

Social Media's Impact on Human Attention Span

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Abstract- This research paper explores the impact of exposure to short-form video content on social media on the attention span of teenagers and young adults. It examines the role of dopamine-driven scrolling habits, the effects on academics and productivity, and possible solutions such as meditation and focus-based applications.

Index Terms- Social Media, Attention Span, Short-Form Content, Dopamine, Productivity

I. INTRODUCTION

Topic: Social media's impact on humans.

Issue: The exposure to social media impacting the attention span of the current generation.

How is exposure to short form video content on social media impacting the attention span of the young adults and teenagers?

Social media has impacted this generation as exposure to social media has decreased the human attention span. In 2004 an average human being spent around 2 and a half minutes on a tab However due to our habits of scrolling and switching tabs on social media the number has dropped to 47 seconds today. (Mark.G,2023; Microsoft). This is almost a 66% decrease. This means that on an average people have started paying attention to things for less time. Some statistics show the attention span has decreased significantly by 25% since early 2000s to 2015 (Hayes.A,2024; Wyzowl). A very popular application for short form of content is TikTok which has over 4 billion global downloads on in the span of 4 years from 2018-2022 (2023; National Library of medicine).

II. CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Causes and consequences

The main cause for why the average human attention span is lowering is the constant release of a hormone

called dopamine in our body. Dopamine is the hormone which is responsible for any sort of pleasure that one receives, it could be anything that makes them happy. When dopamine is released, it causes a 'dopamine rush' in the body and this makes humans feel rewarded. To gain this feeling repeatedly people tend to do tasks that give them dopamine very often in continuation and this can be addictive in most cases. (Watson.S,2024; Harvard Health Publishing). Social media platforms offer short forms of content which gives people a release of dopamine to regain this feeling they scroll repeatedly. Their brain gets trained to instantly get content of its liking which eventually leads to people becoming impatient as they are used to getting what they want in a short amount of time. As these platforms have an almost never-ending phenomena people end up mindlessly scrolling in search of a dopamine hit unlike other drugs that have a similar effect because they eventually finish however, this doesn't (Waters.J,2021; The Guardian). The use of social media eventually leads to users wasting their time in their workplace and that makes it hard for them to be productive as they either think that they should use social media for some more time, or they can't concentrate as their brain gets used to receiving short forms of content and focusing on something like a wordy document or an assignment becomes a challenge all of this eventually leads to a shorter attention span(Wolley.K and Sharif.M ,2022; Harvard Business Review).

The lowered attention span due to excessive scrolling on social media largely impacts the academic status of students as those with a short attention span can't remember information for a long time and end up performing worse in tests than students who don't have a short attention span. The mental wellbeing of students is also impacted by this as there are stress levels linked to use of social media. The brain constantly attentive which makes it difficult to stay calm and have the right mindset for learning

(Oaten,J,2024; Santa Maria College). Due to the reduced attention span high school students face difficulty in focusing in class as their attention is diverted easily. A very popular application TikTok which has billions of downloads is said to responsible for this as it was used often during the pandemic which is why now students have a hard timing concentrating (2023; SG Analytics).

III. GLOBAL AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

According to Research papers from Harvard business review a large number of employees and students end up spending time on social media and end up scrolling on social media for hours(Sharif.M ,Woolley.K ; 2022 Harvard Business Review).The decreased attention span makes it hard for people around the world to focus on long tasks. TikTok and Instagram are examples of social media platforms make the users consume “short forms” of content which is repeatedly scrolled (Nussenbaun.T, 2023; American school in London). Short form of content means a document of maximum 1200 words or a video of maximum 10 minutes (Pizzini. M, 2023; Hurrdat Marketing). The current generation is becoming impatient as they want information to be available to them fast due to their habit of consuming short form content. Studies have shown that 32% people stop using certain sites that are slow and if a page takes 1 second longer to load it reduces the number of viewers on the website by 11%. Therefore, this is making the people impatient and making their ability to think deeply weak (Weatherhead.R, 2014; The Guardian). The impact of the short form is global as the audience of one of the popular short form content app is over 4 billion (2023; National Library of medicine), another short form content source; Instagram reels has 2 billion monthly active users from all around the world and over 200 billion are played on a daily average on meta and Instagram (Kumar.N,2024 Demandsage).

National perspective

IV. COURSE OF ACTION

Majority of people in the United States of America own smart phones and many have raised concerns that they are spending too much time on social media

(Jiang.J ,2018; Pew Research Center). According to research American students are not able to sit in class with all their concentration specially after covid-19 because the exposure to technology had increased in that period (Wong. A and Jimenez.K, 2023; USA today). Social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are something teenagers have been constantly using if not all at least one of them. 54% of the teenagers from the United States of America say it’s hard for them to get off the platform that they are using. Teenagers in The United stated say that it is hard for them to completely cut off social media and stop using it. (Vogels.A and Watnick.R, Massarat.N 2022; Pew Research Center).

Course of Action

The short attention span is basically caused by the dopamine addiction which effects our focus. We could either control our use of social media and the dopamine addiction or we could work on increasing our attention span through meditation. Meditation is basically an everyday practice that can improve the brain’s ability to focus and pay attention on something specific. This makes one more “aware, present and calm.” Studies have shown that through meditation the cerebral cortex of the brain gets stronger and helps in concentration. Meditation has proven to improve attention span (2023; Virginian Rehabilitation and Wellness). Meditation can be done through visualisation, repeating a calming word, being mindful, exercising and yoga (2021; Mayo clinic). By doing some very simple practices like focusing on breathing as you inhale and exhale every day for some time, can also help. This has helped a person named Sharon Salzberg who said that “I thought, okay, what will it be, like, 800 breaths before my mind starts to wander? And to my absolute amazement, it was one breath, and I’d be gone” (2019; mindful). This practice helps people live in the present and improves their ability to pay attention to things (2019; mindful). I think that this can be easily implemented in schools and collages if educational institutes dedicate 30 minutes of meditation in a week in the students’ schedule for the wellbeing of the students, the same should be done in workspaces so that employees can focus better and show efficiency at work.

There are also productivity applications that can be downloaded on smart phones which work towards improving focus. The main agenda of these apps is to help users avoid social media. An example of this app is the “Flora” app which is designed so that users can grow virtual trees as they spend their time productively. The app allows to the user to set a timer for the time at which they want to be productive meanwhile a tree is growing in their phones as soon as another app is accessed the tree dies. These help the users avoid social media as they have the consciousness of the tree dying in their minds (2017; Green Focus). This would get rid of the habit of constant scrolling and receiving happiness or satisfaction in a short amount of time which would eventually revert the attention span. This application can be made popular by encouraging people to talk about these apps in workshops about health wellbeing workshops held at schools and colleges, This app could also be made popular by more advertisements on social media itself, as this is where the people who are willing to get rid of their habit of scrolling will be found.

I think that getting an application like the focus app is more effective because it is something that will not only help someone get help in reverting their attention span but also make the person responsible for completing their tasks as they will learn how to concentrate on their priorities. The focus app has a psychological impact on a person as it has trees that die if u get distracted during your focus time so to avoid the tree from dying people tend to not use the app. Meditation; however, is something people may or may not remain consistent due to their busy lives. There may be criticism about the tree app that even if people use it people may or may not be able to control themselves and continue to break their focus cycle repeatedly, but I think if someone’s is willing wanting get their time off social media and do better in terms of academics and work they should be responsible enough for their psychological health and wellbeing.

V. EVALUATION

I used statistics about the Citizens of USA being concerned about their screen time form the from Pew

Research Centre as this website is known for its large-scale research and it also has no objective to be biased as it is not sponsored by anyone. The research findings from this website were also cited in various other articles that I came across which is what makes it credible.

I used Microsoft as the source of my evidence in the beginning of the report as this is a reputable technology company who has a vested interest in conducting research about the productivity in technology and its harms and has a large customer base. I got evidence for the fact that the attention span has decreased form here.

Harvard Health Publishing is an official site of the Harvard Medical School, which is one of the topmost schools of the world and is also one of the ivy leagues. This website can be relied on as Harvard medical school has people who have expertise in medical sciences review these articles before publication. The claims are supported which evidence from their research findings on dopamine and its effects which makes it reliable.

The Harvard business review is also one of the sources I have used for my reference as it is directly affiliated to the Harvard business school which is a well-known university just like Harvard medical school. The articles from this source have authors of the article clearly mentioned and there is a wide range of perspectives that the website explores in terms of scrolling habits and reasons to why one constantly scrolls. It is an educational institute that publishes articles for academic purposes.

Reflection

I knew that people around the world struggle with spending too much time of social media, get distracted by social media, procrastinate often and that some people get addicted to social media. I knew that specially after covid 19 the popularity of applications such as TikTok have increased.

I wanted to know what the impact of social media on our wellbeing is and why it tends to distract people so easily, I also wanted to know what aspects of our lives can be impacted due to social media and the

popular. After my research I found about the dopamine effect. I learned how the short form video content application can contribute to the lowering attention span of humans I also learned that the development of technology compared to the past has impacted our lifestyles and this is also the cause for why the attention span is lowering. I got to know the impact of the lowering attention span on the academics as to why many students' loose interest in academics due to their short form content addiction/habit. Overall, my perspective changed from thinking that social media was just another aspect of our lives to it being the cause for effecting other aspects of our life.

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