%

Source: Own elaboration

Excessive use of the digital media also adversely affects interpersonal relationships. As the amount of time spent on the usage increases, time spent with relatives and friends decreases, which results in the loss of bonds between parents and children or between friends. Initially, the digital media was treated as a source of escape from the hardships of everyday life. However, over time, it started causing a decrease in the interest in other matters as well as neglecting home, school or health.[14] That is why it was so important to the authors to investigate the effects of the abuse of a mobile phone.

30% of the surveyed men and slightly fewer women – 22% – indicated that one of the consequences of excessive usage of the telephone are bad relationships with parents. The vast difference is between gender and health consequences; 49% of women think that abuse of a mobile phone can negatively affect health and 38% of men share this view. In addi-

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[14] C. Guerreschi, *Nowe…*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

tion, the respondents indicated possible problems in school performance (19% M // 13% F), aggressive behavior (105M // 11% F) and disturbed interpersonal contacts (3% M // 5% F).

In addition, the respondents were asked about their attitude to a potential situation of them being banned from phone usage. The results obtained only confirmed the assumptions of the authors. Both women and men have identified the emerging feeling of anger and dissatisfaction with being banned from using the phone. Only 2% of men and 3% of women said they had no opinion on the subject.

Table 5. Respondents' attitude to a possibility of being banned from phone usage

Dissatisfaction/ Anger	Number of surveyed respondents N=120			
	M		F	
	N=57	%	N=63	%
Yes	39	68%	48	76%
No	–	–	–	–
Sometimes	17	30%	13	21%
I have no opinion	1	2%	2	3%

Source: Own elaboration

According to the results of the research, a mobile phone is not only an indispensable tool to obtain data, but there also turns out to be a telephone savoir-vivre. According to its rules, there are situations and places in which

one should not use it, and in case of urgent necessity one should do it discreetly so as not to disturb others. Yet, about 80% of young people use the phone while socializing.

TABLE 6. USING THE PHONE WHILE SOCIALIZING

Using the phone while socializing	Number of surveyed respondents N=120			
	M		F	
	N=57	%	N=63	%
Yes	45	79%	49	77%
No	4	7%	5	8%
Sometimes	7	12%	9	14%
I do not control it	1	2%	–	–

Source: Own elaboration

The research conducted in Mazowieckie region clearly indicates that relatively young people use new communication tools much more often than other people. At the same time, the youngest users of new communication tools subjectively declare the highest level of specialist familiarity with applications and functionalities related to the daily use of these devices. The level of knowledge about the negative effects of using mobile devices is considered to be rather low. Rapid changes in the field of modern communication technologies, such as software development, application pluralization, new smart solutions for devices, as well as the increasing availability of devices and the Internet, expose the users of modern communication tools, especially children

and young people, to these devices. Addictive and compulsive use of modern communication tools, especially those with mobile Internet access, causes changes in their leisure time management, leading to less activity.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the rapid development of the new media has changed the functioning of today's societies not only in terms of the forms of communication, but also in terms of the ways of spending free time. The generation of young Poles tends to focus their lives on "only here and now". They are even described as "present-hedonistic". They are focused on entertainment, pleasure, excitement; they value quick changes, and the future is not as important to them as the present.[15] They do not reflect on the consequences of their behavior. The consequence of these changes are the difficulties to adapt in the new, ever-changing world. It turns out that the world of the media, on the one hand, widens the sphere of consumption, but on the other hand, it limits the space of individual freedom. Research results show that the users of mobile devices find life without mobile devices hardly possible. They impersonate the devices, treat them as if they were living beings, develop intense emotions and predilections towards them, suffer after their loss. New media, digital tools and mobile devices are treated by users as objects that trigger emotional reactions, require concentration and evoke memories. In addition, they imply many serious consequences, such as obesity or depression.

Immersion in the world created by the media may cause that people rarely meet and talk in person, more and more often communicating via electronic devices. This reveals the truth about the excessive attention that people pay to mobile phones and about the extent to which they abuse them in various everyday situations. These tendencies may, in turn, cause the weakening of traditional social ties, both in the family and between peers, as well as the impoverishment of language. What could be the reasons for excessive usage of the phone? Safety and convenience are the most frequently presented arguments to justify its frequent use. The real causes extend from social phobia and fear of loneliness to the attempt to satisfy the need for affiliation and belonging to a peer group.

If the child is constantly checking if there was a connection, they may need acceptance and the confirmation that they are important to others.

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[15] J. Grubicka *Wykorzystanie narzędzi technologii w edukacji dla bezpieczeństwa,* [in:] *Metodologia badań bezpieczeństwa narodowego*, Warszawa 2010, p. 157–167.

A shy teenager, withdrawn from family relationships, who cannot boast about a large group of friends visiting him/her often, may have difficulty in establishing contacts and showing affection. It is easier for him/her to maintain relationships using electronic tools rather than via personal contact. Finally, a good and expensive phone has become a symbol of social status, something that one can boast about. Bringing a fashionable phone model to school improves one's mood, makes one feel important, can impress one's peers.

The digital age is increasingly demanding. Some people can meet its expectations and want to do it, while others cannot find themselves in the new reality. Digital immigrants are particularly vulnerable – those are parents and teachers who did not grow up in the digital age and now have to learn to use new multimedia devices.[16] The dynamic development of computer technology and mobile telephony, and the increasing involvement of more and more people in the usage of the computer and the Internet, including social media, results in the growing problems related to these phenomena, as well as in a rapid increase in the number of people addicted to modern information and communication technologies.[17]

One should not talk about the phenomenon of dependence on digital devices, but rather about the disorder in the usage thereof. If a user treats smartphones as mini computers connected to the Internet, one can say that a tool such as a smartphone, a computer or a tablet, if used irresponsibly, can contribute to Internet addiction. It is not known what determines compulsive usage of a mobile phone by children and adolescents. On the one hand, culture of using mobile devices may be affected by such factors as lack of established and enforced rules including clear principles concerning correct behavior in public places; lack of proper education of teachers about the responsible usage of a mobile phone by children; or lack of effective teachers-parents information flow. On the other hand, it may be that the installed applications, including social network applications, programs or games, are addictive.

As yet, phonoholism is not included in any of the international classifications of mental disorders. Low awareness of the harmful impact of behavioral addictions, including addiction to mobile devices, e.g. a mobile phone, may

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[16] J. Grubicka, A. Jopek, *Tożsamość w cyberprzestrzeni: implikacje zjawiska cyberprzemocy wśród adolescentów*, Kraków 2017, p. 100–105.

[17] J. Grubicka, „*Galaktyka*" *języka Internetu w publicznej przestrzeni bezpieczeństwa*, [in:] D. Zbroszczyk (ed.), *Wybrane problemy i zagrożenia bezpieczeństwa człowieka*, Radom 2018, p. 31–45.

be connected with the general image of addiction prevention as such. Young people that participated in the research were to a large extent not aware of the negative psychosocial effects of the compulsive usage of mobile devices; they often considered being "stuck" to a mobile phone as a mere sign of the times. However, mobile devices can even often be a means of violence. In this respect it can be said that the increasing commonness of the contemporary mobile devices contributes to the fact that possible instances of cyber violence may occur faster and more frequently. The involvement of young people in behaviors related to cyber violence may be an outcome of either conscious or unconscious actions resulting from lack of proper education or the uncertainty of the border between a joke and seriousness.

Apart from these extreme cases, there is also a general risk that a user that utilizes digital media and mobile devices in an uncontrolled, compulsive way in his/her everyday life may become "unkempt" as regards interpersonal relations. However, one can observe a social need for the development of the culture of being offline; the evidence collected in the research conducted indicates that the time spent purposefully without being connected to the Internet and without electronic communication devices is much needed by the youth and their families. Addictive usage of mobile phones, the social pressure to be constantly in touch, as well as information overload result in the emergence of bottom-up initiatives that encourage people to go offline systematically. Being temporarily beyond the impact sphere of the Internet and the digital media during the experiments has led the subjects of the research to many interesting observations; i.e. that one can function throughout the day without major problems not using the digital means of communication; or that beyond the telephone and the computer there is a real world, which is interesting and full of people, of activities worth participating, creative pastimes and the opportunities to realise one's passions, the realization of which being very valuable and worth trying.

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