# UCL professor advocates greyscaling and algorithm curation to combat smartphone addiction



In an era where digital devices dominate daily life, Dr Kaitlyn Regehr, an associate professor at University College London, has emerged as a prominent advocate for what she terms “digital nutrition”. Drawing on her expertise in digital literacy, Regehr aims to tackle issues of digital illiteracy among parents to better equip them in guiding their children’s use of technology.

In her forthcoming book, *Smartphone Nation: Why We’re All Addicted to Screens and What You Can Do About It*, Regehr proposes several practical strategies to help consumers maintain a healthier relationship with technology. Among her key recommendations are two techniques: greyscaling and algorithmic resistance. Greyscaling, which involves switching a phone's display from colour to greyscale, can serve as an immediate tool to understand the effects of visuals on user engagement. “Turning your phone to greyscale is one of the quickest and easiest ways of understanding the impact of colour and images on our user experience,” she notes, suggesting that this practice highlights the addictive qualities of colourful apps and platforms.

Alongside this, Regehr emphasises the importance of algorithmic resistance—actively curating what appears on personal feeds instead of passively accepting the algorithm’s choices. She encourages dedicating half an hour each week to evaluate and refine content, thereby steering away from less meaningful material: “This will give you a sense of how colour and image play into the addictive nature of these devices,” she mentions. Detailed instructions for implementing greyscaling are available through both Google and Apple support resources.

Addressing the broader implications of smartphone usage, Regehr contends that while initiatives like school smartphone bans are beneficial, they are insufficient alone. In an interview with *The Guardian*, she expressed her support for such measures but cautioned that they should not be viewed as a comprehensive solution. “My fear is that when you implement a ban, it can let schools and legislators off the hook because they think the job is done,” she stated.

Regehr's book aims to empower families by providing tools and insights into navigating the complex digital landscape. It will also be accompanied by new educational resources, set to be introduced in schools later this month. These efforts come at a time when nearly all schools in England have instituted bans on mobile phone use during school hours, a move prompted by concerns over children’s mental health and online safety. A national survey revealed that 99.8% of primary schools and 90% of secondary schools have adopted some form of restriction regarding mobile devices.

Through her research, Regehr has previously explored the ways in which algorithms can amplify negative content, particularly extreme misogynistic material. Her commitment to fostering a better understanding of digital literacy is underscored by her personal motivation; her book is dedicated to her two young daughters, as she aspires to create a cultural shift towards healthier technology use. “I am trying to make a cultural change so that their lives are better,” she shared.

*Smartphone Nation* is scheduled for release on 15 May, published by Bluebird, and is positioned as a key resource for those looking to navigate an increasingly digital world with a more informed perspective.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaitlyn_Regehr> - This Wikipedia page provides an overview of Dr. Kaitlyn Regehr's background, including her role as Programme Director of Digital Humanities at University College London and her research focus on the impacts of social media, particularly on young people.
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/aug/15/school-smartphone-bans-are-not-enough-to-tackle-digital-addiction-expert-warns> - An article from *The Guardian* where Dr. Regehr discusses the limitations of school smartphone bans in addressing digital addiction, emphasizing the need for comprehensive solutions beyond such measures.
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