

Caela Vernon-Wright and Maya Goncalves

Nomophobia

How a culture of convenience triggered a
digital disease



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When the iPhone was first released in 2007 it was considered a breakthrough internet communications device. In 2022, the iPhone remains a breakthrough device with ease of use and convenience still at the forefront of the company's design solutions. But it does so much more than help us communicate now.

Now, when an individual accidentally leaves their iPhone at home, they are left without much more than just a simple piece of technology designed to help us reach others. Rather they are left without a calculator, diary, flashlight, mp3 player, digital camera, map, watch and even a wallet for some. Apple has replaced a plethora of everyday items over the last 15 years, making the iPhone an ideal all in one device that fits in our back pocket. The company really wasn't kidding when they said they were going to usher in "an era of software power and sophistication never before seen in a mobile device" back in 2007.

But how has a device so convenient become so counter productive?

The digital age brought on by the introduction



of the iPhone saw an increase in the reliance on smartphones. This can be attributed to Apple's innovative iOS software that makes access to everyday items effortless. In 2008, for instance, the iOS 2 software update gave us a calculator on the iPhone, and in 2018 iOS 12 gave us a measuring tape. In the most recent iOS update, Apple gave us the ability to cut out and paste parts of photos, diminishing the need for editing applications, like Photoshop.

The convenience of smartphone software, such as Apple's continuously updating iOS design, has fostered a "21st century disorder resulting from new technologies." The disorder, termed nomophobia, is characterised by feelings of "fear, anxiety, and discomfort" when an individual is detached from, or doesn't have access to, their mobile phone. The phobia serves as a "paradox of technology," demonstrating how something designed to be good for us, is in fact psychologically harmful to our wellbeing.

A study conducted in 2015 for the Journal of Mental Health aimed to assess the prevalence

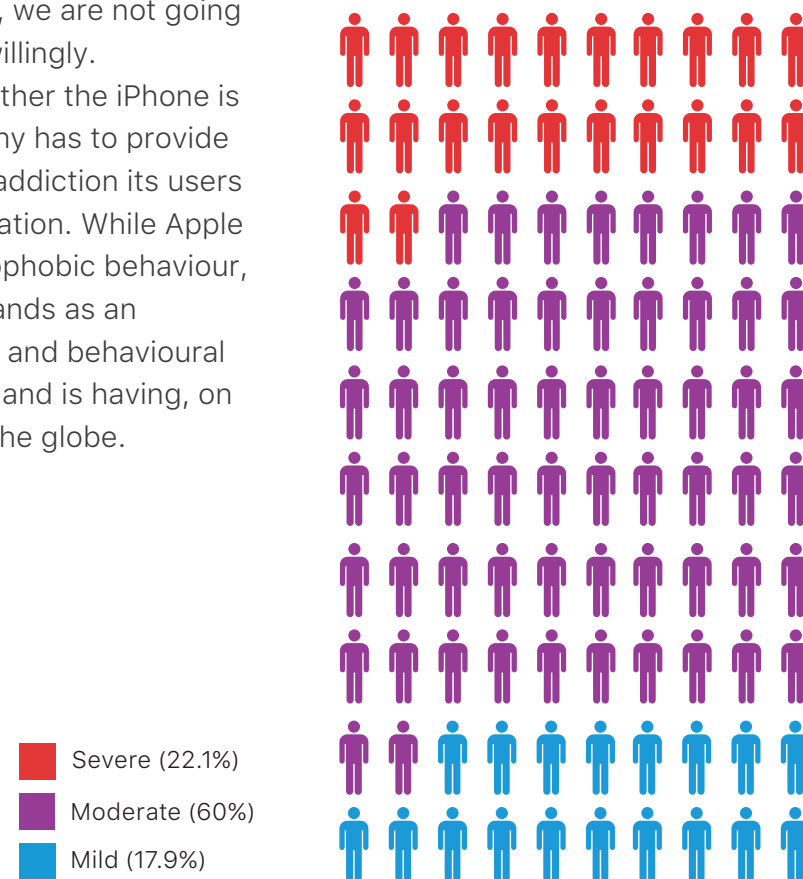
of mobile phone reliance by developing a questionnaire for 145 Medical students in India. The results found that all participants had some form of mobile phone attachment, with 17.9% of participants having mild, 60% having moderate and 22.1% having severe nomophobia. In Poland, a similar study found a direct link between mobile phone addiction and giving up convenience, through a Nomophobia Questionnaire which was validated by a Mobile Phone Addiction Assessment Questionnaire in 2019. This supports the research of Kaviani *et al* who concluded that “the convenience of owning a phone” is a main contributor to an individual’s fear of being away from a device.

The problem with Apple is that their iPhone software design is *too good*, and they know this. Their power and influence within the market is made evident in more recent iOS updates that gave us a focus feature and a screen time app that allows individuals to monitor and limit the amount of time spent on an iPhone. Software like this has been developed on the basis that people will still

reach for their iPhone due to ease of use, convenience and availability which remains the same. With unlimited access to a variety of tools at the press of a button, we are not going to give up such a device so willingly.

This begs the question whether the iPhone is inherently good if the company has to provide new software to combat the addiction its users face as a result of their innovation. While Apple is not the sole cause of nomophobic behaviour, the iPhone’s development stands as an example of the psychological and behavioural impact technology can have, and is having, on the human condition across the globe.

The varying degrees of nomophobia based on a group of 145 medical students in India
Journal of Mental Health, 2015.



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The most frequent use of a mobile phone in a day
based on a group of 200 students

National Journal of Community Medicine, 2015.

-  Texting (2.5%)
-  Taking photos (2%)
-  Calling friends and family (18%)
-  Listening to music (8.5%)
-  Using the internet for academics (2%)
-  Playing games (11%)
-  Social networking (56%)



The reasons why individuals feel anxious being away from their phone based on a group of 200 students

The Turkish Journal on Addictions, 2018.

No access to information (20%)

Limited access to communicate (30%)

Losing connectedness (25%)

Giving up convenience (25%)

