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Critical Review Of Media Addiction And Its Effects

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How Social Media Affects Attention Span

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Psych 303: Research Methods in Psychology

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Do you ever tell yourself that you deserve a little five minute “phone break” in the mist of writing that paper you’ve already procrastinated on? Then, those phone breaks end up becoming more often and longer than when they started. Mostly, because you’ve got caught up in 5-minute craft videos showing how to make your dirty underwear into a fashionable shirt. Well... you’re not alone, as I’m doing the same while writing this. Social media has taken over the lives of many, especially younger generations who have grown up with technology. Social media has a large impact on our attention span due to its rapid and immense information overloading bared on users. TikTok is the worst culprit of all with infinite short videos killing vital brain circuits from endless scrolling (Ramsden & Talbot, 2024). In this article I will be going over the dangers of technology, along with how to slow down social media use and reconnect with the outside world.

https://youtu.be/4z_8EWMO760

As a college student myself, I can 100% say with certainty that college is stressful... Just after the first-year college students are given the financial weight of roughly \$30,000 in debt. With that there are tons of other stressors, such as leaving home and not seeing family as often, the struggle of finding friends, and staying motivated while being put on top of a 30 feet tall stack of homework assignments (Ramsden & Talbot, 2024). Social media is considered an outlet for some people to hide from stress, but overall ends up building more of it (Ramsden & Talbot, 2024). Contributed to that is social comparison and addictive behavior (“scrolling”) through media platforms (Bulut, 2023).

Today, the economy thrives off you suckers that fall for the terrible clickbait videos. Technological evolution guarantees that enticing looking graphic designs

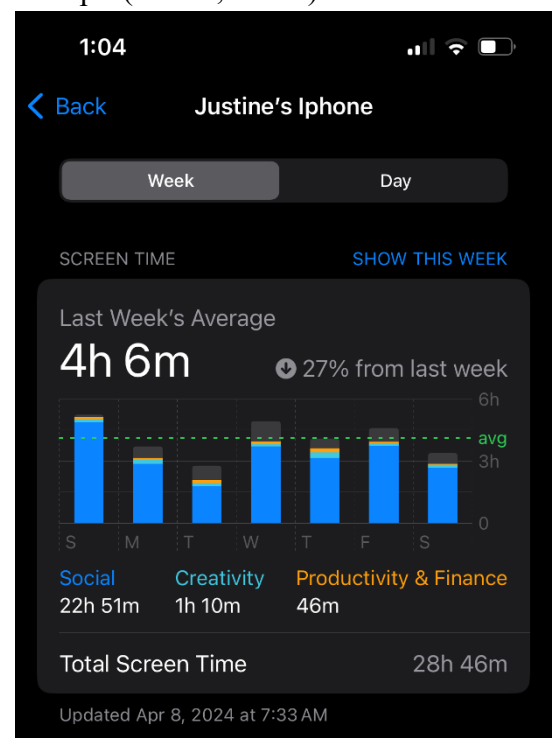
will be enough to capture the attention of the over 5 billion media users today (Giraldo-Luque et al., 2020). This movement then turns into excessive consumption time and symptoms similar to OCD (LaRose et al., 2003). There are several levels that lead to addictive behaviors. Notifications bring about impulses that cause an over alert state (Giraldo-Luque et al., 2020). Notifications can also bring about anxiety for users, since they're constantly waiting for that one reply. Messages and posts (scrolling) provide frequent, interactive, and information overloading content (Giraldo-Luque et al., 2020). This content leads you to want more and causes constant attention breaks to keep looking. Finally, followers, likes, and rewards generate consumptive behavior (Giraldo-Luque et al., 2020). Users keep posting and liking and crave the feeling of value among followers. All these combined release extreme levels of dopamine in the brain, the feel-good chemical that really hooks you (Bulut, 2023).

Reports done by multiple scientists show that the higher social media consumption, the lower GPA's and test scores (Hou et al., 2019). This information was gathered from university students at Peking University. Students participated in a questionnaire that focused on social media addiction and mental health. Those that scored high in media addiction also scored high in low self-esteem and tended to have lower performances academically (Hou et al., 2019).

A lot of the negative effects associated with media addiction tend to do with constant multitasking on media. Consider this, you're listening to your favorite Miley Cyrus song while scrolling through Instagram. At the same time, you just got a text from your friend asking you "what you're up to." Consistent overstimulation,

as shown in the example, leads to decreases in attention span over time (Bulut, 2023). Which in turn can have an impact on schoolwork if you're not able to focus on the material. High media consumption and its correlation to oversaturation of stimuli can reduce gray matter in the anterior cingulate cortex (Bulut, 2023). This area is responsible for sustained attention and ability to ignore distracting extraneous stimulus (Bulut, 2023).

Constantly performing multitasking activities online can “train” your attention span to be shorter. Approximately 50% of TikTok users found the videos one minute or longer were stressful compared to short clips (Bulut, 2023). As said before, this doesn't only affect you personally, but also can be damaging academically and socially (David et al., 2014). Social media is addictive. Personally, when I go on, I lose sense of time and mindless scroll for longer than needs to be mentioned... people are dependent on the dopamine rush. In order to fix this, some regulation codes could be added. The average screen time on campus's worldwide is around 4 hours and 26 minutes, and definitely could be higher depending on the person (Giraldo-Luque et al., 2020). Think of how much of that time could be put towards studying instead.



Don't worry! Your terrible attention span from binge watching cringey influencers doing the renegade dance can be reversed! First, let's start with non-technological ways to reduce distractions and stay focused (Sanford Fit).

- Chewing gum
- Drink water
- Exercise
- Meditation
- Taking notes while studying

Chewing gum has actually been shown to increase alertness and lower stress (Sanford Fit). Drinking water should be an obvious one but it's not. It's like when you don't have a snickers bar, you're not yourself when you're dehydrated. Dehydration can degrade cognitive abilities (Sanford Fit). Exercise and meditation go hand in hand, in the sense they are a healthy distraction and relieve stress. Instead of taking phone breaks while doing homework, go for a brisk 30-minute walk and continue studying. Finally, taking notes requires undivided attention and information can be better retained (Sanford Fit). Moving on to change that can be made on technology to reduce screen time (Burk, 2019) ...

- Set time limits on apps that take up most of your screen time
- Call instead of texting
- Stop taking technology to bed
- Turn off notifications and sounds
- Designate screen-free time throughout the day

Personally, I'm still not proud of my screen time, but I've been able to lower it by two hours using some of the above methods. Turning off notification sounds and notifications reduces the urge to constantly check your phone. Taking technology to bed can increase alertness and delay sleep, leaving you on your phone longer than intended (Burk, 2019). Instead, opt for a book before bed and then you won't need that extra melatonin gummy.

In conclusion, social media addiction is a continuing problem among users today. Overconsumption of this material can be harmful in many aspects of life including socially, academically, and mentally. Maybe now you'll think twice before going down the loophole of true crime for two hours on TikTok. Remember that it's important to give your brain a break and do activities that don't easily overstimulate. Exercise, drinking enough water, and reading could be all it takes to regain part of yourself that was lost in overconsumption of media.

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