

## Mental Health 2020: Obsessive Consumption Disorder: Tackling the problem of handheld digital addiction - University of Manchester, UK

Joshua Bluteau

University of Manchester, UK

### Introduction:

The significance of new technologies are always interrogated in the media upon release, with predictions being made as to their long term effects and impact upon the mental health and wellbeing of users. However, the long term impacts are often unpredictable and difficult to plan for. This paper will draw on the combined experience of the co-authors to highlight the dangers of digital addiction, looking beyond online gambling and into the worlds of gaming, social media and augmented reality. Whether it is the pressure of posting, the time consuming nature of inhabiting the digital world, the impact of likes, or the purchasing of loot boxes, digital addiction can come in a wide variety of guises which are barely understood and even less accepted. After all, aren't these online worlds just a game? Or a way to chat online? With suicide being one of the biggest killers for men under 50 and addiction being statistically more prevalent in men, this paper questions the role of the digital world in happiness, wellbeing and asks whether it is gendered. Today, internet and computer use are ingrained in contemporary society and have changed the way we live our lives more than any other technological medium yet. Despite this, we still know relatively little about the effects of internet addiction on our psychological functioning, mental health, and general well-being. Just last year, data from the Pew Research Center showed that 77% of Americans connect to the internet on a daily basis. While many believe that surfing the web or binging cat videos on YouTube is a relatively harmless act, there are some people who spend so much of their time using a computer or on the internet that it has begun to interfere with their daily lives. When an action or desire becomes a hindrance, taking precedence over the most important aspects of one's life – relationships, work, school – it can become classified as an addiction.

Internet addiction is yet to be listed in the latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (commonly referred to as the DSM-5). However, a 2-year study funded by The National Institutes of Health may change that. Beginning in August of 2017, the study could deliver sufficient evidence that problems stemming from excessive internet use deserve serious attention from U.S. mental health and psychiatric communities. Professionals that do recognize internet addiction tend to classify it as either an obsessive-compulsive disorder or an impulse control disorder to aid treatment. Internet addiction is also called compulsive computer use, pathological internet use, and internet dependence.

**Objectives:** In light of the rise in research on technological addictions and smartphone addiction in particular, the aim of

this paper was to review the relevant literature on the topic of smartphone addiction and determine whether this disorder exists or if it does not adequately satisfy the criteria for addiction.

**Results:** We reviewed quantitative and qualitative studies on smartphone addiction and analyzed their methods and conclusions to make a determination on the suitability of the diagnosis "addiction" to excessive and problematic smartphone use. Addiction is a disorder with severe effects on physical and psychological health. A behavior may have a similar presentation as addiction in terms of excessive use, impulse control problems, and negative consequences, but that does not mean that it should be considered an addiction. We propose moving away from the addiction framework when studying technological behaviors and using other terms such as "problematic use" to describe them. We recommend that problematic technology use is to be studied in its sociocultural context with an increased focus on its compensatory functions, motivations, and gratifications.

**Conclusions:** Although the majority of research in the field declares that smartphones are addictive or takes the existence of smartphone addiction as granted, we did not find sufficient support from the addiction perspective to confirm the existence of smartphone addiction at this time. The behaviors observed in the research could be better labeled as problematic or maladaptive smartphone use and their consequences do not meet the severity levels of those caused by addiction.