

## **MEDIA COMPETENCE AS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF HEALTH PREVENTION ACTIVITIES IN THE PREVENTION OF PHONOHOLISM**

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**Abstract:** The development of modern technologies has enabled unlimited possibilities for contemporary people in the sphere of education, information, communication or entertainment. There have been significant progress and development in many areas of human life. However, the positive changes which contributed to the improvement of the social life quality, at the same time, brought many behaviors threatening health. The long list of risks is constantly growing and it is not expected to decrease. The problem of cellular addiction occurs more often and gains in power. Excessive and improper use of mobile phones poses many threats to physical, cognitive, emotional or social development and may lead to a phonoholism – i.e. a phenomenon that may result in withdrawal from social life, loss of contact with the family or persistent sleep disorders.

As the mobile phone is today the basic subject, which is used by people of all ages, increasingly also the youngest, several-year-old children should become an educational challenge for parents and teachers.

Therefore, there is a great need for extensive prevention of health and promotion of media competences for the digital society in order to make conscious, safe, responsible and critical use of tools that facilitate communication, learning and playing.

**Keyword:** mobile phone, phonoholism, media competences, health prevention.

### **1. Introduction**

Significant progress in many areas of human life has influenced the development of modern technologies, the ubiquity and diversity which of have changed many areas of human life. The long list of risks is constantly growing and it is not expected to decrease. The problem of cellular addiction occurs more often and gains in power. Excessive and improper use of mobile phones have created many threats to physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. That is why there is a great demand for the widespread promotion of health and media

competence in the digital society in order to use the communication facilitating tools in an informed, safe, responsible and critical manner. Among the digital media, mobile telephony has emerged, especially communications, which has not only influenced social life but continues to do so. Currently, the attractiveness of a mobile phone increases as it is used not only for making phone calls, sending text messages, but also becomes a portable computer with access to the Internet, radio, voice recorder, camera, field navigation device, notebook, calendar. Therefore, having a mobile phone in the latest version is widely desirable and shows that the owner can keep up with fashion. Nowadays, it has become a basic object used by people of all ages, even small kids.

The generation of children and adolescents born after 1995, referred to as the generation of networks or glass screens, balancing between the real and virtual world, meets their needs in the world of digital media and perceives a mobile device as an extension of its physical and mental presence (Gruchała, 2014). Its possession gives them a sense of freedom, independence and security. It can be used anywhere and at any time (Guerreschi, 2010). A loss of control over the use of the device can lead to a situation in which normal functioning without the constant presence of a mobile phone seems to be affected. If one permanently spends free time using the mobile device, seeking the approval and acceptance, it can lead to various problems such as neglect of learning, problems with concentration and speech, lack of physical activity, obesity, aggressive reactions, insomnia, depression or progressive isolation from colleagues, friends and family. It happens that such people give up such activities as: meetings with friends, watching the movies, going for walks because they prefer to talk on the phone (Sarzała, 2010).

The widespread use of digital mobile devices has also changed the nature of using a mobile phone to the addictive one. This aforementioned occurrence is commonly called smartphone addiction and it initiated the emergence of a new phenomenon known as phonoholism. Previously, a problem of infoholic addiction existed (Jędrzejko, 2010). The dilemma concerns people who are not able to function without the constant presence of a mobile phone. Phonoholic can be described as a person who abuses smartphone, does not turn off the device and, in an uncontrolled manner, constantly has it within reach. Such a person constantly checks notifications, and if for some reason is not able to receive messages or talk – becomes upset. It is worth emphasizing, however, that the problem of phonoholism threatens not only children and young people, in fact it can affect people of all ages.

## 2. Negative consequences of the abuse of mobile telephony and concern for health

Permanent use of digital device, as well as the increasing availability of mobile telephony, can lead to deviant behavior putting the user in danger of becoming addicted to this cyberspace tool (Jędrzejko, 2010). Excessive use of mobile phones may also result in narrowing one's interests and impoverishing the language (e.g. using slang specific for people who regularly send SMSs (Jędrzejko, 2010). The problem of mobile phone addiction is especially dangerous for children and teenagers who are just learning to communicate with other people (Woronowicz, 2009). It is difficult to determine at what point we can say that we deal with phonoholism. However, there are at least three groups of behaviors that may arise. These are visible behaviors of mobile phones owners, psychological feelings associated with (not) using digital media, and negative effects associated with it. Therefore<sup>1</sup>, addiction to a mobile phone is "a specific condition of the human body and changes in behavior accompanying the narrowing of the range of coping skills in life along with the emerging compulsion to use a mobile phone despite the negative consequences of previous succumbing" (Kozak, 2011). Basically, we can talk about psychological (non-substantial behavioral), pathological addiction, evidenced by a high demand for performing certain activities, their repeatability, strength, loss of control and extremity (Juczyński, 2008). Phonoholism is a pathology manifested by the abuse of the telephone in various daily activities.

For several years, doctors and specialists in the field of addiction have been warning about the impact of a mobile phone on human life. They confirm cell dependence and related serious anxiety taking the form of phobias or nomophobia (Kozak, 2013). They highlight its particularly adverse effect on the nervous system. Based on research, it can be concluded that electromagnetic radiation emitted by the phone causes changes in local blood flow in the brain. Longer conversations can affect the development of glioblastoma or meningioma – brain tumors. Lennart Hardell – a Swedish oncologist and epidemiologist said that "people who started using a mobile phone before the age of 20 are five times more likely to develop glioblastoma, as well as the development of vestibular-cochlear nerve cancer" (Woronowicz, 2009). Despite unambiguous reports from research, however, the impact of the length and frequency of the telephone conversation on the human body is still being discussed. Some doctors confirm while others do not agree with these reports and pay attention to the short duration of the study to provide clear results.

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<sup>1</sup> According to WHO (World Health Organization), addiction is a mental and physical condition resulting from the interaction between a living organism and a chemical substance, characterized by behavioral changes and other reactions, which include the need to take a given substance on a continuous or periodic basis in order to experience its effects on psyche, or to avoid unpleasant symptoms accompanying the lack of this substance, see Kiełtyka K Tanorexia - a new health threat. "Dermatologia Estetyczna" 2008, 3, pp. 174-182

### 3. Competence and perspective of critical information prioritization

Differently that it used to be, the accelerated pace of life, search for quick pleasure combined with expecting a prize, loosening the rules of functioning and difficulties in controlling our own behaviors probably contributed to the fact that more and more of our behaviors have become addictive and thus morbid. People with deficits concerning some life skills can be seen as the victims of addiction and seemingly ease their own problems. Their inclination to undertake an activity and, consequently, become addicted to it result from many factors, both environmental and individual. These factors are related to the personality of an individual and his/her willpower. On the one hand, we are aware of the fact that media literacy in the digital environment is one of the key competences in modern knowledge society, which often determines success - educational, social, professional – of a young person. On the other hand, we often do not pay attention to certain own behaviors or actions incorporated into everyday life, which, in consequence, may take pathological forms.

Uncontrolled performance of certain activities in which a mobile phone is the subject of absorption, leads to a number of behaviors that can be a manifestation of pathology due to their intensity and negative consequences that are borne not only by the owner of the mobile phone but also by the social environment in which he/she lives.

Although a human health is conditioned by many factors, it largely depends on lifestyle, which consists of "behaviors called behavior, which are the result of the influence of socially determined patterns of behavior and interpretation of situations, created and used by the group as mechanisms for coping with life" (Słońska, Misiuna, 2000). We decide about our own health to a great extent undertaking behaviors defined as health-promoting or anti-health – evidently leading to our health's deterioration. However, in order to make the right choices and right decisions concerning one's own health, an individual must develop and improve life skills, which are particularly attributed to human development in childhood and youth.

In shaping life skills, not only knowledge plays an important role, but also development of skills and attitudes, as well as in the area of improving and maintaining health, development of human competence – in this case- psychosocial.

The term competence means "the scope of one's knowledge, skills and responsibility" (Kopaliński, 1980), in other words it is "the area of knowledge, educated skills and acquired experience" (Gurycka, 1994). Thanks to a somewhat broader definition, we learn that competence "is a special property, expressed in demonstrating at the level set by social standards, the ability to behave adequately, in the awareness of the need and consequences of just such behavior, and in taking responsibility for them" (Czerpaniak-Walczyk, 1995). A comprehensive approach to competence can be found in the definition, which captures it as "a highly complex instruction, being the result of knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, emotions and valuation" (Dylak, 1995). Competences that "enable critical selection and

prioritization of information, and solving new, difficult problems, as well as allow to become responsible, wise, able to cooperate with other people" (Lubowiecka, 2002) should be an inseparable element in shaping media competences necessary in promoting health prevention, as regards the addiction to mobile telephony.

#### **4. The importance of media competence in the digital society**

It turns out that 64% of children up to 6.5 years old use mobile devices, and 25% of them do it every day, while 26% of preschoolers have their own mobile device, and 62% play on a smartphone or tablet (The use of...). The question therefore arises: Are we able to use new technologies rationally? It seems that media education is necessary already at the first educational stages. It should be aimed not so much at transferring knowledge about the media as at education of its proper and reasonable reception and use of information. Therefore, the purpose of the aforementioned educational activities should be to prepare for a reflective and responsible media reception, including using it as a tool for intellectual work and social communication (Penkowska, 2013), also understood as "a harmonious composition of knowledge, understanding, evaluation and efficient use of the media" (Kaczmarek, 2013).

Children and young people get lost in the flow of information. Media education in kindergartens and schools is often understood only as the media use in the classroom. Currently, technical skills related to operating new technologies are not enough to function in the world of media. It is necessary to "prepare a person for the conscious and critical reception of various types of media messages ... to convey knowledge about the media understood in the context of communication tools and the content they convey" (Siemieniecki, 2007). In fact, "media competence should be educated throughout the whole human life and begin when the child begins to show interest in the media and media messages" (Ogonowska, 2013). Taking into consideration the fact that society is constantly changing, only through understanding the mechanisms used in the media to create and select information, this society will be able not only to effectively and safely use the media and critically assess the received content, including advertising and other commercial communications, but also creatively use the means of communication in everyday life (What is ...).

Bearing in mind that media, as a means of communicating cultural and educational content, is an indispensable component of the educational environment, and skilfully used, it can play a role in human life by supporting development of their personality (Juszczak-Rygałło, 2014), adults are responsible for providing guidance on proper media reception. It is worth remembering, however, that media education should be targeted at all social and age groups.

## 5. Conclusion

The abuse of mobile phones particularly adversely affects the human psyche. The problem is serious because the negative consequences of this phenomenon affect not only an individual, but also affect his/her immediate surroundings. They impede functioning of not only the injured party, but concern also the family forced to bear emotional, economic and physical costs. Social damage is huge. Therefore, it is important to undertake the implementation of comprehensive actions involving systemic projects. The health situation of the Polish society is anxious and requires promotion of preventive measures and safe health patterns. (Bulska, 2008, 2012, 2013) Especially when it comes to safety in everyday life.

Tools that have been already constructed can be used for such preventive actions. One of them is, for example, the Catalog. It is available both on-line and in printed form. The Catalog presents a coherent and comprehensive vision of the development of media, information and digital competences, which enables conducting long-term and large-scale activities, as well as smaller local projects. Divided into 10 thematic areas and 6 age groups and levels of advancement, it can complement the core curriculum, which omits many aspects of media and information education. It contains important thematic areas:

- I. Use of information – on effective search and organization of information, as well as assessment of credibility of sources.
- II. Unit in the media environment – about communicating through the media, building image and acting in online communities.
- III. Language of the media – on the meaning of words, images and sound, as well as the functions of media messages and the culture of communication.
- IV. Creative use of the media – about creating and presenting one's own creativity in the media.
- V. Ethics – about seeking answers to questions about good, evil and the limits of freedom in the media.
- VI. Safety – on anonymity, privacy and basic principles of secure media use.
- VII. Law – on the rights of media users and institutions established to defend them.
- VIII. Economic aspects of media operations – about advertising, the value of information, financing and the media market.
- IX. Digital competences – about the basics of computer operation, as well as about IT thinking.
- X. Mobile security – safe use of mobile devices (Catalog of media competences ...).

It is the media education program addressed to teachers, librarians, textbook authors, lecturers, and especially didactics at pedagogical colleges, animators of local communities and people conducting cultural education in cultural institutions or NGOs which can help teach critical and reflective reception of media coverage.

The analysis of the intensity of using mobile phones or smart phones shows that it is more common among the younger generation. Taking the above into consideration, it is worth paying attention to understanding the issue concerning addiction and network generation, as if "we understand the future, we also understand what changes are necessary today in our institutions and society" (Tapscott, 2010). Any addiction consequently limits human freedom and leads to deterioration of well-being and psychosocial health.

Therefore, there is a great need for extensive, preventive healthcare and promotion of media competences in the digital society in order to consciously, safely, responsibly and critically use tools that facilitate communication, learning and fun.

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