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## The Negative Effects of Digital Technology on Society

Digital technology is accelerating at a rate unforeseen, but is humanity prepared to deal with the ramifications of this such advancement? In and around the last 20 years, new technologies such as smartphones and computers have emerged. In just as much time, these technologies have rapidly advanced bringing forth the rise and popularity of social media which has shifted the way that society operates. These digital technologies have introduced new means of socialization and connection, and increased convenience, and, as a result, newer generations have grown accustomed to convenience never before possible. This development places a question on how the societal effects of these technologies may be exacerbated in the youth, and if not regulated going forward, how the consequences of such inaction will change society in the next 20 years to come. To prevent detriment to the users of digital technologies, it is essential that society moves towards reevaluating its relationship with internet usage and psychosocial dependence on digital technologies. Further, it is necessary that regulations are put in place for these ever developing digital technologies, in order to better inform their users of the complete scope of their functionality and invoke transparency of the corporate goals of the companies behind these digital technologies.

As more advanced digital communicative technologies have arisen, greater convenience in communication has been reached. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have created new means for connection, allowing for continuous connectivity and communication at any time of the day or night. Platforms such as these, also introduce social metrics such as 'likes' and

‘views’ on posts, as well as ‘follower counts’. These metrics are oftentimes used to gauge engagement and garner communities. However, the focus on these metrics has been found to lead to mental distress in both the introverted and those who are more sociable. Users who receive a high number of ‘likes’ and other forms of attention online often experience a dopamine rush, this being a result of the positive attention that they receive.

However, as a result of this, users of social platforms such as those aforementioned, often seek out greater attention on the internet, in order to maintain that rush, with users posting in greater frequencies and spending larger amounts of time on these platforms for this purpose, resulting in a loop of unhealthy dopamine boosting interactions, creating a dependence on it as a source of such, and/or coping mechanism. In more intense cases, those with minimal intervention, external restraint, and/or found alternatives for the users as a coping mechanism, it can result in social media addiction. Users may avoid real world events, activities, and social opportunities, in favor of seeking this attention; these users may otherwise prioritize events that they believe could boost their online appearance. The aforementioned behaviors can place a strain on relationships and negatively affect the mental health of users by distorting their perception of the real world and real relationships, leaning into extremes due to the disconnected nature of their goals and leading to isolation. Further, when these most vulnerable users, those with unhealthy usage relationships with these platforms, fail to receive this attention, they may experience negative effects on their self-esteem, anxiousness, and general well-being. This is due to the perception of social hierarchy on the internet, with users conflating real world connections for engagement on these platforms.

Due to the unrestricted communication allowed by social media, the unique phenomenon of cyberbullying has arisen. Individuals who seek to make negative, hateful, or otherwise mean spirited remarks online, are allowed to do so anonymously if sought, due to the nature of many social media platforms. In addition to this, many platforms lack proper filtration systems, allowing for hateful speech, violent media, extremism, and other forms of bigoted or otherwise graphic content to slip

through. When users are repeat exposed to such material online, long term negative effects to their psyche, such as decreased empathy, increased anger, and aggression in thoughts and even acts. (Lancet Reg Health Am., 2023). Such effects show to be incredibly detrimental to public health, with extreme cases of such repeat exposure leading to violent radicalization (Front Psychol., 2022).

As a result of the ways in which modern society is structured, humanity's day-to-day lives have been deeply impacted by digital technologies and the internet. Most advancements in digital technologies have replaced the need for many older inventions, creating convenience for previously more tedious tasks, and leading to much of the global population finding these devices essential to everyday life. Devices such as smartphones have eliminated the need for tools such as flashlights, calculators, maps, and many other previously individual devices (Business Insider, 2015). In earlier models of digital and communicative technologies, individuals were restricted to more rigid lines of communication, such as the ever-common house phone or desktop computer. These devices required that users remained in a singular location, and were not endlessly available, restricting long distance communication largely to what users allowed through. However, modern iterations of these technologies lack these physical restrictions on usage; cell phones are usable in a majority of the world and can accept calls and texts at any time; personal computers which were previously fixed to a particular location, can also exist as laptops which are transportable. The easy accessibility of modern digital technologies has, in turn, increased the pressure for individuals to strive for maximum availability; this can lead to increased stress and a fear of missing out on important connections.

The current lack of regulation on digital technologies have created unique negative effects on the youth. As digital technologies have become more accessible, the youth have been able to access the internet at an extremely young age. As a result of this, it has become ever the more commonplace for individuals to be exposed to explicit content at a young age. A 2020 survey found that approximately 50% of those that it surveyed had been exposed to explicit sexual content before the 8th grade. (Wen-Hsu Lin, PLoS One.)

Supporters of unrestricted development of internet technologies frequently claim that it is essential that governments refrain from involving themselves in the development of social technologies, instead opting for a more Laissez-faire market policy, in order to avoid stagnation of innovation. However, it is particularly evident, based upon current practices with minimal governmental intervention, that such a state, is severely detrimental; creators of these vast platforms have failed to properly protect their users. Innovation, that harms its users, finds stagnation within itself.

In the modern day, and for as long as digital technology continues to develop, it will be necessary for governments to place greater emphasis on creating and enforcing regulations, in order to protect the global population. There is an ever-growing need, particularly, for legislation to reduce the predatory principles that much of social media is based upon; it is entirely feasible to develop a middle-ground between profit and practicality for users. Without such change, it is implausible to reduce the current harms to mental health, child development, and public welfare being endured upon society. Finally, if these principles fail to be within the ethical principles of developers of digital technology, a question is raised; for whom are the innovations of digital technology meant to serve?

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