

DO MOBILE PHONES DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

Friday 19 January 2018

# THE BIG DEBATE: DO MOBILE PHONES DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

## THE DILEMMA

Mobile phones are now ingrained in daily life, with users becoming increasingly reliant on their devices. Phones let us stay in touch with friends and family, access useful information, and view amazing entertainment. They can be used for research, reading, chatting, listening to music, taking photos and playing games. With so many uses, it's no surprise we carry smartphones with us everywhere.

Ofcom's 2017 report into media habits found that 93% of children in the UK now have access to a smartphone, but is there

a downside to these devices? Two major investors in Apple, the makers of the iPhone, have warned the company that young people appear to be suffering negative effects from using their phones too much. They have suggested Apple should do more to protect children and teenagers from harm. In the UK the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, has said that the mobile app Snapchat should be banned by parents because it has addictive elements. With so much concern surrounding the issue, can we be sure that the rise of mobile phones has been a good thing?



## GLOSSARY

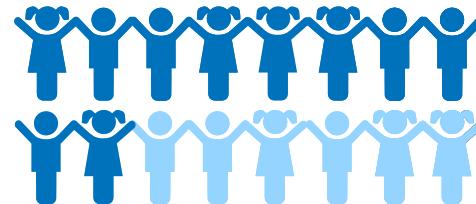
**INVESTORS** – People who give money to a company to help them make their products. In return, the investors take a share of the company's profits.

**CONTENT** – The information, entertainment, games and videos that you find on the internet.

**OFCOM** – The Office of Communications. The UK government-approved authority that regulates television and the postal industries. Ofcom aims to protect the public from harmful or offensive material.

## FACTS & FIGURES

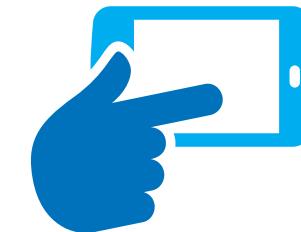
**62%** of children aged **8-11** use a mobile phone.



**8-11** year-olds-use their phones for at least **10 hours** a week, while **12-15**-year-olds spend an average **18 hours** a week on their devices.

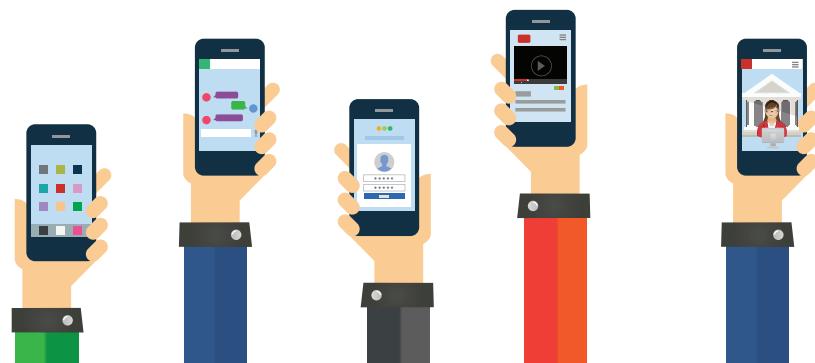
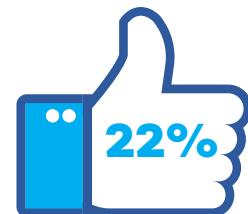


**74%** of **12-15**-year-olds have a social media



The average age for a child to get their first mobile phone is **11 years** and **8 months**.

**22%** of **8-11**-year-olds access their own social media profile via their phone.

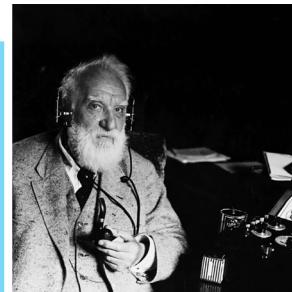


## TIMELINE OF PHONES

Mobile phones are such a big part of everyday life, many of us can't even imagine life without them, but that wasn't always the case. Here is a timeline of telephone technology:

**1667** – A British scientist, Robert Hooke, passes sound down a tight wire with his "acoustic string phone".

**1876** – Alexander Graham Bell invents a workable telephone. He makes the first call to his assistant in the room next door saying "Mr Watson, come here, I want to see you."



Alexander Graham Bell in 1915

**1919** – The first rotary dial telephones replace the traditional 'candlestick' telephones. Landline telephones are becoming more commonplace in people's homes.



A traditional 'candlestick' telephone



The newer, rotary phone

**1926** – The first transatlantic call is made from London to New York.

**1983** – The first mobile phones go on sale. They cost \$4,000 (about £5,500 in today's money) and take 30 hours to charge! They are only used by a small number of business people.



The Motorola DynaTAC was the first commercially available mobile

**1992** – Mobile phones for personal use go on sale in the UK and the first text message is sent.



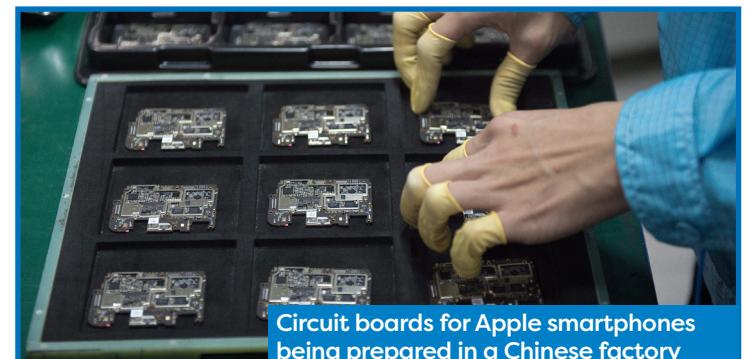
**1994** – The IBM Simon (right), the world's first smartphone is available in 15 states in the US. It combines a mobile phone with basic computer functions such as a calendar and software apps, but the battery only lasts one hour!

**2000** – The Sharp J-SH04 launches in November and becomes the world's first commercially available camera phone.

**2007** – The iPhone is launched, revolutionising smartphone technology and touchscreen features.



**2018** – Worldwide sales of mobile and smartphones exceeds 1.5 billion.



Circuit boards for Apple smartphones being prepared in a Chinese factory

## MOBILE PHONES: THE POSITIVES

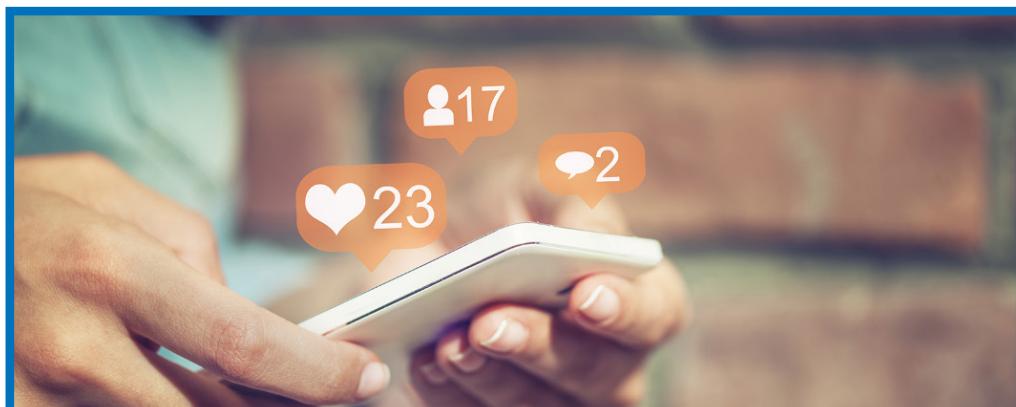
### THEY HELP US LEARN

Looking around us, most people have mobile phones and spend a lot of time using them. This is because smartphones have many positive uses and applications. Googling on mobiles can help us find out important information quickly, while websites like Wikipedia and BBC Bitesize help young people to complete their homework and achieve better results in school. Language learning applications like Duolingo even provide mobile phone users with the incredible opportunity to learn a new language. Mobile phones are powerful, portable tools we can use anywhere to check facts and make ourselves smarter.



### THEY KEEP US CONNECTED

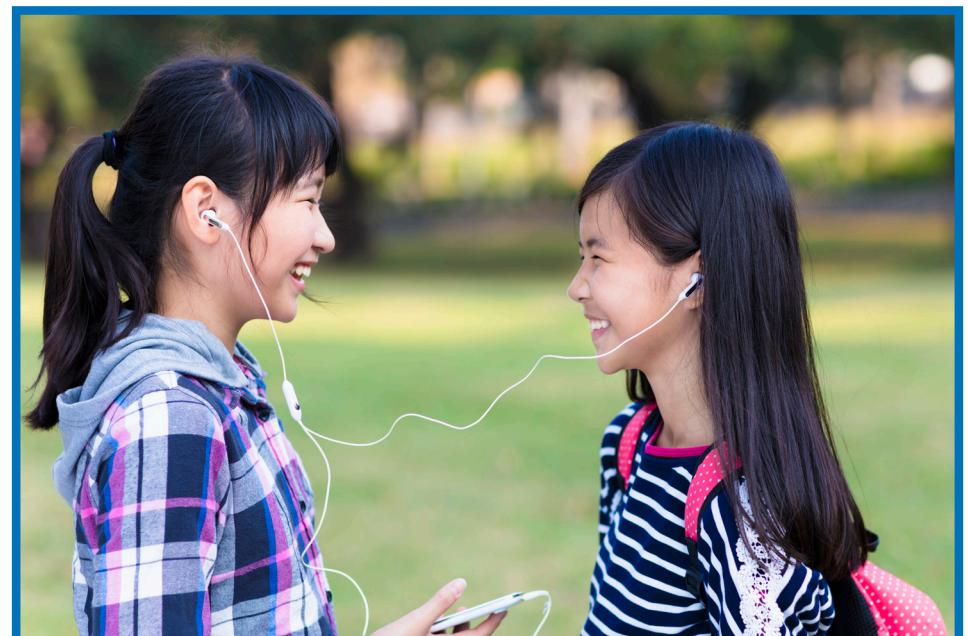
Mobile phones let us keep in contact with our friends and family even if they are miles away, thanks to social networks. In emergencies, smartphones mean we can



get the help we need quickly and stay safe, while digital maps help us to find help if we get lost. They also let us share important ideas and achievements, letting us play and collaborate digitally. We can even use smartphones to have old fashioned telephone conversations without having to use a landline! In this sense, mobile phones really enrich our social lives.

### THEY ENTERTAIN US

Mobile phones can play music, movies, television and games. Best of all, these multimedia devices are so portable that we can take them anywhere and be sure to have some fun content to keep us entertained. Battery life is getting longer in newer phones, so the fun doesn't have to end. Thanks to mobile phones we never have to take a boring car trip again.



## MOBILE PHONES: THE NEGATIVES



### THEY CAN AFFECT OUR SLEEP

Although there is a steady stream of stories in the media concerning the harmful effects of mobile phones, firm, scientific evidence relating to this issue is less common.

Nevertheless, a few studies around the world are beginning to show that constant, unrestrained use of mobile phones can lead to unhappiness and mental health problems. One of the more compelling studies on this issue found that heavy phone use at night can cause sleep problems in some individuals. This is because staying up late to send messages and

check the device exposes the eye to more artificial blue light. These increased doses of light can trick the brain into thinking it is daytime, meaning the body doesn't produce important sleep hormones such as melatonin. As a result, the body's natural sleep cycle is disrupted, potentially causing insomnia and sleep deprivation in some people. Being sleep deprived can lead to reduced concentration, unhappiness and even stop children from growing properly.

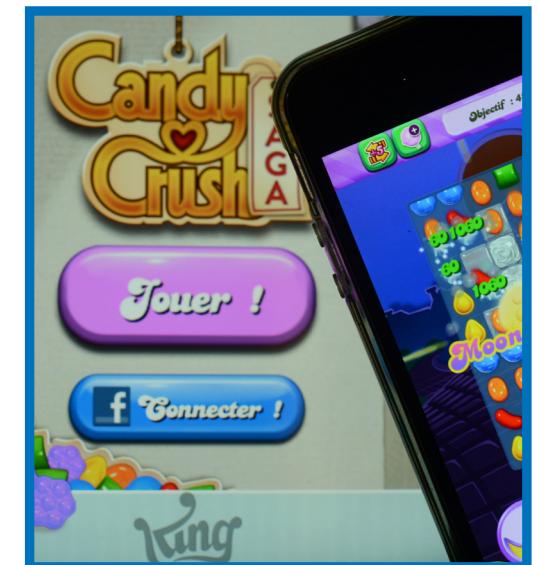
### PHONES CAN CAUSE SOCIAL PRESSURE AND DISTRACT US

A number of surveys have suggested that young people are feeling more stressed due to mobile phones. Many schoolchildren report an increased pressure to reply to messages and check what their friends are doing because smartphones are connected to social networks at all times. Phones also make it easier for people to bully each other online, as bullies are able to hide behind anonymous accounts. This further adds

to the stress that phones create. Teachers are also saying that having internet enabled smartphones in the classroom can distract pupils and negatively impact learning. A study from the University of Southern Maine, USA, showed that students who had their phones in their line of sight performed much worse than those who could not see their devices. This suggests that just the presence of a mobile can reduce our attention spans.

### SOME APPS CAN BE ADDICTIVE

Additionally, there is some evidence that certain mobile games and applications can lead to addictive behaviour. In games like *Candy Crush Saga* and *Angry Birds*, the user is rewarded for completing levels with bright, colourful displays, joyous fanfares and in-game items. Because the player has just completed a difficult task, being rewarded in this way stimulates his or her brain to release dopamine. Dopamine is the chemical in the brain that is responsible for making us feel pleasure. As a result, it feels good to beat the level, and the player is encouraged to beat another to get the pleasurable feeling again. In most people this does not cause any issues, however, for some gamers these reward systems can cause addictive behaviour that negatively affects their lives. Applications like Snapchat also encourage users to maintain "streaks" of consecutive messages. There are fears children are more susceptible to becoming addicted to mobile games and applications, leading to fewer young people living healthy, balanced lifestyles.



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## YES, MOBILE PHONES DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD



**1. THEY CAN AFFECT OUR SLEEP** – The blue light from mobile phones can negatively affect our sleep cycles if we use them irresponsibly at night. This can shorten our concentration spans and impact the way our bodies grow.

**2. THEY INCREASE SOCIAL PRESSURE** – Smartphones put more pressure on us to constantly communicate and check what our friends are up to. They also make it easier for bullies to get away with saying nasty things to people.

**3. SOME APPS CAN BE ADDICTIVE** – For some people, applications like Snapchat and games like *Candy Crush Saga* can lead to addictive patterns of behaviour that stop them from leading healthy lives.

## NO, MOBILE PHONES DO MORE GOOD THAN HARM



**1. THEY HELP US LEARN** – Phones can be used to help us with our homework, to check facts or even study a new language. Mobile phones help to keep us informed and make us smarter.

**2. THEY KEEP US CONNECTED** – Without mobile phones it would be really difficult to stay in touch with all the people we love. They can even help us in emergencies; maps help us if we get lost and we can always contact someone if quickly is we need help.

**3. THEY'RE FUN** – Films, music, games – mobile phones have it all and can be taken anywhere. This helps to make our lives consistently enjoyable as we are always just a few seconds away from downloading some entertaining content.

DISCUSS ?

Can you imagine a world without mobile phones? How would it be different?

DISCUSS ?

Would it be possible to stop people using mobile phones now?

DISCUSS ?

Do you think parents should have more control over what their children can do with their phones?

DISCUSS ?

Do you think technology companies should be more responsible with their products?

DISCUSS ?

Should there be more laws controlling what people can access on their phones?

DISCUSS ?

Do you try to limit the amount of time you spend on your mobile phone?

DISCUSS ?

What things would make using a mobile phone better?

