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The Impact of Technology on Our Attention Span

In a world where you can access decades of information with just a press of a button, or contact someone across the world in just a matter of seconds, it is hard to think of technology as villainous. Nonetheless, it is scary to think that as technology evolves, the human race may be confronted with challenges that seemed so minuscule before. Algorithms become so good that you can't help but scroll, smartphones become so effective that you get anxious when you misplace them, and you catch yourself finishing the entire television show in a day because the episodes keep auto-playing. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines attention span as "the length of time during which one (such as an individual or a group) is able to concentrate or remain interested," which highlights the core of technology's issue. The influence of technology on our day-to-day lives has diminished our attention spans by creating a continual stream of distractions that debilitate our ability to concentrate on a task. If we become self-aware of these changes, we can actively work towards restoring our attention spans and creating a more productive society.

An article by *Ox Journal* highlights the impact of technology on our attention span across different age groups. It shows that children are most heavily impacted by technology because of the constant exposure they have. According to the *Pew Research Center*, 49% of children under 2 years old have interactions with a smartphone, and 74% of children under the age of 2 have interactions with a television. This is evident in public as well, it's become increasingly common to see parents give their children tablets while eating out or at the grocery store, they even

developed a name for these children, the *iPad Kid*. These children have become enthralled by the instant gratification technology provides them, and it's difficult for them to behave without the multitasking that these digital devices allow them. Children have a newfound need to multitask; they find it difficult to sit down and complete a task, and they need something else to stimulate them, like music or a movie. If they try to tackle a task head-on, many children feel bored or burnt out due to their small attention span and will often resort to putting off the task to engage in something else, like social media or television. Specialists are concerned about their education and learning abilities due to their attention span decreasing as the use of technology increases.

However, the effects are not limited to our youth, but to adults as well. Productivity, especially in the work environment, has been heavily impacted by the use of technology. According to *Ofcom*, 20% of adults spend more than 40 hours per week online, which isn't shocking since smartphones have become more than just a way of communication; they have become a way of life. Many adults use their smartphones to stay up to date with work by checking emails, viewing their calendars, and making appointments. It's common to even hear people remark that their smartphones are their lives because without them, they wouldn't know how to function. In a podcast episode of *Speaking of Psychology*, Gloria Marks, PhD, tells how technology is able to enhance productivity through the use of different software, but it also contributes to the decline in our attention spans. Between games and social media, the once seemingly useful device can become our biggest enemy. According to *Cross River Therapy*, adults, on average, check their phones every 12 minutes, making it incredibly difficult to maintain focus while completing a task. Subsequently, technology's impact in the workplace may enhance productivity, but it also diminishes it by creating a constant distraction that the adult attention span is no longer able to resist.

Despite this, the effects of technology on our older generation are less pronounced. Older adults spent most of their lives before digital technology, and many of them haven't or don't want to adapt to our modern high-technology society. Most older adults use technology as a luxury rather than a necessity. They would rather communicate with someone face-to-face rather than screen-to-screen. In fact, according to an article by *Dwane H. Dean*, older consumers are less likely to use self-service technology and prefer human interaction. This means that an older consumer would be more likely to wait in line for a cashier than use a self-service checkout stand. This preference contributes to fewer interruptions from digital devices, which preserves their attention span. Observing how older adults tackle technology can help teach other generations ways to manage technology, thus helping to restore their attention span.

Given these various impacts on technology across different age groups, it's apparent that technology presents unique challenges for different generations. For children, their early exposure and constant access to technology fosters an environment of instant gratification and multitasking, which has greatly impaired their ability to focus on a task. The attention span of adults is also on a steady decline as they are faced with a stream of distracting notifications and the need to stay up to date with their work and personal lives. The digital distraction technology provides adults, has lowered their productivity and the ability to concentrate on simple tasks. However, the older generation's attention span triumphs by preferring human interaction over technology. The influence of technology on our day-to-day lives has diminished our attention spans by creating a continual stream of distractions that debilitate our ability to concentrate on a task. As it continues to evolve, it is critical to become self-aware of its impacts on society so that we can actively work towards restoring our attention span and bettering our lives.

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