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Technology: The Effects on Us, and The World

In today's day and age, people are living in a world where there is technology everywhere around them. Since the '90s, the world has been gaining global access to the internet. This makes it possible to connect to anywhere in the world, making an already well-connected world even smaller. With common everyday uses of technology, there is a connection between the ability to learn and mental well-being, which influences the ability to make a difference in the world.

With today's internet, there is a connection with every part of the world. In Professor Amelia Lewis' *Social Sustainability Lecture*, Lewis states that "Everything is connected rather than focusing on a specific issue or yourself as an individual" (6). With today's technology and the internet, a single message sent online could influence someone on the other side of the planet within milliseconds. With all the possible information, and such a short time span, how can a person ensure that this connection's effect has a positive outcome? The easiest way, and best way to start, is with you. Lewis states, "a healthy society starts with a healthy individual" (6). A healthy individual is a person who can manage their mental wellbeing and continue to learn throughout their life. Given the world's everyday continued use of technology, one question becomes, how does his use affect an individual's well-being and ability to learn?

In years past, people used to read for much longer periods of time. As Nicholas Carr states in *Is Google Making Us Stupid*:

I'm not thinking the way I used to think. I can feel it most strongly when I'm reading. Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I'd spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That's rarely the case anymore. (2)

In the past, we got information on almost everything we learned, through reading and even for enjoyment, many more people than today turn to a book to read. Nowadays, as computers and technology become more common, people turn to different sources of entertainment. As examples, there are social media platforms to get the latest scoop about a celebrity or friend. Today, people could also watch a video of a cat jumping off a banister for seven and a half hours on loop. The possibilities are endless! Computers and technology also make it much easier and faster to do research. Carr writes, "Research that once required days in the stacks or periodical rooms of libraries can now be done in minutes" (2). As Carr suggests, people can simply run a search through a search engine and find thousands of answers and sources. Though it is great that the information being searched is easily accessible, it could also have downsides. Because of the convenience of people's everyday usage of a search engine, their minds may change. Carr contemplates, "What if I do all my reading on the web not so much because the way I read has changed, i.e. I'm just seeking convenience, but because the way I THINK has changed" (Carr 3)? As people get more and more used to the search engine, they retrain themselves to think differently about their approach to reading. This could make it a lot more difficult to read and understand a lengthy article or a book. With this issue in mind, how does a person truly know that they are in control of their research?

Similar things have happened in novels. George Hadley states: "Walls, Lydia, remember; crystal walls, that's all they are. Oh, they look real, I must admit — Africa in your parlor — but

it's all dimensional, superreactionary, supersensitive color film and mental tape film behind glass screens. It's all odorophonics and sonics, Lydia" (Bradbury 3-4). This excerpt comes from Ray Bradbury's *The Veldt*. This science fiction short story can align with this situation quite significantly. George and Lydia Hadley have a nursery in their house that can become whatever their kids can dream of. This could often allude to our situation of finding anything anyone could ever want on Google or with entertainment sources. Their disbelief of the effects on the well-being of their children could be concerning, so, if it affects the Hadley children, how could the effects of real-life technology affect a person's well-being?

There are many great things with today's uses of technology that could improve most people's physical and mental health. According to Pedro Cardoso-Letite and a few others, "Total hours of media consumed per day increases with age" (9). As a person gets older, they continue to use technology more and more, whether it is for academic purposes or for entertainment. One commonly used platform that could prove beneficial is video games. As Cardoso-Letite mentions, "Overall, more time on video gaming is associated with faster response speed in the attentional control tasks without, however, any concomitant increase in error rates that could have been indicative on an increased impulsivity or inattention" (12). Younger audiences who play video games can be beneficial to reaction times. Though playing games can be beneficial, how much time spent playing games is most effective? According to Lisa Mundy and a few others' research, playing video games does not directly coincide with academic grades, though could help learn essential skills such as problem-solving, depending on the type of game (11). Though video games could be beneficial to certain academic skills, another form of media could cause a different effect.

Social media is a tool that is often used to connect many people. It often allows them to reach out to a community of people all around the world and be able to understand everything that could go on, whether or not that information is accurate. Social media's connection could be beneficial in both their well-being and academics. According to Jaqueline Nesi, "One of the most clearly established benefits of social media use is that of social media connection, with 81% of teens reporting that social media allows them to feel more connected to their friends" (119). People can reach out to audiences much faster than they previously could have thought. Before phones and the internet were common, it would have taken months to get a single message across the planet, when now people can send and receive messages within milliseconds. Social media could also prove beneficial to academics. Sonia Santoveña-Casal ran a research program with undergraduate and post-graduate university students using Twitter or offline programs to complete tasks, see how people react, and use the social media platform to their advantage. One interesting outcome that Santoveña-Casal discusses, "the students who completed the social network-based activity were found to earn higher grades than the students who completed the more traditional activity or those who did not complete any activity" (131). Students often could use the platform to ask questions about their assignments quickly and receive answers quickly, offering more time to complete the assignments and allow them to focus on making it the best possible. Another interesting note that Santoveña-Casal mentions is that "it is concluded that educational level does not influence social media participation or academic performance," therefore stating that anyone could realistically use some sort of online platform to allow learning to be completed in an easier fashion (136).

Though there are many benefits of using social media and technology for both entertainment and education, there could also be a few downsides. According to Cardoso-Letite,

“Children who spend more time on media are more frequently reported by their teachers to manifest ADHD-like behavior... Yet, partial correlation analyses reveal that media multitasking might be driving this effect” (15). This often could make it difficult for students to focus on an academic assignment and be able to continue with their education. This also could be a major source of distraction when learning online. Media multitasking is working with multiple medias at the same time. A lot of students often may have a video or TV show running while they work on an assignment, which could draw their attention away from what they are learning, decreasing their effectiveness while working. This could also open a lot of room for error towards an assignment, that could affect their abilities to learn and their academic performance.

Another issue that is often common is peer influence. According to Nesi, “Peer influence processes may also be heightened online, where youth may access a wide range of their peers in addition to potentially risky content” (117). The influence of others is much easier to do without being punished for it when behind a screen. The large access of other people across the globe could also allow for a much larger chance for a community to target you. Sometimes the easiest way to recover from a targeting situation is to either remove your access to that group of people or just leave the internet all-together.

Putting a limit on access to technology could prove beneficial. Going back to *The Veldt*, “This room is their mother and father, far more important in their lives than their real parents” (Bradbury 10). Letting the technology take full control over your lives could lead to a larger margin of the downsides given. According to Mundy, “Using a computer for more than an hour was associated with a lower numeracy performance, an association that again remained after control for prior media use, and equivalent to a loss in learning of around four months” (10). Giving that distance away from the technology could also give people time to rest their brains

from the dopamine rush often given by the apps and research tools used, allowing a chance to read longer lengths. If people give themselves the time to rest, they could use their technology to improve their everyday well-being, as well as their ability to perform better academically.

Ensuring that people can use their online tools effectively is easiest when they focus on what they can control. Between the effects of using different medias at once, the huge connections, and difficulty reading, there could be a negative impact. Some positive impacts are the huge access to everyone, increased response times, and ease of access to sources. The best way to make the positives outweigh the negatives is by taking some time off from technology here and there. Taking breaks, as well as trying other sources of research, could make academic experiences much better and improve everyday well-being.

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