

Art Lightstone, 80 Minute Challenge, April 2010

**The Scourge of Social Media:  
Why Ontario Schools Should Ban Access to Facebook and Other Social Media  
Sites**

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For the Students of CIA4U

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Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites have become increasingly popular over the past few years. Current research indicates that approximately 6 billion minutes are spent on Facebook each day worldwide, “with 4 million status updates each day” (Agyemang, 2009). Sadly, utilizing these forms of social interaction to such great extents is far from healthy, and can result in addictive behavior, reduced levels of fitness, delayed social development, and even isolation and depression. The Education Act should require schools and school boards to block Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites because these sites tend to be addictive, waste inordinate amounts of time, and impede face to face social development.

Facebook Addiction Disorder, or FAD, is now a recognized form of psychological disorder. In fact, the disorder is currently being considered for inclusion of the next edition of the DSM-V. A diagnosis of FAD requires that a sufferer meets two or three of six possible criteria within a six to eight month period. These include: i) increasing amounts of time on Facebook, ii) distress caused from cessation of use, iii) migration of social interaction from face to face communication to Facebook communication, iv) romantic encounters migrate from face to face to Facebook communication, v) Facebook friends are not known to the user in real life, and vi) real life social interaction often includes allusions to Facebook. The addiction to Facebook and other forms of media is definitely getting the attention of psychiatric researchers. These researchers are conducting numerous studies to examine the issue.

A growing body of research in the area of addiction suggests that Internet Addiction Disorder is becoming a real problem, it is a psycho-physiological disorder involving tolerance; withdrawal symptoms; affective disturbances; and interruption of social relationships. The most common one is Facebook Addiction Disorder (FAD) (Mootee, 2008).

Studies on Internet addiction originated in the US by In 1996, The first research on Internet addiction was presented by Dr. Kimberly Young in her 1996 paper entitled, “Internet Addiction: The Emergence of a New Disorder.” This paper was presented in 1996 at the American Psychological Association’s annual conference held in Toronto, Ontario. Since that time, numerous studies have documented Internet

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addiction in a growing number of countries, including “Italy, Pakistan, Iran, Germany, and the Czech Republic” (A Growing Epidemic). Reports also indicate that Internet addiction has become a “serious public health concern in China, Korea, and Taiwan” (A Growing Epidemic). In fact, treatment centers have even begun to emerge across the US and abroad (A Growing Epidemic). While it is difficult to estimate the magnitude of Internet Addiction, a nationwide study conducted by a team of researchers from Stanford University’s School of Medicine estimates that nearly “one in eight Americans suffer from at least one sign of problematic Internet use” (A Growing Epidemic).

According to Rob Bedi, a registered psychologist and assistant professor at the University of Victoria, Internet addictions are becoming increasingly common on university campuses. This is attributed to the fact that students have large amounts of unstructured and unsupervised time, as well as free and unlimited access to the Internet access. Bedi highlights the difference between “procrastination” and “addiction,” suggesting that the issue has become a problem once a student is trading study time for Facebook time. Furthermore, Bedi suggests that students come to recognize their own triggers and habits. “Find out what’s missing from your life... Whether it’s having too much free time, not knowing anyone or just escaping, think about what made you resort to [Facebook], and what you could be doing instead” (Pope, 2008).

Korea presents a prime example of the severity of Internet Addiction issue. Since 2002, the Korean government has operated a Center for Internet Addiction Prevention and Counseling in Seoul. The Center is housed in the same building as the Korea Agency For Digital Opportunity & Promotion (KADO). KADO runs the Center along with a number of other Internet related programs. KADO President Youngi Son estimates that “as much as 15 per cent of Korea's population —some 7 million people — have an unhealthy attachment to the Web” (Woyke, 2009).

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Sadly, Internet Addiction does more than simply waste time. There are numerous physical and psychological symptoms associated with Internet Addiction. Restart, a US Internet Addiction Recovery Program based in Washington, suggests that Internet Addiction can lead to feeling of guilt, shame, anxiousness, and depression, changes in sleep patterns, weight gain or loss, backaches, headaches, and even carpal tunnel syndrome (Signs & Symptoms of Computer & Internet/ Gaming Addiction). Suicide has even been associated with Internet Addiction.

In 2004, Zhang Xiaoyi, known to be a brilliant junior high school student from Tianjin, China, committed suicide after allegedly playing Warcraft for more than a day. Xiaoyi jumped out of a window of his family's 24th floor apartment after playing the game for 36 consecutive hours at an internet cafe. Xiaoyi's parents then sued the game's Chinese distributors, suggesting that the firm should have warned people about the inherent risks of addiction to the game and "taken measures to prevent players' from over-indulging themselves" (Parents sue game firm after son's suicide, 2006).

It is difficult for any country to enact a law that would prohibit people from overindulging in Internet usage. However, countries throughout the world are starting to take steps. The Chinese government has repeatedly cracked down on internet cafés, particularly after several high-profile tragic incidents involving Internet over-usage. In 2002, for example, Chinese authorities took action after 24 people were killed in a fire that broke out in a Beijing Internet Cafe. In 2004, the Chinese government also shut down 8,600 unlicensed internet cafés after "two middle school pupils fell asleep on a railway line and were run over following a 48-hour internet session" (Teen dies at internet addiction camp in China, 2009).

Having considered the evidence currently available regarding Internet Addiction, the Ontario government should, at the very least, include a passage in the Education Act that would require schools to block access to Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites. While this would be a small step toward addressing this growing issue, such a step should communicate the government's concern for

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the issue while also helping to stigmatize the propensity amongst teens towards overusing the Internet.

Unless we wish to see a future generation of unfit, unhealthy, Internet addicts in Ontario, the Ontario will have to take decisive steps to addressing the issue as quickly as possible.

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