Age of Distraction: Technology and It's Connection to Mental and Social Health

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STORMONT VAIL HEALTH

The History

- 24/7 internet connection, video gaming, or social media consumption is available to many

- Many see the 1:1 connection with eyes, speech, posture, non-verbals as a contingent variable in the understanding of ourselves and others and to facilitate intimacy and attachment

- Generational differences
  - Boomers (47-60) – defining moment Kennedy assassination
  - Generation X (61-81) – defining moment Challenger explosion
  - Millennials (80 – 95/2000) – defining moment 9/11. This is also the first generation of digital "natives." They created what we see now
  - Gen Z (95/2000 – 2010/2020) – what we see now
  - Gen Alpha (2011ish – 2025ish) – future. Millennial parents. This will be the first generation completely raised on glass fronted devices. This is and will be their main medium of communication and information. They do and will expect personalized online experiences

- Large studies looking at this include "monitoring the future" and "the youth risk behavior surveillance system"

Digital Statistics

- 90% of people own a smartphone. 97% between 18-49 years old

- Three quarters of US adults' own computers, half have tablets and half have e-readers

- 77% of Americans go online daily

- 15% US adults are "smartphone dependent", 20% 18–29-year-olds

- 92% of teens age 13-17 report being online daily, spending an average of 6 hours a day on screens

- 41% of US adults say they're online almost constantly; 62% of 18–29-year-olds; 15% of those over 65.

- Most popular choices: Facebooks, YouTube; Instagram; WhatsApp, TikTok

- From 2017 – 2024, use of social media worldwide increased from 2.73 billion to 5.17 billion

*Pew Research Center, 2021/2024

What Does that Look Like?

- People are going out less, for young people fewer reported incidents of underage drinking, illicit drug use, and car accidents amongst teens

- Those with unique interests report fewer feelings of isolation and loneliness when connected to an online community.

- Many see social media as a career opportunity, increasing motivation and work ethic, and possibly fostering self-esteem and confidence – for young people this is not always realistic

Hours Impact – Correlations

- Spending 10+ hrs/wk on social media = 56% more likely to report being unhappy

- 6 hours/wk = 47% more likely to be unhappy

- Reported increase in "feeling lonely" – from 2011 to 2015 from 8th and 10th graders
  - Other research has shown that daily social media use decreases the risk of feeling lonely or left out

- For the older generations who did not grow up with screens during their developmental years, there is less impact by media for identify formation and social confidence. So, there is a distinct impact if use is during developmental years.

- Shame

- Biological impacts

"Screen Time"

- 'Screen time' is any time a person spends using a smartphone, tablet, computer, or television. This might include interacting on social media, watching content, playing video games, using video chat, accessing and doing homework.

- Not all time spent in front of a screen is necessarily detrimental.

- Effects of 'screen time' are still being studied though much of the research focuses on those with developing brains.

Benefits of 'screen time'

- Over 95% of schools in the United States are now connected to the internet.

- Educational programming and health information are available online, through apps, and on television.

- Programming can foster creativity or provide a creative outlet.

- Growth of ideas results from interactions with blogs, vlogs, and podcasts.

- Increased sense of community with those identifying shared interests.

- Fosters exploration of unique identity and "safe" feedback for social skills.

Disadvantages of 'Screen Time'

- 'Screen time' seems to desensitize the brain to stimulation, potentially causing ADHD-like behaviors.

- Older children and teenagers may experience similar effects with high levels of usage, as well as headaches, poor sleep, social comparison, mood dysregulation.

- American Academy of Pediatrics recommends:
  - Ages 0-2: No screen time at all
  - Ages 2-5: No more than 1 hour per day
  - Ages 5-18: 2 hours per day *leisure time*

- University of Oxford:
  - Up to 6 hours per day is normal for teenagers, BUT well-being peaks at around 4 hours
    - Including homework and other educational/school activities

Screen Time vs. Social Media Usage

- Not all screen time is social media, but all social media is screen time

- MRI differences are seen in children who use smartphones, tablets, and video games more than sever hours a day

- Those who use screens more than two hours a day got lower scores on thinking and language tests

- Early research on screens focused primarily on television and console-based video games. Research is beginning to look at the differences in impact for overall screen time use vs. social media usage

Benefits to social media usage

- Can provide a creative outlet

- Interactions with blogs and vlogs can help expand worldview; ability to create can increase sense of advocacy and purpose

- Increased sense of community with those identifying shared interests; increased access to support

- Fosters exploration of unique identity

- Can lead to strengthening bonds with IRL friends

Risks of Social Media Use

- Social media provides additional avenues for bullying, making it difficult to escape
- Fear of missing out, increased social comparison
- Can disrupt dopamine production, and sleep
- Possibility of sexual exploitation
- Other safety issues include unfiltered content, location tagging, 'the internet is forever
- Physical effects: back issues, neck issues, carpal tunnel, fitness etc.

Mental Health Impacts of Social Media Use

- Decreased self-esteem

- Increased eating disorders, body dysmorphia, disordered eating

- Increased anxiety, depression, isolation, worthlessness

- Deterioration in concentration and attention

- Poor sleep

- Unhelpful coping/avoidance

Correlation with Anxiety/Depression

- 62% felt overwhelming anxiety

- 68% feeling very sad

- 63% feeling lonely

- Rising Stats….
  - 85% feeling overwhelmed by "all you had to do" – up from 62% in 2016
  - Moderate to severe depression rates rose from 23.2% (2007) to 41.1% (2018)
  - Moderate to severe anxiety rates rose from 17.9% (2013) to 34.4% (2018)
    - The never done enough paradigm
    - Cite, why I don't get "done": sleep disruption, loneliness, cost of college, time spent on social media
    - 15-minute sprints

Social/Physical/Mental Impact

- Research indicates that social connection is a critical factor for mental and physical health

- Impacts preventing mental health problems, maintaining good mental health, and aiding recovery
  - Strong positive association of social isolation and loneliness with depression. This is true in personal, and employee based social relationships

- Strong social connection is associated with better cognitive health

- Social connections, isolation, and loneliness are linked to several physical health diseases and mortality

- For older adult perception of loneliness matters. Research seems to indicate that loneliness has a stronger impact on mental health while isolation has a stronger impact on physical health

- Much research suggests humans in general have been trending towards more loneliness and less social connection even prior to the pandemic….one might question how social media use is impacting this trend; though research shows interventions that are technology based are effective in reducing loneliness

Problematic Smartphone Use

- Anxiety when phone is not available and neglect of other activities = PSU

- Correlations of PSU with depression, anxiety, low self esteem – most notable with adolescents and young adults

- Also related to increased conflict with others, lowered social skills and emotional intelligence, lower psychological well being

- Related to compromised inhibitory control, impaired attention, and impulsivity

- Negatively correlated with academic progress and success

- Parallels exist between PSU and traditional concepts of addiction but the neurobiological similarities between PSU and addiction are not consistent – you can't discount the fact that smartphone use is normalized behavior in everyday life in society. Furthermore, the time spent using smartphones does not always correlate to the development of PSU.

- Research supports the idea that process usage (consuming news, relaxation) is more associated with PSU than social usage (social networking/messaging).

Adolescents

- As a group, one of the most studied age ranges

- Screen time most often at its height with this group

- Some studies show that adolescents are now experiencing a delay in developing the abilities to determine who they are and how they want to be in their friend groups; developing less healthful behaviors, habits and hobbies

- Some increases in rates of anxiety and depression and suicidal behavior

iGen

iGen

- Generation that grew up with a smart phone

- Pre-pandemic research looking at screen time was done on generations who did not grow up truly with smart phone access but was applied to children who did have that level of access; new post-covid research is being done on children who did

- What are we learning:
  ◦ The impact of screen time is the same for academic screen time as it is for social screen time; they combine to create the effect we see for excessive screen time
  ◦ Natural social interactions are impacted/reduced
  ◦ Virtual reality is their reality; they grew up here…what happens online is the same as what happens IRL to them – they are struggling more with early adulthood than prior generations

iGen Cont.

- Devices often serve as their social world – it is not disconnection to them – when taken they begin to feel isolated

- Digital dissociation – when one doesn't feel their behavior online is "them"

- While they truly report having friends and feeling connected through social based connections, they have reduced emotional intimacy due to lack of in person interaction. They may have few IRL experiences to share with one another

- Being raised on screen time creates a true stronger need for novel stimuli – they are truly bored at rates that are different than those not raised on screens; wired to need more input at quicker rates

iGen cont.

- Positively - they are more tolerant of individual differences

- its they have the potential to know anything due to access

- its there is a tendency to fuse their mental health with their identity so that mental health becomes a core component of how they see themselves---and media is much more likely to present a "match" to them even though diagnostically they don't actually meet criteria
  - We all know adolescent try out identities, but they seem to be doing that on media now where you can join and identify with numerous different types of groups based on others presented videos/experiences – seen an increase in trying things because they are aesthetically pleasing in the videos when historically they might never have tried this identity (seeing someone complete suicide on TikTok/engaging in the aesthetic of cocaine and its mini utensils)

Continued potential obstacles for this generation

- They are prone to not doing well in academic settings where they are put on levels based on behavior. They are far more anxious about staying on good behavior marks without being able to conceptualize that two days of good behavior and one day of bad is actually developmentally appropriate at certain times (i.e. don't weigh yourself every day)

- The early emphasis on achievement (academic too) leads to higher rates of depression/anxiety/self harm in this population

- Children struggle more to move into adulthood due to reduced attention spans. There is some evidence they think adulthood = full attention all day every day and they avoid it or are scared of moving into it

Internet Challenges

Have you heard of:
- ALS ice bucket challenge?
- Mannequin challenge?
- Chubby bunny?
- Harlem shake?
- Bottle flip challenge?

What about?
- Cinnamon challenge?
- Tide pod challenge?
- Choking game?
- Kylie Lip Challenge?

What to do?
- Stay up to date.
- Talk about it. Likely vs. Unlikely.
- Discuss the risks. Be direct.
- Acknowledge peer pressure.
- Don't judge.
- Monitor.

Cyberbullying

What is cyberbullying?
- ◦ Sending mean messages to someone
- ◦ Purposefully sharing embarrassing pictures
- ◦ Spreading rumors or lies
- ◦ Telling others to ignore a person or leave them out

- Cyberbullying is non-stop, anonymous, and easily spread.

- Response: for young people try to find solutions that don't include removing their devices – its not sustainable or realistic for many and is a significant part of their lives (for many). For older individuals, they may need to learn good tools and skills for this setting that they have not yet developed

How to respond when screen time seems to be negatively impactful

- Build tolerance for working through social anxiety to reduce later feelings of loneliness

- Show genuine interest in a person's online life; it is their life

- Acknowledge gaps in knowledge about their life; if that is true for you

- Adequately discuss decision making in that world rather than trying to move them out of it

- Teach/discuss sensible screen solutions

Management of Screen Time

Flipd
Moment
Offtime
Forest: Stay Focused
BreakFree
App Detox
Quality Time
Stay on Task