DIGITAL ADDICTION

Threat or opportunity?

Your addiction online

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0.Introduction

Digital addiction is increasingly affecting our lives, although its true impact is often underestimated or completely overlooked. Many people do not even realize that they are in the grip of digital technologies, as digital addiction develops gradually and inconspicuously. The latest studies and analyses describe in detail not only the extent of this phenomenon, but also its consequences - from reduced ability to concentrate and health complications to increased aggression, social isolation and other serious negative phenomena. Research from leading world institutions confirms that excessive use of digital technologies changes the structure of the brain in a similar way to other forms of addiction, such as addiction to addictive substances.

In this book, I present specific examples from my practice as a consultant and advisor specializing in the issue of Internet addiction. I have worked with hundreds of clients from different age groups and professional backgrounds, and it is these experiences that form the backbone of the entire text. You will also find insights that are not often talked about publicly – for example, withdrawal symptoms of digital addiction, which can include anxiety, irritability, insomnia, inability to relax without a screen, or even physical manifestations such as headaches and hand tremors. These symptoms have long been underestimated by both the professional and lay public, even though they can significantly reduce the quality of everyday life. The book also includes my vision of future developments in this area, including the possible emergence of specialized certificates, products and services focused on solving digital addiction, which could help both individuals and companies and educational institutions.

Digital addiction significantly affects our lives both at work and in our personal lives. In the work context, it manifests itself in reduced productivity, the inability to complete tasks without constant interruptions, impulsive consumption of content on social networks or the loss of the ability to do deep, focused work. In personal life, interpersonal relationships are gradually disrupted, with digital devices replacing direct communication, spending time together and emotional closeness with partners, children or friends. The number of addicted people is constantly growing and has been a phenomenon for the last ten to fifteen years. This means, among other things, that no one can yet predict with certainty what long-term consequences digital addiction will have for today's children, adolescents and adults. The generation that grows up with smartphones from an early age is the first of its kind, and society does not yet have enough data or experience to fully assess the extent of the possible impacts on mental health, cognitive abilities or social competences.

Special attention should be paid to children and adolescents, whose brains are in the process of intensive development and are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the digital environment. Excessive exposure to screens at an early age can negatively affect the development of language, empathy, the

ability to resolve conflicts or build lasting relationships. Parents and educators should therefore pay increased attention to children's digital habits and actively guide them towards a healthy and balanced approach to technology.

If you feel that digital addiction is affecting your life, or that someone close to you is, I encourage you to read this book and consider seeking professional counseling or other forms of help to reduce your digital addiction. There are many forms of support available, from individual counseling and group therapy to structured digital detox programs, that can help you regain control of your life. Deciding to reduce your digital addiction can be a challenging decision, especially since digital technologies are so deeply embedded in our daily routines that cutting them out completely is neither desirable nor realistic. However, I believe that consciously and purposefully reducing your addictive behaviors is one of the most important steps you can take for yourself and your loved ones. The sooner you decide to take action, the sooner you will see improvements in your attention span, physical and mental health, and relationships—both in your personal and professional lives. Many of my clients describe that after just a few weeks of focused work on their digital habits, they felt significant relief, greater peace of mind, better sleep, and renewed interest in activities that previously brought them joy.

As digital technologies continue to evolve, new applications, platforms, and digital environments will emerge that are designed to maximize users' time online, potentially fueling addiction. Technology companies are investing heavily in research into human behavior to keep users hooked to their products for as long as possible. Mechanisms such as endless scrolling, reward systems such as likes and notifications, and personalized content algorithms are all designed to activate the brain's dopamine system and drive repeat use. The consequences of untreated digital addiction can be severe: people under its influence often make rash and harmful decisions, such as sending funds to scammers, sharing sensitive personal information, or irreparably damaging long-term relationships. Loss of critical thinking and impulsive behavior are direct consequences of an overloaded and constantly stimulated brain. However, digital addiction can be addressed – both through prevention and early intervention that can prevent serious life situations such as work conflicts, family crises or property losses. Prevention begins with education – simply becoming aware of the mechanisms by which digital addiction works can be the first and essential step towards change.

Digital addiction is a serious problem that deserves the same level of attention and respect as other forms of addiction. Just as no one chooses to be addicted to alcohol or gambling, no one intentionally chooses to fall into digital addiction – yet it happens to thousands of people around the world every day. Please take this warning seriously – not just for yourself, but for those you love.

I wish you that digital addiction will interfere with your life as little as possible, and I believe that the information and experiences contained in this book can be of real help to you in this.

1. About me

I work as a counselor and consultant in the field of digital addiction. I come from the Czech Republic and live in Prague, but for my clients I travel to different countries of the world, and everywhere I find the same phenomenon: people addicted to their screens, disconnected from the real world around them.

I graduated from the University of Mining and Technology in Ostrava, where I received an engineering degree, and I also completed a minimum pedagogical qualification at the University of Ostrava. I mention my education at the very beginning on purpose – I do not have a medical degree, but I have extensive practical experience in the field of consulting and counselling, as well as deep technical and IT knowledge on which internet applications that cause digital addiction are built. It is this combination of technical insight and practical counselling experience that allows me to look at the issue of digital addiction from a perspective that is fundamentally different from the approach of clinical psychologists or psychiatrists – and in many ways meaningfully complements it. I understand the algorithms behind the addictive design of social networks, I understand the psychology of endless scrolling, and the reward systems built into gaming applications. This knowledge gives me an advantage when working with clients, because I can explain to them not only what is happening to them, but also why and by what specific mechanisms technology keeps them addicted.

During the Covid pandemic, I – like most people around the world – spent a significant amount of time online. Several times a day, I followed the news about the number of infected people and the statements of experts on the current situation. I was part of a global information vortex that engulfed many of us without warning and with no apparent way out. At the time, I was working as an IT consultant, but I increasingly felt that my true calling and future professional direction lay in the field of digital addiction. However, I did not know how to start, and this uncertainty accompanied me for months before I took the first concrete steps.

Around 2020, during the pandemic, I realized that I did not want to spend dozens of hours a day on the Internet in the future, so I began to consciously limit my use of it. I admit that it was not easy at all – I experienced withdrawal symptoms, which I describe in more detail in this book. These included feelings of restlessness, irritability, inability to concentrate on one thing for more than a few minutes, but also physical manifestations such as headaches or a feeling of emptiness that was difficult to name, let alone manage. I studied a large number of books and professional articles and found that unpleasant withdrawal symptoms are quite common when reducing digital addiction and that they are experienced by people across age groups, education levels and professions. It took me about half a year to get to the point where I spend only about thirty minutes a day on my mobile phone – exclusively reading news and articles that really interest me and that I consciously choose. However, there are also days when my

access to my mobile phone and the internet is completely limited, and I consider these days to be the most productive and valuable of all.

When I went through my first period without the internet and mobile phone – it lasted two days and it was sometime at the end of 2020 – I started to notice people around me more: on the tram, the metro, in restaurants and in public places.. It was as if someone had lifted a veil from my eyes. The world suddenly became more vivid, colorful, and full of details I had previously overlooked. I quickly realized that digital addiction affects children, students, and adults across generations, with each group facing different types of addictive behaviors and different challenges in overcoming them. I saw countless couples in restaurants paying full attention to their phones instead of each other—sitting at the same table, yet each in their own digital world, more distant than ever. I saw parents scrolling through social media instead of playing with their children on the playground. I saw teenagers who couldn't go even five minutes without their phones without showing signs of anxiety. More and more people—children and adults—are addicted to the internet, and not only the intensity of the addiction is changing, but also the apps that cause it. Over the past six years, when I have been focusing on this topic, there have been significant shifts in the field of digital addiction - not only as a result of the increasingly widespread use of the Internet, but also in connection with the advent of artificial intelligence, which brings completely new forms of addictive behavior and poses unprecedented challenges to experts and laypeople.

I have personally verified that I can go without the Internet for several days without feeling a strong desire to use it. This state – which some of my clients describe as an almost unattainable goal – is actually the result of systematic and patient work on myself, not exceptional willpower or a special innate disposition. However, there are not many such people – the majority of the population is largely addicted to the Internet without fully realizing it or being willing to admit it. I can personally say that I know very few people who could turn off their mobile phone for two to three days without feeling anxiety, restlessness or a compulsive need to check the news. I now use the Internet exclusively for work, e-mail communication and studying professional materials. Each session with the Internet has a clearly defined purpose, time frame and defined outcome – exactly as I recommend to my clients. At the same time, I started exercising more – I run, bike and practice yoga regularly – I go out into nature more regularly, I lost twenty kilograms and overall I feel much happier and more balanced. My relationships have deepened, my ability to concentrate has improved significantly and I feel like I am the master of my own time again.

In 2020, I was sitting in the lobby bar of a hotel reading a printed book. It was a quiet early evening, and I was enjoying that rare moment of silence and concentration that seemed almost revolutionary to me at the time. A gentleman sat down next to me and asked with a smile why I was reading a traditional book instead of an electronic version. It was a question that carried much more than

it first appeared – it reflected a deeply ingrained assumption that the digital form is automatically better, more modern and more valuable than the physical one. We got to talking, and I explained to him that I was consciously limiting my internet use and that I had just gone two days without a mobile phone. His reaction surprised me – instead of doubt or mockery, I saw interest, relief and perhaps a little envy in his eyes. This gentleman asked me for advice on how to limit his internet use, and offered me a reward for the consultation. It was my first professional conversation about digital addiction – informal, unplanned, and yet absolutely crucial for my future career. Since then, I have conducted a large number of consultations with clients of various ages, professional backgrounds, and levels of addiction, and I have developed a methodology for working with digital addiction that is based on my own experiences, on the findings of professional literature, and on thousands of hours spent listening to people who are looking for a way back to themselves. I will briefly introduce this methodology in this book, and I believe that it can be a useful guide for anyone who decides to embark on a similar path.

The value of limiting digital addiction is different for everyone and depends on each person's individual circumstances, values, and life priorities. Some people don't see digital addiction as a problem – either because they're not aware of it or because it doesn't seem serious enough to them at the moment to address it. For those of my consultations, this book probably won't be of any benefit, and that's perfectly fine. Others, however, see digital addiction as a problem and realize what overcoming it can bring them: better job opportunities thanks to more focused and efficient work, better and deeper interpersonal relationships, more time for activities that truly fulfill them, and an overall more fulfilling and meaningful life. They realize that every minute spent mindlessly scrolling is a minute subtracted from something they really care about. This book is for them – as a guide, a source of inspiration, and a practical tool on the path to digital freedom.

2. Is digital addiction a threat or an opportunity?

Digital addiction is and will continue to be an integral part of our lives. It permeates every aspect of our daily reality – from waking up in the morning, when we reach for our phone before we even get out of bed, to the hours spent aimlessly scrolling through social media at night. It influences our decision-making, attention, and interpersonal relationships, and shapes our shopping behavior, work habits, and the way we perceive ourselves. Research repeatedly shows that the average person spends more than seven hours a day in front of a screen – a number that is constantly increasing. It depends only on each of us whether we will perceive it as a threat or as an opportunity – for change, greater efficiency, or better business performance. The key is not the technology itself, but the way we consciously relate to it. Below I present a few specific opportunities that are worth paying attention to.

a) Inspiration from those who have overcome addiction

You are probably familiar with the stories of famous people who have successfully overcome addiction to alcohol, drugs or other addictive substances. After their recovery, these people usually gained greater humility, deeper self-knowledge and significantly improved their personal and professional relationships. Their stories have become a source of inspiration for millions of other people and have shown that overcoming addiction is not just about losing something harmful, but above all about gaining a new quality of life. Similar stories exist today in the world of digital addiction. People who have been forced to limit their digital lives – whether due to illness, imprisonment or long-term separation from civilization – have often experienced profound improvements in relationships in both their private and professional lives.

These individuals describe how they rediscovered the value of direct human communication, how their ability to concentrate improved, and how they rediscovered the joy of simple, everyday activities that they had previously neglected. Their experiences are a valuable testament to what digital overload takes from us and what conscious technology restriction can give us back. These stories can serve as a powerful motivational tool – for individuals, families, and entire organizations – and show that change is not only possible, but also deeply rewarding.

b) Strengthening partnership relations

Digital addiction can paradoxically serve as an impetus for renewing and deepening relationships. When partners realize that instead of paying attention to each other, they are spending time staring at a screen – sitting next to each other, yet completely distant – an opportunity opens up for them to change. This

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