

# OPINION

## Why Are Certain Apps So Addictive?

BY ETHAN LANGEMO

**F**ACEBOOK. Snapchat. Instagram. Twitter. Clash of Clans. Boom Beach. Reddit. Covet Fashion. iFunny :). These are just a few popular smartphone apps which have continued to capture the attention of users throughout the world for several years... The question is, for better, or for worse?

What are some effects of smartphone addiction, and why are we addicted? A study shown at the Radiological Society of North America conference showed that the brain chemistry of teenagers who were classified as cell phone/social media addicts possessed an altered brain chemistry, most noticeably in reward areas of the brain such as the nucleus accumbens, compared to non-addict individuals.

Another study by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) found that suicide rates for teenage girls increased by 65 percent between the years of 2010 and 2015, as well as severe depression diagnoses which also increased by 58 percent, and that there is a strong correlation with a growth of smartphone media activities. The same study found that teenagers who spend their time doing other things such as athletics, school work, or religious activities had lower risks for depression and suicide.

One trait about people that app developers have learned to take advantage of, is that when it comes to our relationship with technology and media, we want to be entertained and addicted. We want something to lure us in. Apps will send us push notifications to notify us when someone likes our post or a band is going live, and platforms like *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *Snapchat* draw

you in with a feature called “stories,” where you can publicly post something for a limited time, making you want to check in often to make sure you’re keeping up to date with everyone.

One of the most basic features of social media apps could perhaps be the most diabolical of all: the pull-and-release app refresh. It works the same way as a slot machine, and uses a psychological concept known as variable-ratio schedule; when you pull down the lever on a slot machine, or pull down on the app to refresh, you may or may not be rewarded with a few posts, half a day’s worth of content, or nothing at all. The main difference is that with slots, you play until you can no longer pay to play, or you choose to quit. Your only payments for refreshing an app are your time and desperation for new gossip.

We love our phones so much because we can customize how and by what we are entertained. This is why we have displaced much of our time from TV to smart devices. It is not that we are saving more time in our lives by not watching as much TV; rather, it is simply a matter of us changing our attention from one medium of entertainment to another.

So what can we take from this? We can certainly accept that we have fallen victim to the machines in our pockets and recognize the psychological effects of what we have allowed to capture us. However, we can also look at this as accepting this as the new culture, in which we integrate ourselves into each other’s lives and the internet, while balancing on the thin blade between staying grounded in reality or fully investing in digital sensation. †

## Standardized Testing is Failing our Students

BY JULIA FOLZ

**T**HE EDUCATION SYSTEM is controlled by those who make the text books, tests, and rubrics. Students and teachers are not the sole focus of the education system, instead it is money. As a country we force our students to take several standardized tests in their lifetimes. Some are on a national level, such as the ACT and SAT, and some are on a more local level, such as final exams.

According to Education Next, a journalistic website dedicated specifically to issues in education, there was a plan put into place to try to make all of the standardized testing the same across the nation. The plan was called Constoria and while many states agreed to it, but many did not. Education Next states that some consider the initiative as, “...a dangerous or even unconstitutional expansion of federal control of education,” which is a common concern.

We also have to look at who is writing the tests for our students. The Atlantic reported that across the nation, tests generally come from one of three companies, those being Cengage McGraw Hill, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and Pearson. These three companies sell the text books, write the tests, and assign value to knowledge.

By giving this much power to the companies that benefit from standardized testing we are taking the power of educators away. These companies are determining what our students should learn, when they should learn it, and how quickly the curriculum needs to move in order for the students to grasp everything in the given textbook. These companies do not have education degrees and are not looking at what is best for the students. They are concerned with what will make them more money, which is more testing.

Originally, standardized testing was created to see if students were improving throughout the year. This can actually be used to the students and

educators advantage because it can help teachers to see if certain teaching strategies are working well or not. However, as a country we have put too much trust into these tests.

Standardized testing is also still in use do to the fact that it is believed to be less biased. The creators of standardized tests saw that there were differences in how short and long-answer questions were graded. For example, a student may know and understand the concept, but they may have poor writing skills. If this student can’t articulate what the answer is, they are likely to receive a lower score. While the simple multiple choice questions do eliminate some of the bias in grading, there can still be bias in how the questions are written. Since the companies that write the tests also grade them and sell textbooks, there is bias in the system itself. The exam writers have their own agenda, which is to generate revenue.

Another significant problem with standardized testing is that it gives an unfair advantage to students who come from wealthier families. The students who can afford tutors, test prep, and better schools will likely do better than the students that can’t.

The Chronicle of Higher Education reported that “Many minority students attend schools that are under-resourced, have high student-to-teacher ratios, have no AP courses, and are lacking in tutoring and counseling services. This places them at a distinct disadvantage and generates a small pool of minority students with high ACT or SAT scores.”

Standardized testing dictates our education system, hurting our students and disabling our educators while benefiting the textbook suppliers. Our education system needs to be about the students, and not about putting more money into the rich man’s pocket. †