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## From Huxley's Soma to Smartphones: Exploration of Digital Dependency through the Lens of *Brave New World*

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### Abstract

The research, *From Huxley's Soma to Smartphones: Exploration of Digital Dependency through the Lens of Brave New World* examines the theme of digital dependency through the lens of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. In the novel, Aldous Huxley presents a society that relies on drug soma to escape reality and maintain control mirroring our modern reliance on smartphones and digital technology. By drawing parallels between soma and contemporary digital devices, this study explores how technology influences our behavior, relationships, and sense of freedom. Huxley's dystopian vision serves as a powerful warning about the potential dangers of technological dependence. This research investigates how our constant connectivity and digital immersion can lead to a loss of individuality and critical thinking, much like the effects of soma in the novel. By analyzing the impact of digital media on our daily lives, this study aims to highlight the importance of balancing technological benefits with the preservation of human values. Through this critical analysis, we hope to provide insights into the challenges of digital dependency and encourage a more conscious engagement with technology.

**Objectives:** The main objective of the study is to

- Compare how people use soma in *Brave New World* with how we use smartphones today.
- Study how being too dependent on digital devices affects our behavior, relationships, and individuality.
- Look at Huxley's warnings about technology and relating it to our society now.
- Discuss the impact of digital devices like loss of personal freedom and critical thinking.
- Suggest ways to use technology wisely keeping our human values and individuality.

### Literature Review

This literature review explores digital dependency through the lens of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), which portrays a society controlled by the pleasure-inducing drug "soma." The novel's depiction of a population kept in check through artificial pleasure draws striking parallels to contemporary issues with digital technologies. Andreassen et al. (2016) investigate the relationship between addictive social media use, narcissism, and self-esteem, finding that higher levels of narcissism

correlate with increased social media addiction and lower self-esteem. Similarly, Rosen et al. (2013) identify a connection between heavy Facebook use and symptoms of psychiatric disorders, suggesting that technology can exacerbate mental health issues, much like "soma" masks underlying unhappiness in Huxley's world. Carr (2010) in *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* argues that the Internet impairs our ability to concentrate and engage in deep, reflective thinking, paralleling Huxley's critique of superficial contentment and lack of critical thought. Pariser (2011) in *The Filter Bubble* highlights the isolating effect of personalized algorithms that create echo chambers, while Rainie and Wellman (2012) in *Networked* describe how digital technologies transform social interactions, eroding traditional social structures and creating dependency on digital networks, similar to the engineered relationships in Huxley's dystopia. Twenge (2017) in *iGen* examines the impact of constant connectivity on youth, noting increased anxiety, depression, and a lack of preparedness for adulthood, mirroring the conditioned complacency and lack of critical thinking in Huxley's society. Collectively, these works underscore the profound psychological and societal impacts of digital dependency, reflecting the dystopian themes of *Brave New World*.

## Methodology

This research *From Huxley's Soma to Smartphones: Exploration of Digital Dependency through the Lens of Brave New World* uses comparative literary analysis. It starts by selecting primary sources like the original text of *Brave New World* and its digital versions, such as e-books and multimedia presentations. It incorporates secondary sources such as scholarly articles, books, web pages, blogs, and critical essays to provide diverse interpretations. Then, it analyzes how excessive technology changes key themes like control and dehumanization. Using reader-response theory, it examines the impact of digital literature on modern life. Finally, it evaluates the cultural and ethical effects of digital literature on today's society.

## Introduction

Too much dependency on anything is addiction. In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the drug soma is used to keep people calm and happy, making it easier for the government to control them. This idea is similar to how we use smartphones and digital technology today. Many people rely on their devices for quick pleasure, social connections, and to escape from problems. Many parents nowadays permit their children to the maximum exposure of smartphones to keep them busy and remain disturbance-free. This grows into a habit or dependency and many times it becomes an addiction without which they cannot live for a while.

This research will scan at the similarities between soma in Huxley's *Brave New World* and today's use of smartphones. It will explore how our dependence on technology affects our behavior, relationships, and freedom. Huxley's book warns us about the dangers of depending too much on technology and losing our individuality. Just like soma makes the citizens of *Brave New World* less able to think for themselves, too much smartphone use can make it harder for us to think critically and connect deeply with the world around us

By studying these comparative issues, we can better understand how digital dependency impacts our lives. We can also find ways to balance the benefits of technology with keeping our human values

and thinking skills strong. This study will offer insights into how we can live in the digital age while staying true to ourselves and our ability to think critically.

## Discussion and Interpretation

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* portrays a society in which the drug soma is a tool for maintaining order and happiness. This society's reliance on soma draws a striking parallel to our modern dependence on smartphones and digital technology. The constant need for digital connectivity, instant gratification, and virtual socialization mirrors the escapism and control provided by soma in Huxley's dystopia.

### Influence of Soma in *Brave New World*

In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the drug soma plays a pivotal role in maintaining social stability and individual compliance. It is a powerful, state-sanctioned drug that ensures the population remains content, docile, and free from distress. The impact of soma on human beings in the novel is multifaceted, encompassing psychological, social, and moral dimensions.

Psychologically, soma acts as an omnipresent escape mechanism. It numbs individuals to any form of discomfort or dissatisfaction. Characters in the novel frequently use soma to avoid negative emotions, which eliminates their ability to experience and process genuine human feelings. This artificial contentment creates a superficial happiness, devoid of true emotional depth and resilience. Bernard Marx and Lenina Crowne's use of soma to cope with their discomfort illustrates how the drug suppresses personal growth and self-awareness.

‘Six years later it was being produced commercially. The perfect drug.’

‘Let’s bait him’

‘Euphoric, narcotic, pleasantly hallucinant.’

‘Glum, Marx, glum.’ The clap on the shoulder made him start, look up. It was that brute Henry Foster. ‘What you need is a gramme of soma’. (Huxley, p.46)

Socially, soma fosters a culture of dependency and consistency. The drug ensures citizens remain unchallenging and obedient, perpetuating a stable but stagnant society. ‘All the physiological stigmata of old age have been abolished. And along with them of course...’ (p. 47) This widespread usage of soma undermines the development of meaningful relationships and authentic connections. As Helmholtz Watson observes, the reliance on soma prevents individuals from experiencing the full range of human emotions, thereby inhibiting deep, personal bonds.

Morally, soma eats into individual autonomy and ethical reasoning. The drug's ability to instantly alleviate any form of discomfort discourages critical thinking and moral reflection. John the Savage's rejection of soma symbolizes resistance to this dehumanizing control, emphasizing the importance of experiencing suffering as a part of the human condition. ‘Stupefied by soma, and exhausted by a long-drawn frenzy of sensuality, the savage lay sleeping the heather. (p.228)

Overall, soma's impact on human beings in *Brave New World* is profound, highlighting the dangers of sacrificing emotional depth, social integrity, and moral autonomy for the illusion of stability and happiness.

## **Influence of Smartphones and other digital devices on the Modern World**

The influence of smartphones and other digital devices on the modern world is so profound that it affects various aspects of daily life, social interactions, and cognitive processes. Smartphones have transformed communication, providing instant access to information and facilitating constant connectivity (Rainie & Wellman 7). This abundant presence of digital devices has reshaped how people interact, work, and even think.

One major impact of smartphones is on social behavior. Social media platforms, accessible through these devices, encourage continuous engagement and often lead to superficial connections. The scenario is profuse exposure to social networks makes people unsocial. Studies have shown that while these platforms can enhance communication, they also contribute to feelings of loneliness and social isolation due to the lack of face-to-face interactions (Twenge 18). Moreover, the pressure to present a curated version of oneself online can lead to anxiety and depression (Andreassen et al. 643).

Cognitively, smartphones and digital devices influence attention and memory. The constant notifications and the ability to multitask can lead to fragmented attention spans, reducing the capacity for deep, focused thinking Carr 119). This "always-on" mentality can impair cognitive control and increase stress levels, as individuals feel compelled to respond immediately to digital stimuli (Rosen et al. 1243).

Furthermore, digital devices shape consumer behavior and personal habits. The algorithms that power social media and online shopping sites track user behavior, tailoring content and advertisements to individual preferences. This can lead to increased consumerism and reinforce echo chambers, limiting exposure to diverse perspectives (Pariser 65).

## **Digital Dependency and Behavioral Changes**

In *Brave New World*, soma is used to suppress negative emotions and ensure a smart population. Similarly, smartphones and diversified digital devices serve as modern-day escapes from reality. They offer distractions through social media, gaming, and instant access to information. This constant connectivity can lead to significant changes in social behavior. Studies have shown that excessive smartphone use can increase anxiety and decrease attention span (Twenge 21). Just as soma pacifies the citizens of Huxley's world, our devices often pacify us, reducing our ability to engage deeply with world affairs.

## **Broader Impact of Soma and Smartphone**

### **Crash on Relationships**

Huxley's characters have shallow relationships, lacking genuine emotional connections. Today, while digital technology facilitates communication, it often leads to superficial interactions. Social media platforms encourage brief, surface-level engagements rather than meaningful conversations. This can result in weakened personal relationships and a sense of isolation, despite being constantly connected. The digital world's emphasis on virtual connections can mirror the emotional emptiness depicted in *Brave New World*.

### **Loss of Individuality**

In *Brave New World*, individuality is suppressed to maintain social stability. People are conditioned to conform from birth, and soma further ensures the controlled behaviour of the population. Similarly, the digital age often promotes conformity. Social media algorithms reinforce echo chambers, exposing users primarily to information and opinions that align with their existing beliefs. The social network fosters quicker response but it limits the depth of hearts. This limits exposure to diverse perspectives, reduces critical thinking, and fosters group thinking. The homogenization of thought and behavior in the digital era reflects the loss of individuality that Huxley earnestly warned about.

### **Control and Freedom**

Huxley illustrates how soma is used to control the population, ensuring that they remain content and unthinking. Today, digital technology can also be a means of control. Algorithms track our online behavior, tailoring content to keep us engaged and influencing our decisions and opinions. This subtle form of control can shape our perceptions and behaviors without our conscious awareness. The illusion of choice and freedom in the digital age can be as deceptive as the contentment provided by soma. In daily family life, it is common nowadays for parents to pacify their children with digital technologies. They often let their kids use gaming consoles, watch TV shows, or play on smartphones to keep them occupied and avoid disturbances. However, this has a lasting impact that can be detrimental to their physical and mental development.

### **Significance of the study: Maintaining Balance**

The study, *From Huxley's Soma to Smartphones: Exploration of Digital Dependency through the Lens of Brave New World* has wider social significance so far as human relationships are concerned. The study examines the effects of digital dependency on human relationships. Understanding these impacts can help in developing strategies to foster healthier interactions and growth in a digitally dominated society.

Understanding the parallels between soma and smartphones highlights the importance of maintaining a balance. Embracing technology's benefits without losing our humanity is crucial. This involves fostering digital literacy, promoting critical thinking, and encouraging meaningful, offline interactions. Setting boundaries for digital use and being mindful of its impact can help preserve our individuality and mental well-being. Overall, while smartphones and digital devices offer numerous benefits, such as improved access to information and connectivity, their influence on social behavior, cognitive function, and consumer habits raises important questions about the balance between technological integration and maintaining mental and social well-being.

### **Conclusion**

Huxley's *Brave New World* serves as a powerful warning about the dangers of technological dependence. This research, *From Huxley's Soma to Smartphones: Exploration of Digital Dependency through the Lens of Brave New World* by examining the parallels between soma and modern digital devices, can gain insight into the potential consequences of our digital dependency. It is crucial to travel the digital age with awareness, ensuring that we harness technology's benefits without sacrificing our

humanity, individuality, and freedom. This research underscores the need for a mindful approach to technology use, balanced connectivity with genuine human engagement and critical thought.

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