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Abstract: This article documents a personal experience in monitoring and tracking phone usage and social media addiction to reduce time wastage, improve productivity, and improve physical, mental, and psychological well-being and social interactions with humans and nature.

Keywords: Social Media, Mobile Phone, Facebook, WhatsApp, Social Media Detox

1 Introduction

Do you ever feel like your phone controls you more than you can control it? I've been there, and I know how overwhelming it can feel. In this article, I will also share my personal experience with social media and phone addiction, the results of a LinkedIn poll I conducted, the personal insights from my mobile phone tracking data, and the steps I've taken to regain control. Time is a priceless resource, as Myles Munroe rightfully said. Time can be wasted on less productive habits and behaviors such as mindless scrolling on the phone, satisfying the gratification of the mind and soul, and emotions that do not make you realize the full potential you have. Time wasted is never regained. (Munroe, 1991). In today's information age, the race for access to data, knowledge, and wisdom has become a priority for everyone. People strive to stay ahead by accessing the latest information in real-time, 24/7. Guess what, the Internet, mobile phone, and social media growth is accelerating at a high rate like never before. GenY/GenZ kids and the millennials alike are caught in between, and even everyone is competing for this recognition in the world of fake faces, smiles, and photos on social media, with no genuine display of real feelings and /or affections to each other. A like or love emoji on your photo or post does not mean someone genuinely cares for you, it's because they casually feel compelled to give that show because you are their digital friend. We have seen the positives and downsides of how mobile phones and social media have impacted a lot of people: from fake news to emotionally tempering stories, memes, and videos that could trigger a wider reaction, commenting, sharing, and even cyber-crime is thriving behind these scenes. (Alter, 2017) (Hari, 2022).

The world of portability and mobility has created social disarray and disorder among human beings. Our precious time, attention, money, and focus are constantly being tugged in all directions by the relentless pull of social media and our ever-present mobile phones. This has caused a degeneration in social norms: from order into chaos, from being responsible to becoming irresponsible, as

Apostle Paul writes in his epistle to the Roman church, describing people who acted amoral, anything is neither good nor bad, it's based on what they feel or perceive, or what person does: they have a reprobate mind, to do things which are not right (Romans 1:28, emphasis added). Persistent distractions have a demanding effect on your attention on the road, consuming so much of your abilities and potential that can be realized for a greater purpose for the good of humanity and mankind, thus giving you greater satisfaction and meaning in life, long-term (Munroe, 1991) (Peterson, 2022).

This article focuses on my journey from being a simple homeboy to being influenced by the world of technology, mobile phones, and social media and attempting to detox myself from the mess I found myself in. It provides a practical guide and lessons on how to break free from the constraints of social media and nomophobia (the fear of being without a mobile phone) (Alter, 2017). Today, many of us have become excessive technophiles, surrendering a significant part of our lives to technology, particularly social media, and cell phones, which can feel like a new false deity (Postman, 1993). The goal is to become a true human being who does not seek validation from superficial friends and connections but cultivates genuine relationships. This journey can help ignite the potential hidden deep within us for the greater good of all humanity (Munroe, 1991).

This article is structured as follows:

Section 1 presents the introduction. Section 2 provides key statistics on social media usage and cell phone numbers in Papua New Guinea (PNG). In Section 3, I documented and described in brief my transformative journey from village to school, showcasing the profound influence of technology. Section 4 discusses the significant impacts of social media and cell phone addiction, drawing from my personal experiences. Section 5 offers highlights the candid exploration of my struggles with social media and mobile phone usage. Section 6 provides and discusses insightful results from LinkedIn polls, accompanied by a brief analysis. Section 7 discusses the proven strategies I implemented to overcome addiction, including effective monitoring of my usage and decisive actions taken. Section 8 provides concluding insights and strong recommendations, offering practical tips for breaking free from the shackles of social media and cell phone dependence. Section 9 lists essential bibliographic resources that provide valuable insights and support for this discussion.

2 Bigger Picture: PNG Stats

But first, let's begin with an overview of digital stats for Papua New Guinea at large and see how PNG is heading in terms of digital connection and inclusivity. Here's a summary of the key 2024 digital adoption and use data in Papua New Guinea, along with comparisons to the population presented by the Datareportal website (Kemp, 2024):

2.1 Population Overview (2024)

- Total Estimated Population: 10.42 million
- **Population Growth:** Increased by 186,000 (+1.8%) from 2023 to 2024
- **Gender Split:** 48.5% female, 51.5% male
- **Urban vs Rural:** 13.8% urban, 86.2% rural
- **Median Age:** 22.3 years

2.2 Digital Adoption in Early 2024

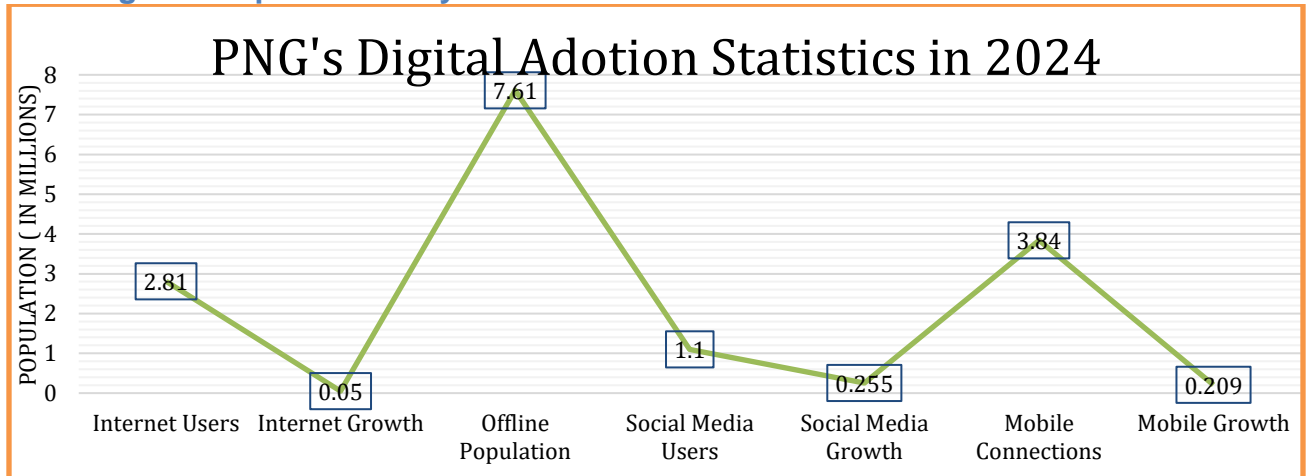


Figure 2.1: PNG's Digital Adoption Statistics 2024.

- **Internet Users:** 2.81 million (27% of the population)
 - **Growth:** Increased by 50,000 (+1.8%) from 2023
 - **Offline Population:** 73% of the population (7.61 million)
- **Social Media Users:** 1.10 million (10.6% of the population)
 - **Growth:** Increased by 255,000 (+30.2%) from 2023
 - Internet Users with social media: 39.1% of Internet users
 - **Gender Split:** 37.8% female, 62.2% male
- **Mobile Connections:** 3.84 million (36.9% of the population)
 - **Growth:** Increased by 209,000 (+5.8%) from 2023

2.3 Popular Social Media Platforms

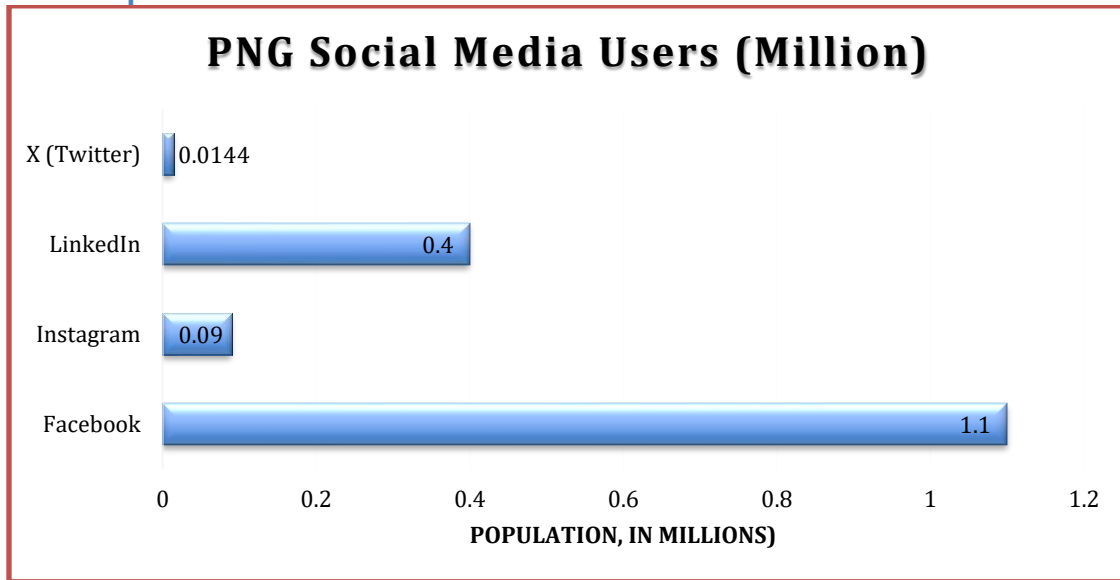


Figure 2.2: Popular Social Media Platform used by PNGeans.

- **Facebook:** 1.10 million users (10.6% of the population)
 - **Growth:** Increased by 255,000 (+30.2%) from 2023
 - **Gender Split:** 37.8% female, 62.2% male
- **Instagram:** 90,000 users (0.9% of the population)
 - **Growth:** Increased by 31,000 (+52.7%) from 2023
- **LinkedIn:** 400,000 members (3.8% of the population)
 - **Growth:** Increased by 90,000 (+29%) from 2023
- **X (Twitter):** 14,400 users (0.1% of the population)
 - **Growth:** Increased by 313 (+2.2%) from 2023

2.4 PNG Mobile Phone and Internet Use Data Analysis

- **Digital Penetration:** With only 27% Internet penetration and 10.6% social media users, PNG remains a relatively under-connected country. The potential for growth in both sectors is significant.
- **Rural Connectivity:** The vast majority (86.2%) of the population lives in rural areas, highlighting a major challenge for Internet and digital services accessibility.
- **Social Media Growth:** Social media use is growing rapidly (+30.2% in 2024).
- **Mobile Connectivity:** A substantial portion of the population (36.9%) has mobile connections, indicating a strong potential for mobile-based services.
- **Age Demographics:** With a median age of 22.3, PNG's population is relatively young, which aligns with the increasing use of digital platforms, especially social media.

2.5 Summary of PNG Social Media and Phone Usage Data

As of early 2024, PNG's digital landscape saw growth in Internet and Social Media usage, with 2.81 million people now having access to Internet and mobile services (27% of the total population). Roughly 1.1 million of the 2.8 total are actively using social media. The surge in social media accessibility and activity indicates increasing digital growth, which can potentially have positive and negative impacts on society.

As the number of social media users grows, so does the potential for phone addiction. About 3.84 million population now have access to mobile phones, implying that people are increasingly reliance on their portable devices for connectivity, entertainment, and other digitally enhanced services for survival or leisure/pleasure. This growing dependency raises concerns about the impact of social media and phone usage and their impact on mental health, productivity, and social interactions, as many users spend significant time scrolling through the apps and checking notifications. While not downplaying the positive significance of mobile phones and social media as valuable tools for communication, information sharing, and e-commerce (social commerce), it also poses a challenge to personal well-being. It is essential to strike a delicate balance between digital engagement and real-life interactions. This balance is key to promoting healthier lifestyles and preventing addictive digital experiences from overwhelming individuals. Many people may be suffering in silence, struggling to break free and make significant changes in their lives. To shed light on this issue, I will share my personal experience, which may provide valuable insight into the broader challenges faced by those caught in this daily struggle.

3 My Journey to Technology: from Analog to Digital

I bought my first one-band Nokia mobile phone after completing grade 10, three years after Digicel came distributing their phones at our local station and began setting up their network. I use the phone mainly to play games, for light at night, and in preparation to communicate with my parents when I continue my boarding school, which is in another district away from home.

As I continued to do my grade 11, I upgraded my phone to a Motorola 1 band, but this time, it had basic Internet searching capabilities to allow for web browsing, and so I sometimes, as a matter of being curious, I used to buy a Flex card to try out maybe at least once a month. But due to strict school rules, phones were not allowed on school premises. Anyone caught in possession of a mobile phone would face severe penalties, including termination from school immediately, so I left my phone with our church elders in the church area. I only use the phone on weekends when I go to church to call my parents or family at home. Sometimes, I tried to sneak the phone to the school, but the fear of being caught and terminated became so obvious that I would return it after a day or so. This strong discipline at school enables me not to have much time on the phone for two years.

Then came the major shift, after completing my grade 12, I was selected to go to a tertiary school. There, as my other cousins who came some years before would say to me, this is freedom, nobody will tell you what's best for you. You have to have discipline and get your priorities right. By then, though still a newbie to the world of technology, computers, mobile phones, the Internet, etc., I embarked on this journey into the unknown, leaving behind my familiar village world to an unfamiliar one, the one that would later become my new norm of living.

By then, I upgraded my phone to another Nokia phone, although it has both button and touchscreen capabilities. I was still yet a newbie, so not much interest was given to that, but I noticed that I began to feel attracted to my phone: I made a lot of friends now at school, a new environment far away from home, so I thought I got to stay connected to get away from this homesick feeling. So, we exchanged phone numbers, texted each other, made calls, and took photos and selfies, but I was not introduced well to social media platforms during my first year. After completing the first-year foundation course, I found my name on the list students who would be streaming to undertake Diploma in course and then with further option for advancement to Bachelors' Degree the year later if successful.

It was during this time that I created my first Gmail account, which I still use to date. I also created my Facebook account, seeking to make online friends so that we can share pictures and make and read comments. I felt like when I uploaded a cute picture and got many views, likes, and comments, I was hyped. It validates the idea that I am handsome, and also, whenever I upload a picture, I have to make sure it's the best one. Anything less than that will not be uploaded but kept as another storage eater for my phone and also for memories or further reference. A year later, I created my first LinkedIn, mainly to update my profile as we are about to look for industrial training opportunities with companies. Although I had access to YouTube the same year I created my Gmail account, I only used it on my laptop or in the school's computer lab for schoolwork purposes. Many years later, YouTube has become my go-to streaming site for videos, music, news, sports, and other media content.

After completing my studies and getting into professional work life, I began to use WhatsApp more frequently just a couple of years ago. And WhatsApp too is now replacing other usual means of communication, such as SMS or calls via normal mobile phone applications. I also became so interested in content creation that I frequently updated new content, mainly on church activities, items, preachings, and teachings on my YouTube channel (later renamed to Bata Des Inspirations). Emails were connected to phones, all work files became portable with a click of the button on your phone, and work can be done anywhere, anytime, so long as the network and data connection is active. Notifications were frequently popping up every day, offering no hope for resistance to check the phone and react or respond to the notification, either a call, text, Facebook or WhatsApp notification, email, or phone update. All was too good to ignore. Social Media notifications were hard to resist, especially when you know you just posted something. They validate

how others perceive you, your social status, or you're standing among the community of your lifeless friends connected by Facebook or other social media platforms. More views, likes, comments, shares, loves, and many other reactionary emojis are some of the fake validating tools to make you soar up to "cloud nine" emotionally within a matter of a short time.

4 Impact of social media and phone addiction on my journey

As I continued on my journey of using digital technologies and services every day, I was baffled by how much of the surrendering of my time, my lifestyle, my culture, and so much I have given over to technology without being aware of it. This has got me thinking about myself and how I became so addicted to my cell phone and social media, which are considered to be enticing and addictive technology (Alter, 2017). Like many, I constantly scrolled, checked notifications, and lost hours on my phone. Over time, I noticed how this habit affected my focus, relationships, and overall well-being. Realizing the negative impact was the first step toward change. I began to realize my mobile phone is becoming a priceless possession and is becoming glued to me wherever I go. I can hardly go without a phone, and whilst I am bored, I just aimlessly pick up a phone to scroll through, pretending to send texts, make calls, or check through the gallery for videos or images to keep my mind busy and pretending as if I am in communion with someone. But in reality, I was growing socially distant away from being connected to people intimately while conversing without the need for a phone unless a call came in for work-related matters or other important planned commitments prior then I would excuse myself to take the call. I felt like this endless mobile phone scrolling was disturbing me from developing my full potential and maximizing the time for the best of what is more important to me than the phone itself.

To understand what addiction means, let's travel back in time to its origin in ancient Rome, where borrowers unable to repay, debts were sentenced to the servitude of addiction until their debts were cleared. This concept has evolved to represent any hard-to-break bond. Addiction signifies a deep attachment to experiences, whether positive or negative and often reflects passion. Being an addict implied a strong enthusiasm for activities like eating or reading, but the term has since become broader. Behavioral addictions do not involve substance use but manifest when individuals cannot resist certain behaviors that temporarily meet psychological needs yet lead to long-term harm. As in social media and cell phones, such excessive use can decrease productivity, increase anxiety, and disrupt sleep. Research has shown a connection between phone addiction and mental health issues, underscoring the need for mindful technology use (Alter, 2017).

Further negative consequences of the addictive behavior may include interference with the performance of life roles (e.g., job, social activities, or hobbies),

impairment of social relationships, criminal activity, and legal problems, involvement in dangerous situations, physical injury and impairment, financial loss, or emotional trauma (Alter, 2017). This shift to mobile devices is dangerous because a device that travels with you is always a better vehicle for addiction. (Alter, 2017). Here are some of my personal experiences of the negative impact mobile phones and social media have had on me:

- Time management issue: I noticed I am so hooked up that every 2 minutes, I had to just check my phone for no good reason. Even if I am at work, my other hand would be busy on my laptop; my left hand would just reach out to check the phone. This happened to me for two years until late last year. I began wondering what was wrong, and so every time I was tempted to put my hand on the phone, I paused and asked what's this for. My quality time that I need to use for other important things is just wasted. At the end of the day, I would sit back and ask myself what did I do today with my time? Did I use it effectively to bring out the best potential in me, or just waste it unnecessarily on my mobile phone or social media?
- Psychological effect: I had a very sharp memory I could remember things for a long period. Even a social media image or post that I see can get stuck in my mind and affect the way I think about that thing. Worse is, videos or movies painted a mental picture in me that it would take a long time to erase, especially bad stuff like violence. Sometimes, when seeing these things, I would just react unnecessarily to a post, and it would affect my emotional balance. For example, seeing a bad post or image would just cause me to get angry and so bad, leading to emotional drama.
- Financial effects: On average, I would spend K100 a month to buy phone credits and data. In my monthly budget, I budgeted this much for mobile services subscription mainly to do work at home in the night and on weekends.
- Sleep Impact: I realized that the longer I looked on the phone, the bright lights affected me and my sleep time. I found myself sleeping less, waking up late, and tired in the morning due to the late-night use of my cell phone. I put my phone next to my pillow, in short, I couldn't sleep without a phone by my side. Every phone notification would wake me up. My phone is always on 24/7, except in cases where the battery is flat out due to a power outage. Sometimes, I found it so hard to sleep, and I would stay awake till 4 AM and then sleep for a while and get up at 6 AM and get ready for the day. This affects my productivity level at work, sometimes, I become drowsy during the day, my thinking capacity becomes dull, and I tend to lose the true intelligence that I was born with.
- Relationship: I also noticed I had a lot of fake friends who I could connect to via mobile phone or social media and only a few genuine friends that I interact with daily with genuine love, concern, and mutual benefit, and those fake ones are giving me a lot of emotional distress that made over react unnecessary sometimes.

5 The Problem: My Struggle with Mobile Phone and Social Media

Just a year ago, it dawned on me that I noticed that the mobile phone had become a huge part of my life, everywhere I go, it stays with me. Even if it was just by my side when I was sleeping, a sound of notification would just wake me up from my sleep. My cell phone is always on 24/7 unless, in case of a prolonged power outage, I would save some battery by switching it off. The nature of my work involves much use of phone, social media, laptop, and technology-related tools and services, as I found myself caught in between this battle. I vividly remember one Sunday last year; I was tasked by the senior elders of the church to share a sermon on where we place our trust and on whom, with my scripture based on Psalms 20:7, where King David writes: “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God” (KJV). As I was giving an introduction to my sermon, I asked a question to the congregation: Apart from your life, what is the most precious thing that you always keep close to you everywhere you go? They looked at me, startled, and I reached out to my pocket, pulled out my mobile phone, held it high, and said your mobile phone. I furthermore told them that even if they stole your wallet or money, you wouldn’t bother much, but if they stole your phone, you would be disastrously distressed. They looked and laughed, and I told them, this is not a joke but a reality, and it’s happening to all of us.

After delivering that sermon, I came home and began to ponder on what I shared with the congregation, and that became my turning point in life, too, especially on how I use social media, mobile phone, and the Internet. In this information age, fueled by smart technologies, and how these tools and services have become my trustee companion of reliance and source of a go-to for anything/information I need at the click of a button, I felt like my natural human instinct as a person began to become diluted and dulled due to over-reliance on technology.

It’s important to recognize that technology itself isn’t inherently bad; rather, my challenge has been ensuring it doesn’t take over my attention, time, and focus from the significant goals I am meant to achieve. This realization prompted me to reflect critically on my phone and social media usage and explore how I could recover the time I had lost to unnecessary scrolling. I started to question my habits, particularly why I felt compelled to check my phone with each notification. Over the past two years, I was averaging a check every two minutes—except during engaging meetings or events. This realization spurred me into action, motivating me to make meaningful changes. As mentioned by Adam Alter, social media provides the least favorable environment for anyone wanting to develop a mature, loving, sensitive, genuine, and lasting relationship. It offers quick and easy access to superficial validation and friendships that lack authenticity (Alter, 2017).

In my journey, I sometimes resorted to drastic measures out of frustration, even smashing my phones and living without one for a month. However, work

commitments required me to purchase a new device, leading me to delve deeper into understanding my relationship with my phone and social media.

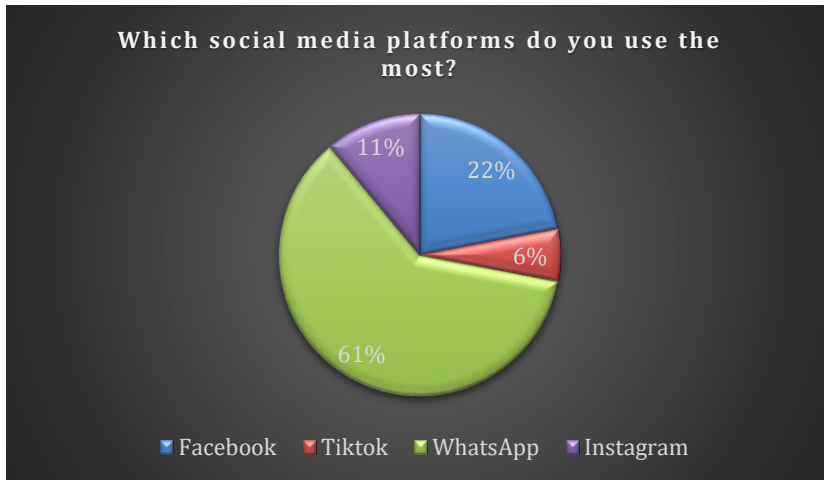
I experimented with different strategies, like deactivating my Facebook account, but I often found myself rejoining. Despite these challenges, I see each struggle as an opportunity for growth. I've been actively seeking solutions, praying, fasting, and learning from others' experiences. While the journey has been difficult, I am committed to finding a balance. I believe that with persistence and the right strategies, I can reclaim control over my time and habits. Every step I take brings me closer to breaking free and achieving my goals. Sometimes, in my downtime moments, I reflected on life in the village and how we used to enjoy life without these devices and endless digital notifications. Life in the village was fun and simple: we engaged, talked with each other face to face, and enjoyed a socially connected life. Comparing this life to mine currently, with technology at the tips of my fingertips, I asked myself: "What can I do now"? The paradox still lies deep within: although I am connected technically, I am socially apart. It's like we are close, yet thousands of miles apart. I can stay in my room or workstation and WhatsApp my friend or colleague who is just a couple of steps away. Instead, I could just walk over and have a mutually connected conversation where we see each other, smile, shake hands, and, yeah, at least enjoy a good time together. It seems to me that intrusive technology such as mobile/cell phones has made life easier for me and harder to escape. Additionally, mobile services and social media [or technology] *"brought about convenience, and convenience weaponized temptation"* (Alter, 201, pg.20).

While that is in progress, I decided to conduct some polls on LinkedIn to see how others are also managing their social media and mobile phone usage. The results below summarize the feedback received.

6 The Bigger Picture – Insights from LinkedIn Polls

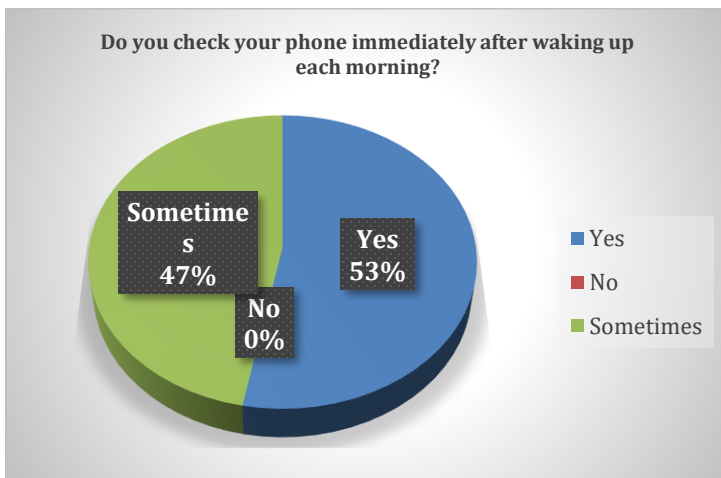
To understand how others experience phone addiction, I conducted a LinkedIn poll. The results were striking: 70% of respondents admitted to spending more time on their phones than they'd like. These insights highlight a shared challenge, one that calls for actionable solutions.

Figure 6.1 Question 1: Which of the following social media platforms do you use the most?



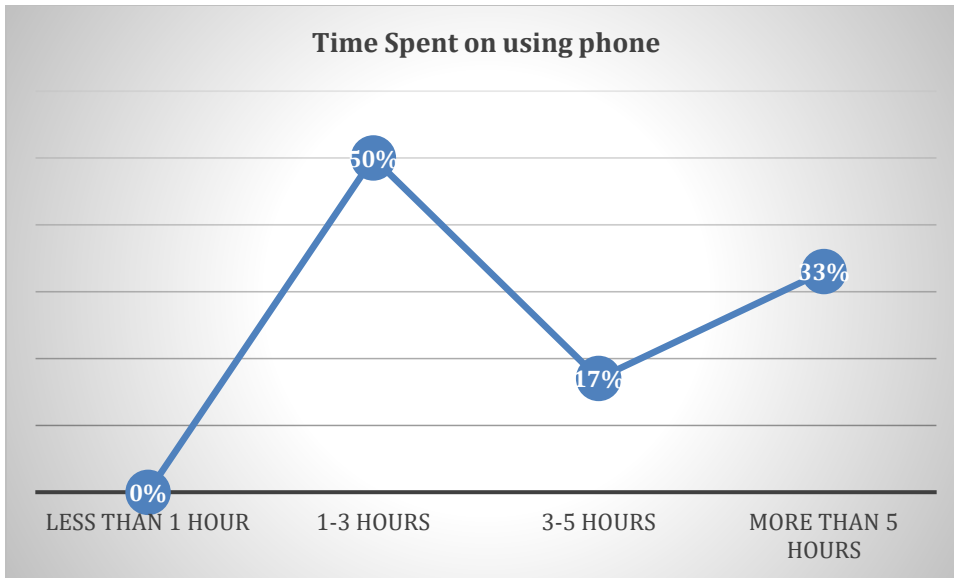
Of the most frequented social media platforms used, 61 percent of the respondents say they use WhatsApp frequently, followed by Facebook 22 percent.

Figure 6.2 Question 2: Do you immediately check your phone after waking up every morning?



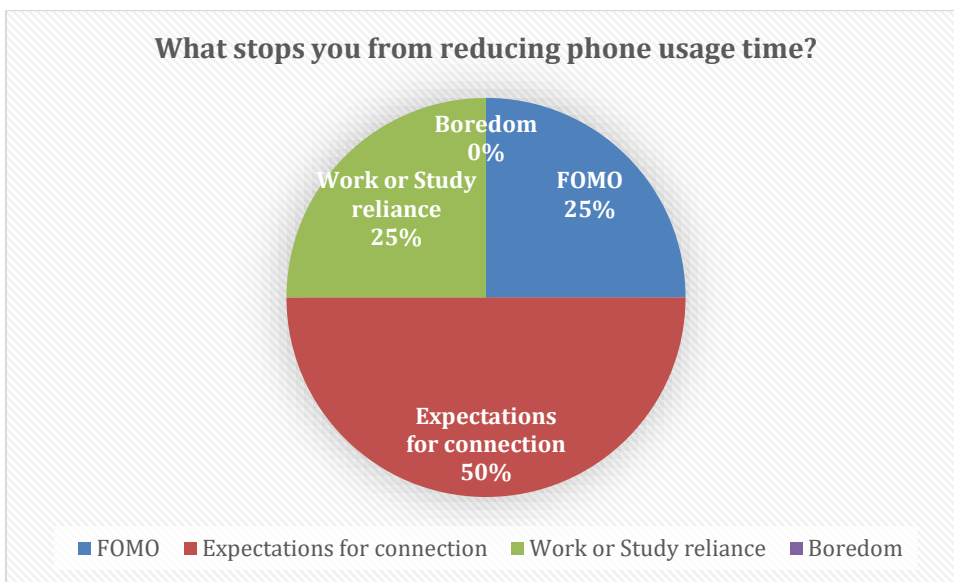
Fifty-three percent of the surveyed respondents say they frequently, first thing after waking up, is checking their phones, and 47 percent sometimes do that.

Figure 6.3: Q3. How much time do you spend on scrolling and using your mobile phone daily?



Fifty percent spent between 1- 3 hours using their cell phones, 17 percent spent 3-5 hours, and 33 percent spent more than 5 hours.

Figure 6.4: Q4. What is holding you back from reducing your phone usage time?



When surveying people if they ever tried to limit their phone usage time but kept on staying on, 50 percent said that because they expected connections to keep coming (either call, text, WhatsApp message/call, Facebook message or notification), 25 percent for work or school (professional) purposes, whilst 25 percent said it's the fear of missing out (FOMO) on what's happening around that keeps them hooked onto their phones every day.

7 Taking Action – My Steps to Overcome Mobile phone and social media Addiction

This section outlined in detail some of the specific steps or things I did to help me overcome nomophobia through a digital detoxification process. It uses some data from my phone app to track progress as well as some thought processes to help me sustain through this detox process as I set to reset myself back to my default mode.

7.1 Digital Wellbeing App Phone Data Monitoring Results

To use my personal experience to validate some of the reasons why I need to make this change, I activated the Digital Wellbeing App on my Samsung Mobile phone to track my cell phone and social media usage data starting in January 2025. The results are summarized below with screenshots of the reports obtained from my mobile phone.

Summary of Results: Jan Vs. Feb 2025:

- Peak Usage Time: 35 Hours vs 43 hours
- Screen On: 5 hours vs 7 Hours
- Screen Off: 15 Hours vs 14 Hours
- Social Media Usage: 35 Hours vs 31 Hours (WhatsApp is 23 Hours vs 32 Hours)
- Daily average screen time: 9 Hours vs 6 Hours.
- Spent 9 Hours on average each day while awake, not using the phone in January, compared to February, I spent 7 hours.
- The biggest social media is WhatsApp, followed by YouTube and Google Chrome for Google Search.

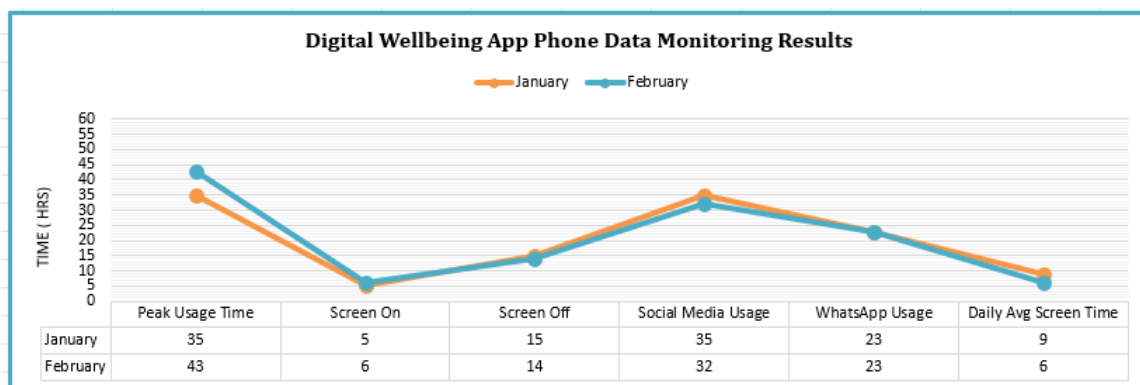


Figure 7.1: Digital Wellbeing App results from my mobile phone.

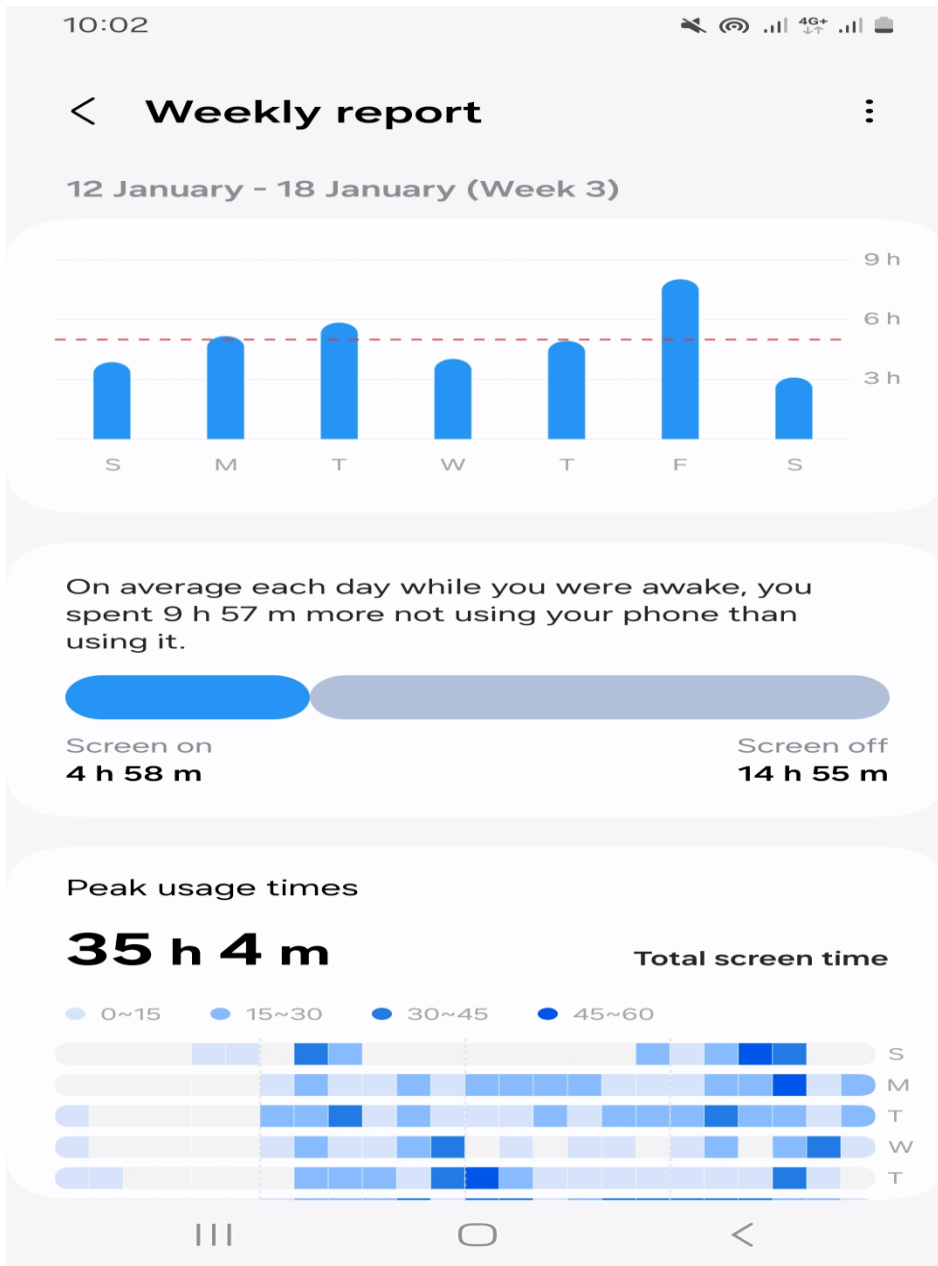


Figure 7.2: Digital Wellbeing App Data for January 2025.

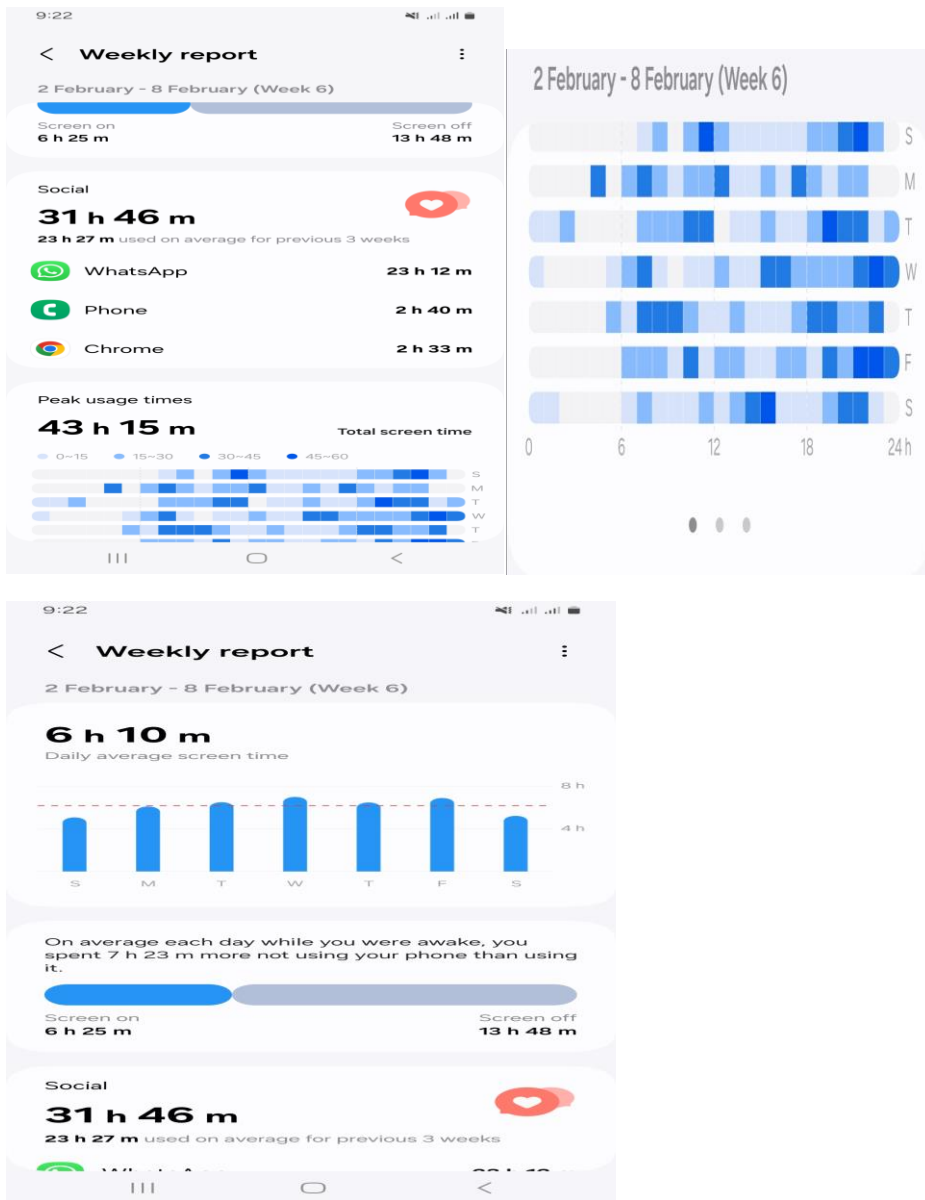


Figure 7.3: Digital Wellbeing App Report for February 2025

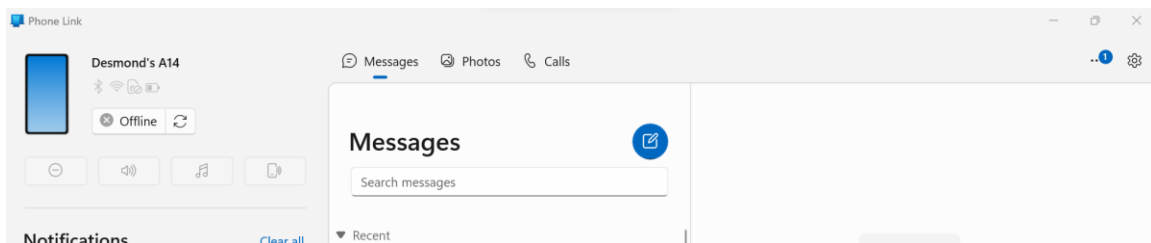


Figure 7.4: Phone Link App on Laptop for accessing phone calls and SMS.

As I began going through these data and analyzing them, the results prompted me to further search for ways to cut down and detox myself from phone usage and social media. It seems I am the victim of the overuse of phones and social media, and this addiction has embedded itself within my memory, a conundrum that only I will learn to unlearn progressively. Indeed, it was a paradox between the suburbia of the world around me that is driven by technology, irresistible gadgets, and my personal development and progress as an intricately created human being. It wasn't until late 2024 that I decided to take some bold steps. I began to take concrete steps to take some action to reclaim the time spent on my phone and social media. I was determined that I devised a plan and told myself I would stick to it and work on my rewards and losses to make myself accountable to myself. I became consciously aware of this addiction, and through trial and error, I discovered several practical strategies that I do daily to manage my phone usage and social media use:

- Setting boundaries by allocating specific times for phone use. I set my screen time to 15 seconds (and the only reason to check my phone is for time. I am planning to get a watch sooner, so that will reduce my phone time. Meanwhile, I set my screen timeout to 15 seconds. As soon as I see the time, I don't need to know anything else), I also strictly use my phone during work hours, and the time to call friends and family is after 5 PM, in case of emergencies that can be attended too quickly. When I leave home for activities like going to the market, shopping, or church, I leave my phone at home. I replaced it with my reading book, biro, and a notebook. As I do not engage in unnecessary and unplanned tasks, whatever I planned to do, I went straight and came back. For example, if I want to go to Boroko, I go there, finish from there, and head straight back home, especially during weekends or holidays. I don't engage in unplanned trips and destinations. That manages my time and also limits unnecessary movement that might involve incidents cos I left my phone at home. In case of emergency, all my phone contacts are synced online, so I can use any device to log in to and access. I keep note of key contact details in my dairy book for quick contact in case of emergencies. As soon as I go to bed, I switch off my phone, drop it off on the table or the floor, and go straight to sleep.
- Taking digital detoxes and breaks from social media. I uninstalled the Facebook app, LinkedIn app, email apps, and X app on my mobile phone and only used it when I was at work. I found Facebook boring due to a lot of nonsense posts and images that were meant to distract my precious time and attention and eat into my emotions. As soon as I got home, I threw my phone away and carried on with other home duties without the need for a phone. I only checked once or twice in case my best friend or family called or texted me for some important things to discuss. I found this more relaxing and comforting.

- Replacing unproductive habits with activities like reading, journaling, and blogging. When I come home, I spend my downtime (quality time) reading, journaling, or blogging. I bring a biro and diary book with me everywhere I go, and I journal down every thought, idea, or discussion that is important to me. To keep me from being bored and turning to using a phone or social media, I invested K50.00 every month to buy new hard-copy books, building my library of knowledge. I find this so helpful that I tend to switch to reading books every time the urge to use social media and/or my phone pops up, leaving my phone at home and focusing on these important activities that improve my life. I realized that when I become so cautious with my time on social media and phone usage, I tend to spend less money on buying data or subscribing to bundles for use: calling, texting, or on social media. Today, after realizing this, I spend roughly around K20.00 per month because I can do all my work at the workplace.
- Exercising or practicing mindfulness: I engage more with reading and learning new languages, so I keep my time off the phone. I spend quality time meditating, waking up as early as 3 AM.
- Using tools like screen-time trackers and app blockers. These steps have significantly improved my focus and mental clarity. I disconnected all phone notifications on my phone, such important ones like phone calls, SMS, WhatsApp calls/SMS/Facebook, and emails are all accessed on my laptop. At work, I only access it when I am at my workstation, whilst outside, I disconnected. The exception is given to high-value projects, inspections, and meetings where I bring my phone with me for real-time reporting and monitoring. Otherwise, I send all my files to my online storage so I can still access them wherever, with whatever device I can find, so long as there is a stable Internet connection. I switched off all mobile phone notifications and uninstalled unnecessary apps that keep me hooked to my phone.
- I reduce my data connection time. I use it at work only, and for use at home, I turn on the hotspot, then put the phone in my room, bring my laptop to the living room, sit down there, and connect to do my projects online, strictly on my laptop. I also connected my WhatsApp to my laptop via WhatsApp web. As shown in Figure 7.1, I used the Microsoft phone link app to link my cell phone to my laptop via Bluetooth, WIFI, or mobile data to make calls and send SMSs, reducing my interaction on the cell phone.

8 Conclusion

Taking control of my phone and social media habits hasn't just improved my productivity—it's given me back my time, peace of mind, and clarity to do what's important. Self-discipline isn't something you can simply solve in one go and expect instant results; it's a continuous struggle. People often seek the easiest path, but true happiness often comes from tackling challenges. Our smartphones epitomize this issue—they're always with us, providing constant, easy distractions instead of encouraging us to focus on what truly matters (Hari, 2022) (Peterson,

2022). The tsunami of fake friends, information, and media content is meant to hijack emotions, feelings, and time towards gratification for short-term benefit whilst jeopardizing your future filled with untapped potential and abilities to be uncovered for greater use and benefit to mankind.

“There are millions of smartphone users who are oblivious or just don’t care enough to track their usage—and there’s a reasonable chance they’re spending even more than three hours on their phones each day. Perhaps there was just a small clump of heavy users who spent all day, every day on their phones, dragging the average usage times higher” (Alter, 2017). Perhaps you are one of them too. However, you still have a chance to overcome this, just like I have.

8.1 Encouragement and Tips for Readers

Start small if you want to take control of your time spent on phone usage and endless social media addiction. “Life rewards action, not intelligence” (Connor Neill, <https://youtu.be/rjeJsQbwZpw>). Reflect on why you use your phone and social media and experiment with replacing unproductive habits with meaningful activities. Share your goals with friends or family to stay accountable to yourself. What steps are you taking to manage your phone usage? Let’s share and learn from each other. Write back to me and share with us all how you’ve taken back your time and improved on other things that give you peace of mind, more engagement with fellow human beings physically, and other skills you’ve learned as you substitute less phone time with more engaging activities. I hope my experience has shed some light and gives you some hope on how you can overcome this too.

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