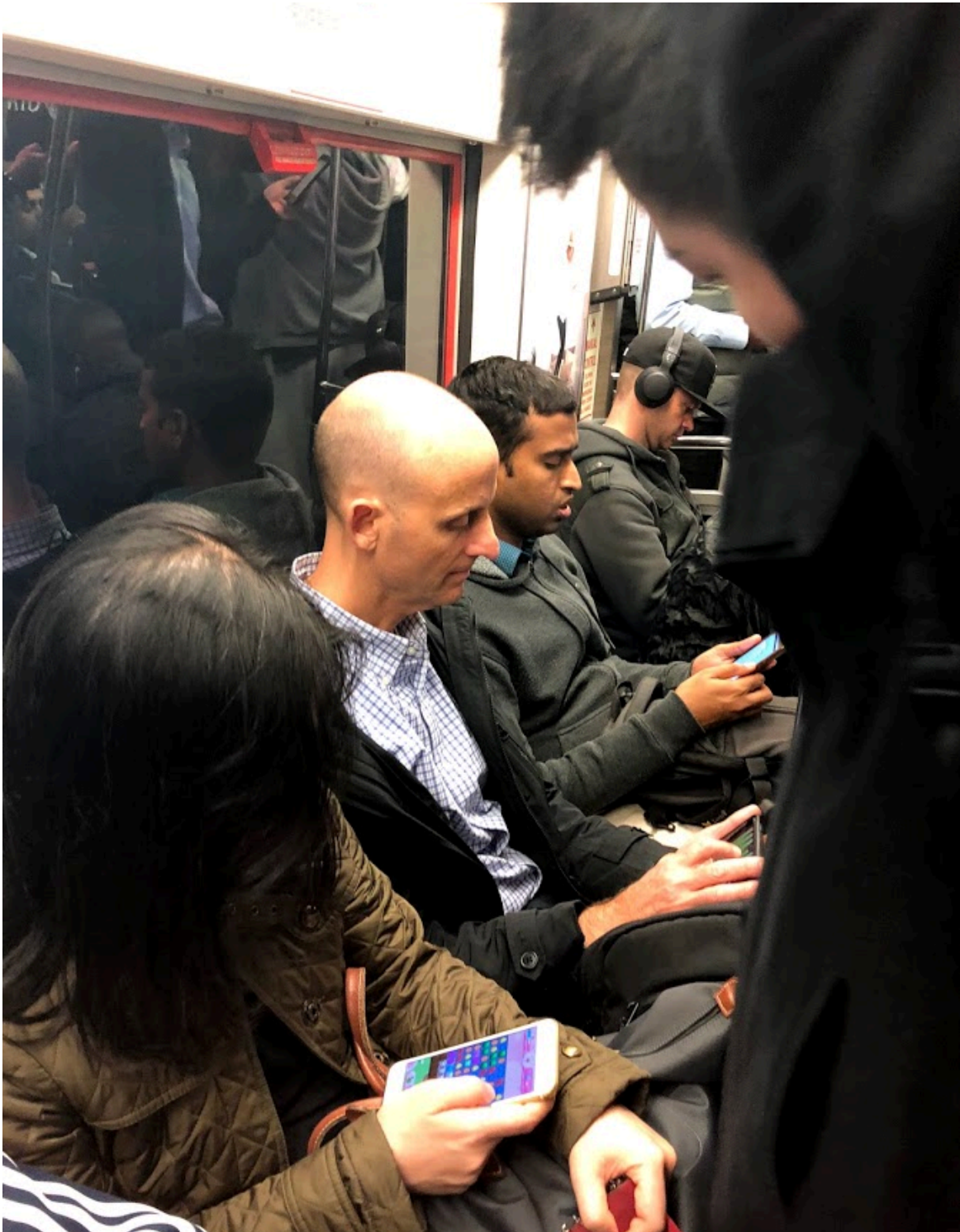THE NEW SCHOOL

Tishman Environment
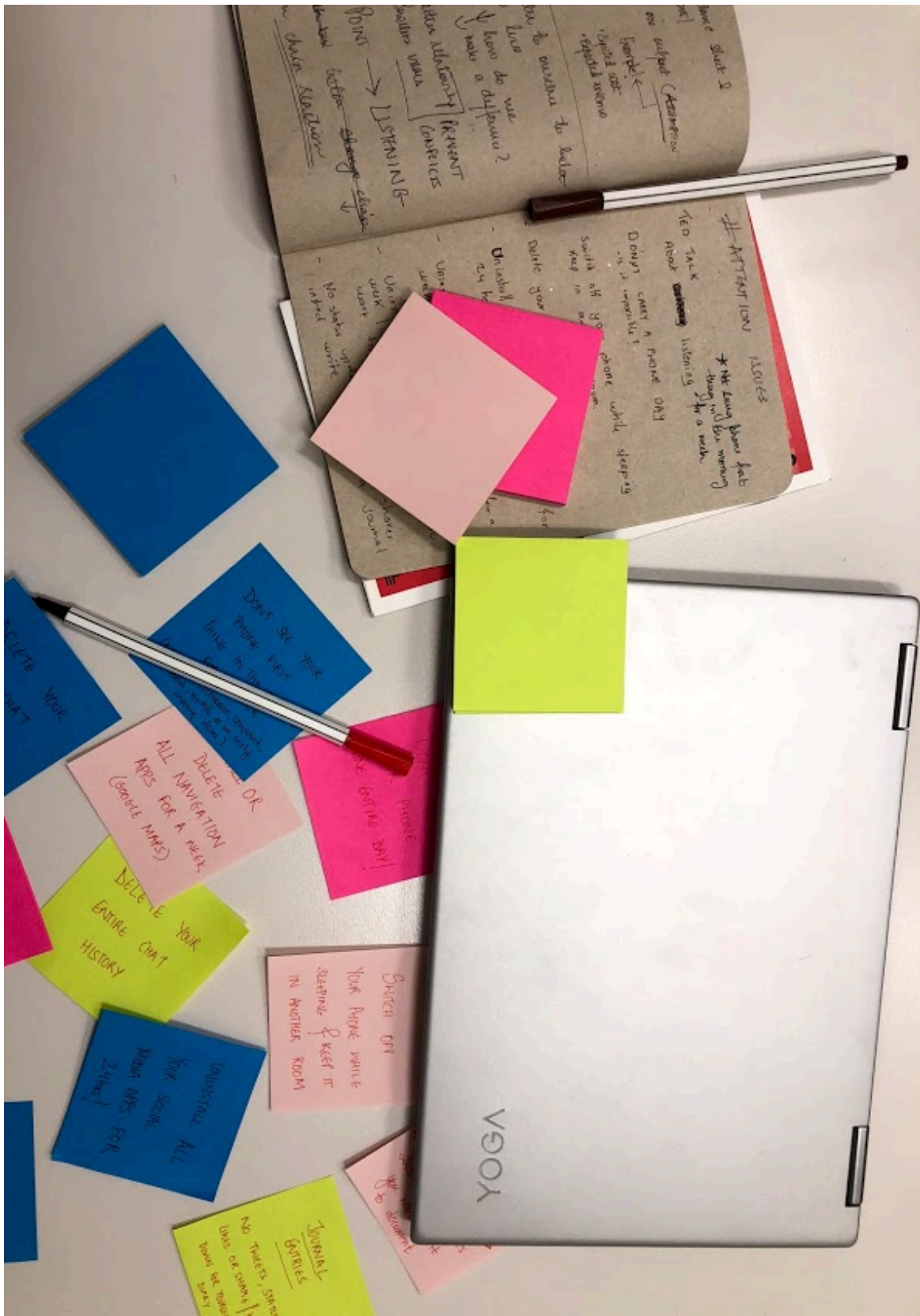and Design Center

TISHMAN CENTER · SEPTEMBER 4, 2018

Online Always

CAN'T STOP
THE SCROLL

By Shalakha Jain

Sipping my coffee on a monotonous
Tuesday morning, I picked up my

phone for a break. I was hoping to be on my phone for 5 minutes which with no surprise extended to the next 20 minutes. I was in a loop of unconscious and mindless scrolling, I believe it's a relatable story.If you happen to walk down the street today, you will notice people around you with their heads down, looking at the new form of dopamine – mobile phones. Adults in the US spend an average of 2-4 hours per day on their devices—that adds up to around 2,600 daily touches.Have you experienced that restlessness of not receiving a message every time you leave your phone for some work? Do you carry your phone to every place you go, even the restroom? Or do you consistently check your phone in a socially awkward situation?Have you ever wondered why is there an urge to never let go of this device? It's an alarming social sustainability issue that we as humans are facing every passing day.To further understand the issue, I took up a personal sustainability challenge to address the issue of addiction to phones. For four months I tracked my phone usage and analyzed it every two weeks. Interesting patterns lead me to a few assumptions and self-realization.The idea of sitting idle and doing nothing is fading, the 'always on' notion has trained our brains to stop dreaming. Mobile

phones are one of the reasons why humans struggle with being curious and creative. A moment without our phone adds to our anxiety and stress, not to ideas and questions.One of the scopes of the design challenge is to train our brains to live a life beyond social media. The evil is not social media, it is the reason we are connected globally. Individuals today need to realize, reflect and draw the line between being socially connected versus caging themselves into silos of loneliness.As I went ahead with my challenge, I was encouraged to draw more people to understand the problem. This resulted in two workshops; log off & talk and log off & play. The goal was to embark the users on a journey of self-reflection to reflect on the unconscious addiction to their devices. In those four months, I was successful in steering a conversation around this topic, which in turn increased awareness and self-consciousness.The purpose of the first workshop aimed at gaining different perspectives on the issue and observing how users react to not having their phone while interacting with other strangers. The restlessness in the body language helped me prove my assumption; mobile addiction has similar symptoms to alcohol, drug or shopping addiction. The grounding of

what defines a certain user's personality and confidence changes as the phone is taken away from their sight. The workshop resulted in the idea of continuing the series of the workshop as log off and play at a bar. To absorb the importance of differentiating the optimal use of the device, few daily challenges were thrown, which focused on a path to self-realization.The second workshop aimed at self-control and building trust amongst peers. The workshop was conducted in a game-like setup in a bar to encourage interaction in the real-world versus the virtual. The rule was to stay engaged in the real world, if the user is spotted using their phone, they buy a drink for the one who spotted them using their phone. This setup helped users to stay self-motivated and be present at the moment and make memories. The night ended with engaging conversations, new friendships and a round of challenges to abstain user's daily use of their phones.The motivation behind the challenges was to let users explore the concept of being offline, explore their creative side and learn to capture memories without their phones. Many organizations like the Center of Humane technology, Thrive Global have been concentrating towards educating users on better wellbeing and mental health with respect to disruptive technology.My personal

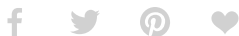four months of practice helped me to see what reducing the usage of the phone could possibly bring in my life. To list down few transitions, I became more empathetic, less absent-minded, more attentive and, respectful of my surroundings which led to an increase in my patience level and most importantly to better sleep.Inspired much? I encourage practicing a little self-time without the device in your hand. Listed down are few fun challenges that came out from my workshops. Go ahead, challenge your peers and see the fun challenges shape your path towards mindfulness. Few challenges:·

Don't carry your phone for a day, difficult? or a tip; don't charge your phone. Let it be dead for a day!·

Switch off your phone while sleeping and keep it in some other room. It will help you sleep and dream better.·   Delete your entire chat history, with a heavy heart but this will definitely help you declutter your mind.·   Uninstall all your social media apps for 24 hours, not so tough!·   Don't use google maps for a week or few days, your direction sense is tested, and you will be surprised. Or try it for once to start with!·   Sketch all the moments you want to capture, forget Instagram or Snapchat to do so for you. It's okay to not share moments with your friends at times.·   Try writing a journal, no stories, no check-in and

no updates. Talk to yourself and record how it makes you feel.· Easiest, don't check your phone first thing in the morning. Try gifting your friend an alarm clock.·   If you are feeling adventurous and nasty, how about you try swapping your phone with your best friend, boyfriend or a loved one. It will help you realize how much you trust your loved ones.PS: I lifted my phone some 20 times while writing this article! Still, this best buddy of mine (my phone) doesn't fail to distract me...Would love to hear your thoughts! *S*

halakha Jain is a student at Parsons School of Design completing her [Master's in Strategic Design Management](). *Her background has been in Design Research and UX, she aims to work for the social sustainability sector to find a path for a greater wellbeing of the society. She is currently trying to find a balance in the tech industry with respect to ethical design.*

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