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People

There Is No 'Internet Addiction': An Interview with Professor Dans

By **Grese Sermaxhaj** - 7.10.2020

If one looks at the phone every few minutes, playing a game, communicating, monitoring the price of a share, watching the weather, looking at a map, taking or retouching a photograph, reading a newspaper or a book, listening to music, is it a symptom of internet addiction? "Addicted to what exactly? To life?" This is among the most powerful yet simple arguments professor Dans presents in his article 'There is no such thing as "internet addiction" '. We had a unique chance to ask Dans more questions on the topic!

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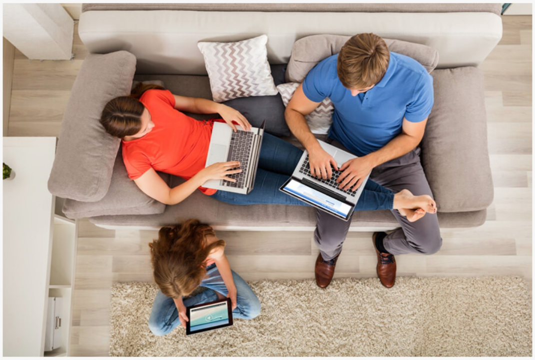

Internet addiction or new way of life

Internet as the friction remover

Professor Dans / Photo: Susana Alosete

In this interview with **Youth Time**, Enrique Dans, Ph.D., Professor of Innovation at IE Business School and blogger at enriquedans.com brings very interesting arguments about Internet Addiction, why it does not exist in the first place.

Dans, the senior contributor at Forbes, dwells on the idea that "the *internet addiction* is just a convenient lie that allows too many people to feel self-justified for not fulfilling their roles as educators."

He elaborates this viewpoint, as well as shares his say regarding how is it possible for a non-existent thing to gain this much attention and visibility worldwide. He shares the idea that some people are using technology and the internet as 'friction remover'.

Read on if you would like to see from another perspective and gain a critical eye regarding this issue.

No addiction, just the usual fear of technology

Dans believes that the myth of "technology or internet addiction" has been a constant in history across the many technology adoption processes humanity has gone through.

"Every time a new technology gets adopted, there's this fear of certain people, certain groups, the youngsters, etc. getting somehow "trapped" or "hooked" by them and becoming "addicted", as if the technology was some kind of drug," he says.

According to him, the difference between substance dependence and psychological dependence is pretty obvious, and that parallelism should be treated with more rigor and seriousness.

"People use technology when they find it convenient or nice to use, but they don't become "addicted", they just incorporate technology into their lives as they see fit. "

"Dopamine is not a drug, is a secretion of our body, and while it's true that people can enjoy dopamine release and try to obtain more of that through certain practices, such as social networking or video games, the same can be applied to, for instance, extreme sports, gambling or watching certain contents."

When 'Blaming the Internet' is more convenient

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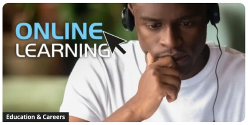

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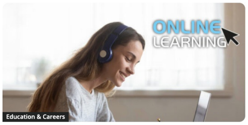

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As was the case with many universities, Wesleyan University was a men's only university. It became wholly co-educational only in 1970. We are talking about the university in Connecticut, USA. Not the university of the same name in the Philippines at the moment.

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We are used to traditional educational systems, but what do we know about informal, or as they're called – alternative educational systems? Read on to find out why their reputation is growing in contemporary times, as we give a specific perspective to Steiner

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Professor Dans / Photo: IE University

He went on by adding that the problem is that the protocols that regulate certain activities typically appear much later than the activity itself. For instance, in his words, by now, we consider gambling a problem, and we try to regulate it by imposing certain social rules (not at all effective).

“When the internet appears and people can start gambling there, these social controls vanish, and people can gamble all the time, as much as they want, and this can become problematic for certain people with low self-control.”

He suggests that these patterns are fought not by restricting the whole activity, but social protocols that are typically imposed via education.

“When a kid refuses to let go his or her smartphone because they are playing or browsing a social network, they don’t have a problem with any addiction, they are just not educated, what they are is ill-mannered: their parents have found it easier to inhibit themselves from educating them, and they find it more convenient to just *blame the internet*.”

“The myth of the “digital native” is a great culprit: many parents assume they can’t teach their kids anything about the internet because they see themselves as totally ignorant, so they decide to inhibit themselves.” he says.

He claims that this results in the following two:

- First of all, they love to believe their kids are some sort of “geniuses” because they master the technology without them (when, in fact, the technology has become so easy to use that anyone can “master” it).
- Second, that their kids grow not as “digital natives”, but as “digital orphans” that are forced to learn by themselves. They are not “addicts”, they just have been left to their own devices with no control whatsoever for too long. “

We must readapt education to the new context

While reading Dan’s article, the thing that grabbed my attention the most was the statement below:

“Internet is a medium, not an activity as such… the internet is a vehicle, not a condition”.

However, does this imply that we just project our true selves into internet activities and we are the ones to hold accountable, not the internet to blame?

I consider myself lucky enough that he addressed my dilemma, by concluding the following;

“The internet is a great friction remover: it allows us to engage in many activities that previously would have required more things, such as being physically present, or together, or closer to certain resources, etc.”

The activity becomes independent

He recalls that suddenly, we can get to know what our friends are doing without having to call them, talk to them, or without getting together, just by moving our fingertips through the smooth surface of a screen.

“This means that the activity becomes independent from previous restrictions, and can be done at any given time. But, the same way we used to educate our children and get them to understand they cannot play with their friends all the time, go shopping all the time or eat candy at all times, we still need to educate them that they cannot be using social networks or playing video games all the time.”

Instead, Dans went on, many parents find it convenient to use technology as “the ultimate babysitter”.

“They [parents] prefer to skip their duties as educators. Unless we readapt education to the new context, we will fail to prepare the new generation to deal with it.”

“The worst case is France and its decision to forbid smartphones in schools: how do you expect kids to learn how to benefit from a technology that is going to be in their hands throughout their whole life if you refuse to integrate it into the educational process and condemn kids to learn it on their own? *It is just absurd!"*

We need to educate kids in critical thinking

Children need to learn technology

In addition to pointing out what's odd with *internet addiction*, Dans shares with us some advice regarding how youth can take full advantage of technology.

"We need to deal with technology as we deal with any other contextual variable." he asserts.

"Teach them how to understand what technology does, its effects, etc. pretty much the same way we teach them how to play or how to eat: we don't just allow kids to play all the time, or to eat only what they want to eat."

CRITICAL
THINKING

The necessity of critical thinking is not less important

Technology is the same: it requires some control and discipline. He is of the opinion that in the beginning, such control and discipline should be exerted by parents, educators, teachers, etc. until kids learn how to exert a certain degree of self-control.

"This process involves necessarily introducing technology- smartphones, computers, etc. – in the educational process, putting chargers in their desks and tables and using smartphones instead of textbooks, so that kids learn that a smartphone allows them to search for information and educate their critical thinking, learning how to spot fake news, etc."

"Get them to understand that the truth is not in any textbook (relying on just one source of information makes them far easier to manipulate), the truth is out there on the web and you need to be educated in how to find it."

"We need to educate kids in critical thinking."

Photos: IE University, Susana Alosete, Shutterstock

We at **Youth Time** have discussed several times the immense impact that technology is having in our lives. Of course, this is not 'black-or-white thinking', however, we all agree that being *Digitally Aware* is of crucial importance:

Digital Awareness, as Part of Today's Survival Kit

After we process the impact that technology is having on us, it is only natural to move forward to understand how to use it to improve our daily lives. This article will discuss strategies to establish a more definitive relationship with technology, noting that what has come to be known as 'digital awareness' is one the most important skills one ought to have in today's world.

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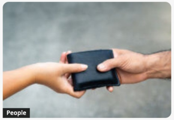

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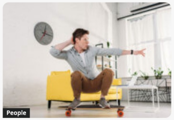

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