Children are Not Ready for Smartphones

Smartphones have improved and helped society grow as people now have access to communication, personal cameras, and the internet at an instant. Even though phones help contribute to society, they are also harm it. The unhealthy addiction to these phones has become a problem, whether it be scrolling through social media out of boredom or having a fake buzzing sensation in their pocket. One of the major issues with phones is that people use them to distract themselves from reality. For example, someone might decide to watch Youtube instead of writing a paper that they need to finish for school. Even though all of these negative effects can be avoided, it is especially hard for children. Because children are more susceptible to becoming addicted, they should not be allowed to have their own phone until high school. A phone addiction is a problem because an “average person checks their phones 150 times a day” (Harris). Children becoming addicted to phones is not the only issue; the internet can be a scary place for children to have access to. The internet is not the best place for children, as it contains dark videos on Youtube and not all advertising is suitable for children. Phones have also cause teens to lose the “allure of independence”(Twenge). Children should not have access to phones due to their addictive nature, their emotional consequences, and the lack of security and regulation online.

The Internet is full of companies trying “play [people’s] psychological vulnerabilities (consciously and unconsciously) against [them] in the race to grab [their] attention” (Harris). Phones are small devices of addiction that are hiding their alternative purpose of gaining corporations money by getting people addicted to them. In a way, phones are like a magician, who “[looks] for blind spots, edges, vulnerabilities, and limits of people’s perception, so they can influence what people do without them even realizing it” (Harris). Like a magician, phones fool children easier than adults, who realize that the trick is actually just a trick, not real magic. The magic tricks that phones perform to entertain people are so addictive it turns the phone into a “slot machine” because the “rate of reward is most variable” (Harris). Every time a phone buzzes with a new notification that brings with it entertainment and mystery. For example, a friend might have posted something new on Instagram or a lover might have sent a text. Interactions are different each time, which developers do on purpose. Youtube makes sure to make the user interaction different each time the app is opened by opening to a randomized recommendation page instead of the user’s subscription feed. Youtube wants people to get lost in the recommended content instead of watching what they want and then leaving. Social media also does this “ by inducing a ‘1% chance [people] could be missing something important” (Harris). If people do not constantly check their social media, they might miss an important event in a friend’s life. This creates a desire to constantly come back to their phone. On the positive side, phones allow people to feel socially approved. Through likes and comments on posts, users receive a sense of gratification and feel better about their decisions (Harris). Tristan Harris claims that “Some demographics (teenagers) are more vulnerable to it than others” (Harris), because teens are more vulnerable to these addictive services their accessibility be removed to help them in the long run. Companies also constantly interrupt people’s lives with notification to help encourage app and phone addiction (Harris). If people had fewer notifications they would use their phone less and the addictive properties of some apps, as mentioned before, would be less useful. If the companies are magicians, then the notifications are like a free show ticket every month. If someone got a free ticket they would want to go to the show. Now that the magician got them through the door, they might spend money on concessions and snacks for the show. The magician tricks the person to go to a show they most likely would not have gone to and gets them to send money. Tech companies are giving the free tickets by notifications, and the money they receive is through the time the user spends in the app. If they are lucky, the user might come back later, causing the user to become addicted to an app they never meant to use. Addiction can be harmful to the brain causing emotional damage, especially to teens.

Phones have caused younger generations to have “abrupt shifts in teen behaviors and emotional states” (Twenge). Instead of going outside, children would rather stay inside and text their friends. Even though kids are socializing, it still causes them to feel isolated because no one is physically there. Due to the usage of phones, teens have also become less independent. The younger generation has become less interested in dating, with the “number of sexually active teens [being] cut by almost 40 percent since 1991” (Twenge). Teens have also become less enthusiastic about acquiring a driver’s license. Teens’ parents drive them everywhere so they have no reason to complain or get a license (Twenge). This change in behavior has also caused a change in emotional states. Teens today have more free time which they spend on their phones in their rooms. This choice often makes them distressed (Twenge). “The number of teens who get together with their friends nearly every day dropped by more than 40 percent from 2000 to 2015”; this hangout time has been replaced with virtual spaces instead of physical locations. Teens spend time in these locations to make them happy, “but most data suggest that... teens who spend more time than average on-screen activities are more likely to be unhappy” (Twenge). Children spend time on their phones and become emotionally distressed. The content they are accessing is also a culprit of this.

Children have access to millions of violent, stupid, and overall questionable videos on the web. These videos are not necessarily bad, but since children are sometimes incapable of making smart decisions, they end up following what is displayed in the videos. An example of how the internet can be harmful to children is the Tide Pod Challenge, which occurred in 2018. The challenge started as a joke article from The Onion about a toddler wanting to eat them because they look like candy (Bever). According to U.S. poison control centers, “there have been 37 reported cases among teenagers” of tide poisoning in January of 2018 (Bever). Children see these videos want to try what is in them without understanding the consequences of their actions. These videos are usually jokes or content meant for adults that children misinterpret. By not having phones, this content can be monitored more easily by their parents. Having questionable content on the internet is not bad, but children having free access to it is bad. Parents cannot rely on using parental protections on phones due to program bugs and the fact that they might not be monitored well (Bridle). Youtube Kids is an example of an app that should block children’s access to non-kid-friendly content. stead, YouTube Kids allows non-kid-friendly content to sneak through filters disguised as safe content (Bridle). While phones might have had effects on children's actions, there is no scientific proof that smartphones are the culprit.

Scientists complain that research on phones’ effects on children is very shallow and needs more research before any claims can be made. Smartphones are a relatively new invention and the research collected on them is not well executed (Denworth). People have always feared technological innovation since “Socrates, who bemoaned the then new tradition of writing things down for fear it would diminish the power of memory” (Denworth). Technology should not be feared, smartphones are not bad, and more research should be done on their effects. Smartphones are not harmful, but are also not necessary for children. Smartphones distract children from physical interaction, which can cause depression. Children are also not mentally ready to have access to the internet all of the time. Smartphones and the internet are not intrinsically bad, but children having smartphones is unnecessary. Not having a smartphone at a young age can be a benefit to their futures by avoiding smartphone addiction.

Children with smartphones have to worry about addiction, emotional stress, and the content of the internet. Smartphones are not bad. In fact, they are great for contacting friends and entertainment. However, children are just not ready to wield the power smartphones give them. The Internet is not the safest place; it is full of companies trying to make profits. These companies use addictive methods to exploit users of the internet. Children are more vulnerable to these exploitative methods (Harris). These methods can affect kids emotionally as the phones might bring them brief happiness, but not constant happiness. Even if the phone is used for entertainment like Youtube, not everything on the internet is kid-friendly. Children can be horrified by fake children’s videos (Bridle). They can also watch dangerous videos such as the tide pod challenge, take them seriously, and end up hurting themselves. Smartphones should not be in the hands of children. Children are better off receiving smartphones in high school when they are able to understand the dangers it comes with.

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