

Addiction versus Habit: Understanding Automaticity in Mobile Phone Use from a Media Effects Perspective

Mariek M. P. Vanden Abeele

Over the past ten years, several studies have been published on problematic mobile phone use and its correlates. These studies typically address problematic phone use as a phenomenon that is recognized in addiction-like symptoms, and that establishes itself among individuals with particular (predisposing) traits (e.g., low self-esteem).

Although this clinical approach to problematic phone use has proven its merits, its strong focus on problematic phone use as a propensity of the (predisposed) individual has led to reduced attention for the role that mobile technologies themselves play in the formation of habitual usage patterns. This is unfortunate, as recent studies show that the nature of mobile media technology itself is highly conducive to bring forth automaticity in its usage (Bayer et al., 2015; Oulasvirta et al., 2012). Such a ‘media effects’-approach to problematic phone use is relevant, as it helps understand certain areas of problem use (e.g., mobile phone use while driving) that do not necessarily result from ‘phone addiction’.

Bayer, J. B., Cin, S. D., Campbell, S. W., & Panek, E. (2015). Consciousness and Self-Regulation in Mobile Communication. *Human Communication Research*. Article first published online: 13 MAY 2015. DOI: 10.1111/hcre.12067

Oulasvirta, A., Rattenbury, T., Ma, L., & Raita, E. (2012). Habits make smartphone use more pervasive. *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, 16(1), 105-114.