

**Question:** “Social media is nothing more than a distraction.” Discuss.

**Step 1: Identify your key words in the question**

- **“Social media”** – give examples: Twitter, FB, Youtube, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.
- **“Distraction”** – from what? Distraction from studies (from students’ POV), distraction from work (adults’ POV), distraction from real news? (For the public – especially with the new concern over the spread of fake news)
- **“Nothing more”** – this prompts you to consider the multitude of functions that these social media platforms have

**Step 2: Setting up your conditions**

Ask yourself:

1. Is this an **absolute question**? (Are there absolute terms such as “definitely”, “always”, “constantly”, “will”, etc.)
2. Does it require that you set conditions for **when something would happen**?

Yes, it is an absolute question because it contains the absolute term “nothing more than”. Surely, if you think closely enough, you would realize that these social media platforms are more than just tools to distract you.

3. So the question comes now: **under what conditions do social media become a form of distraction?**

**\*\*\*SOCIAL MEDIA BECOMES A DISTRACTION WHEN:\*\*\***

1. The person using it **does not practice self-control** and limits his usage on these platforms
2. The individual on social media platforms do not browse these websites to **gaining greater knowledge** about what is happening in the world around him?
3. The individual on social media platforms are viewing content that **will not contribute to making him a better, more informed, well-aware person?**
4. The individual is **abusing the anonymity on social media platforms** to post up fake news, distract others online by posting hurtful insults or slanderSing others, etc.
5. The person uses social media at **inappropriate times and places** (school, lesson time, working hours, etc.)

**So as long as these conditions are NOT** fulfilled, does it mean that social media platforms can actually serve more purposely functions than being a distraction?

<u><b>Yes</b></u> , social media is a distraction if/when...	<u><b>No</b></u> , social media has other useful functions as well...
<p>1. Social media can be a major distraction for both students and professionals when the individual is <u><b>unable to practice self-control and spends excessive amount of time</b></u> on these platforms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Despite the fact that there is <u><b>no actual medical diagnosis for the existence</b></u> of a “social media addiction”, the trends of destructive habits/behavioural traits that certain social media users have → <u><b>garnered the attention of researches to delve deeper into this issue</b></u></li> <li>⇒ Social media can pose as a huge distraction for many people today because of how influential of a role it plays in our lives today</li> <li>⇒ Most of the communication we do in today’s world is done online, through these exact same platforms</li> <li>⇒ We know about our friends’ and idols lives through the pictures they post on Instagram, the snippets from their day’s activities uploaded on Snapchat, their thoughts through their tweets</li> <li>⇒ When social media offers so much entertaining content from all around the world, it is <u><b>increasingly difficult to resist the temptations</b></u> of these sites</li> <li>⇒ <u><b>Distractions posed by SMPs can be serious consequences on both academics and professional lives</b></u></li> </ul>	<p>1. Social media platforms are <u><b>effective communication tools</b></u> to <u><b>allow critical debates and engaging discussions</b></u> between individuals from all around the world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ The <u><b>globalized nature</b></u> of the Internet and thus these SMPs has broadened both the scope of discussions held online and who are the people involved in these discussions</li> <li>⇒ These <u><b>widely accessible international platforms</b></u> therefore allow individuals to exchange diverse opinions on a large spectrum of topics</li> <li>⇒ Social media platforms can engage <u><b>large audiences</b></u> across the globe on a <u><b>diverse range of topics</b></u>, gathering <u><b>interesting opinions</b></u> in free debates on the latest contemporary news and issues → getting <u><b>refreshing insights</b></u> and being able to understand <u><b>various perspectives</b></u></li> </ul> <p>2. Social media platforms are good way to keep in contact with your loved ones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Especially when in today’s societies, people are often kept busy on very hectic schedules, catching up with one another over meals/outings are increasingly harder</li> <li>⇒ It can be a heartening experience to see updates from loved ones on SMPs: a convenient way to know what is going on with those around us that we care about</li> </ul> <p>3. Social media platforms are also ways for people to communicate with their governments/representatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Many officials and authority figures have Twitter, Instagram or Facebook accounts that are regularly updated</li> <li>⇒ They understand the power of social media platforms in communicating with their people and understanding the challenges that their people may face</li> <li>⇒ Social media platforms also serve as a convenient and flexible space for citizens to air their concerns, though one should ensure that it is within respectful boundaries</li> </ul> <p>4. Social media platforms for charity purposes? To get help in one’s personal issues? (Lost and found?)</p>

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## *New York Times: It's Time for Apple to Build a Less Addictive iPhone*

Farhad Manjoo

JAN. 17, 2018

It's not Apple's fault that you feel enslaved by your phone. But the company that gave the world the modern smartphone has a perfect opportunity this year to create a brave and groundbreaking new take on that device: a phone that encourages you to use it more thoughtfully, more deliberately — and a lot less.

Tech “addiction” is a topic of rising national concern. I put the A-word in quotes because the precise pull that our phones exert over us isn't the same as that of drugs or alcohol. The issue isn't really new, either; researchers who study how we use digital technology have for years been warning of its potential negative effects on our cognition, psyche and well-being.

What is new is who has joined the ranks of the worried. Recently, a parade of tech luminaries, including several former Facebook employees, have argued that we're no match for the sophisticated machinery of engagement and persuasion being built into smartphone apps. Their fears are manifold: They're worried about distraction, productivity, how social networks alter our emotional lives and relationships, and what they're doing to children.

It's hard to know what to make of these confessions of regret. Come on, guys — you gave us these wondrous machines, you made billions of dollars from their ubiquity, and *now* you tell us they're bad?

Also, what do we do about it?

Like air pollution or intrusive online advertising, tech addiction is a collective-action problem caused by misaligned incentives. Companies that make money from your attention — that is, ad-supported apps like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube — now employ armies of people who work with supercomputers to hook you ever more deeply into their services. Sure, we should call on them to act more ethically — and Facebook, for its part, has said it's willing to lose money to improve its users' well-being — but I'm skeptical they'll be able to suppress their economic interests.

Government regulation and more restraint from users might also help, but the former is unlikely and the latter is insufficient. So who's left?

The same company that always seems to turn up when it's time to cross into a new era of technology: Apple.

I got to thinking about Apple's responsibility last week when two large investors wrote an open letter asking the company to do more about its products' effects on children. I was initially inclined to dismiss the letter as a publicity stunt; if you're worried about children and tech, why not go after Facebook?

But when I called several experts, I found they agreed with the investors. Sure, they said, Apple isn't responsible for the excesses of the digital ad business, but it does have a moral responsibility to — and a business interest in — the well-being of its customers.

And there's another, more important reason for Apple to take on tech addiction: because it would probably do an elegant job of addressing the problem.

"I do think this is their time to step up," said Tristan Harris, a former design ethicist at Google who now runs Time Well Spent, an organization working to improve technology's impact on society.

"In fact," Mr. Harris added, "they may be our only hope."

For one thing, Apple's business model does not depend on tech addiction. The company makes most of its money by selling premium devices at high profit margins. Yes, it needs to make sure you find your phone useful enough to buy the next one, but after you purchase your phone and sign up for some of its premium services, Apple doesn't really need you to overdo it. Indeed, because it can't make infinite battery life, Apple would probably be O.K. if you cooled it with your phone a little.

Yet even though Apple is not part of the ad business, it exerts lots of control over it. Every tech company needs a presence on the iPhone or iPad; this means that Apple can set the rules for everyone. With a single update to its operating system and its app store, Apple could curb some of the worst excesses in how apps monitor and notify you to keep you hooked (as it has done, for instance, by allowing ad blockers in its mobile devices). And because other smartphone makers tend to copy Apple's best inventions, whatever it did to curb our dependence on our phones would be widely emulated.

Mr. Harris suggested several ideas for Apple to make a less-addictive smartphone. For starters, Apple could give people a lot more feedback about how they're using their devices.

Imagine if, once a week, your phone gave you a report on how you spent your time, similar to how your activity tracker tells you how sedentary you were last week. It could also needle you: "Farhad, you spent half your week scrolling through Twitter. Do you really feel proud of that?" It could offer to help: "If I notice you spending too much time on Snapchat next week, would you like me to remind you?"

Another idea is to let you impose more fine-grained controls over notifications. Today, when you let an app send you mobile alerts, it's usually an all-or-nothing proposition — you say yes to letting it buzz you, and suddenly it's buzzing you all the time.

Mr. Harris suggested that Apple could require apps to assign a kind of priority level to their notifications. "Let's say you had three notification levels — heavy users, regular users and lite, or Zen," Mr. Harris said.

Apple could set rules for what kind of notifications were allowed in each bucket — for instance, the medium bucket might allow notifications generated by other people (like a direct message in Instagram) but not those from the app itself (Instagram just sending you an alert to remind you that your high school friend's mom's brother posted a new picture recently).

“And then Apple could say, by default, everyone is in the middle level — and instantly it could save a ton of users a ton of energy in dealing with this,” Mr. Harris said.

There’s a danger that some of these anti-addiction efforts could get too intrusive. But that’s also why Apple would shine here; building a less-addictive phone is chiefly a problem of interface design, which is basically Apple’s entire corporate *raison d’être*.

Another thing that Apple is good at is marketing, and I suspect it could make a lot of gauzy ads showing people getting more out of iPhones and iPads by unplugging from them for a little while. Note that it already sells a device, the Apple Watch, whose marketing extols the magic of leaving your phone behind.

Done right, a full-fledged campaign pushing the benefits of a more deliberative approach to tech wouldn’t come off as self-interest, but in keeping with Apple’s best vision of itself — as a company that looks out for the interests of humanity in an otherwise cold and sometimes inhumane industry.

“How we live with technology is the cultural issue of the next half-century,” said James Steyer, the founder and chief executive of Common Sense Media, a nonprofit group that studies how children are affected by media.

He suggested that the feeling was ripe for Apple to tap into. “It’s something that everyone cares about — whether you’re a Republican or a Democrat, liberal or conservative, whether you live in San Francisco or Biloxi, Miss., you know that you and your kids are part of the arms race for attention,” he said.

Apple released a statement last week saying it cared deeply “about how our products are used and the impact they have on users and the people around them,” adding that it had a few features on addiction in the works.

Apple hardly ever talks about future products, so it declined to elaborate on any of its ideas when I called. Let’s hope it’s working on something grand.

## **New York Times: A Call to Cut Back Online Addictions. Pitted Against Just One More Click**

By EMILY COCHRANE FEB. 4, 2018

WASHINGTON — As part of a monthlong challenge to declutter her digital life, Kristi Kremers vowed she would cut off her online addictions: Instagram, Facebook and the news websites she checks hourly.

Her resolve dissolved within days. She checked the Drudge Report, “a one-stop shop,” she admitted, for all of her news updates. She caved with Facebook, using the network to coordinate birthday plans (“When it’s your birthday, it’s like the best Facebook day ever,” she said). And then she gave in to the allure of her social media feed to keep tabs on the Minnesota Vikings through the N.F.L. playoffs.

“I was basically set up for failure from the beginning,” Ms. Kremers, an employee at the University of Minnesota, said with a laugh. “Going completely cold turkey in all of these different realms at once was too much.”

The challenge through January was issued by Cal Newport, an associate professor of computer science at Georgetown University. Mr. Newport, who runs a blog about managing digital productivity, encouraged his thousands of readers to remove every piece of digital interaction that wasn’t critical to their work and lives. At the month’s end, he instructed, slowly add everything back in.

“It’s like cleaning out your whole house and deciding, ‘O.K., what do I want to put back into the house?’” Mr. Newport said. His own online weakness, he said, is baseball trading rumors.

He assured his followers that there was no reason to eliminate anything essential: email for work, checking finances, staying in touch with family. Don’t get rid of anything that would jeopardize work or family.

With Silicon Valley under pressure to address the addictive quality of its innovations, Mr. Newport described his informal experiment as a way for people to control their digital intake, particularly since the 2016 presidential election. It sought to address what he described as a widespread complaint: There’s too much news. I need a break.

That is a particularly dominant complaint in Washington, he said, where President Trump’s proclivity for one certain online medium — Twitter — can dictate at least a day of news and reaction.

“There’s a lot of complexity and uncertainty in the role that these technologies should play in personal and professional life,” Mr. Newport said. “We’re past the stage where they’re novel, but not to the point where they’re stable.”

He estimated that nearly 2,000 people worldwide said they would participate in his challenge, tailoring their restrictions to match their work demands but hoping to at least limit their daily diet of news and social media.

At her university in Borås, Sweden, Elin Hedin, 23, stopped using Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Messenger and Instagram. She also tried to limit the amount of time she browsed websites.

In the first week, it felt like a vacation and she slept better. But then, she said, the loneliness kicked in.

“I’ve often felt isolated, and kind of lonely,” she wrote in an email. “I miss reading about people’s days, seeing what they’re up to on Instagram, reading about their opinions on the latest news, and so on.”

“I guess I’m just used to getting that extra bit of socializing,” she added.

For Anya Mushakevich, a 20-year-old Belarusian studying at the University of Pennsylvania, the lack of online socializing made clear which of her friends abroad would make the effort to stay in touch outside the convenience of Facebook. Who among her circle in Belarus or in Singapore, where she attended high school, would take the time to find her email or phone number?

“I feel more invested in the time I spend with people. And because we interact less frequently, we have this idea that we want to make the most of the experience,” said Ms. Mushakevich, who says she is unlikely to reinstall the Facebook app on her phone. “That makes it seem more meaningful than if we had all of the time in the world, like we do on Facebook.”

Mr. Newport continues to send messages of daily encouragement to readers who participated in his challenge. It made most realize, he said, how dependent they had become on websites and mobile phone apps.

“Their role in your life has grown without your permission,” he said. “No one had that in mind when they signed up for Facebook to stay in touch with their college roommate.”

A majority of the people who reported back to Mr. Newport with their results in unplugging noted that they had picked up new hobbies: painting, exercise, the opportunity to write a book. They said they also imposed strict guidelines to keep themselves from slipping: Keep the phone charger in another room. Ask the people texting to instead please call. Stop the reflex click to a favorite sports website instead of focusing on work.

Ms. Kremers, who gave up early in the challenge, says she plans to try again later in the year, with a better understanding of how easy it is to slip into old habits.

“I think it’s a beautiful idea, really,” she said. “It demands a new form of resilience from us.”