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**TikTok and Screen Time: Balancing Risks and Benefits**

In today’s digital age, screens have become an inescapable aspect of our daily lives. From smartphones and tablets to laptops and TV’s, we are in a constant state of media consumption. While screens are a phenomenal source of information, entertainment, and communication, just to name a few, research now suggests that an overly excessive use of screen time can have negative effects on the health and well-being of young children and teens.

In recent years, social media platforms like TikTok have taken the world by storm. People of all ages are indulging in the dopamine driven videos that users are constantly uploading. This has brought new attention to the potential risks associated with excessive screen time. Using its short-form videos, TikTok has been able to reach all age ranges, and in recent years, has become a cornerstone for social media indulgence amongst children and teenagers. However, concerns have grown rapidly about the impact that TikTok has on the mental health, self-esteem, and privacy of its young users. Nowadays, the platform has enough backers to start nationwide trends. The most recent being “Borg”, which stands for Blackout Rage Gallon. It’s a challenge in which High School and College students get a clear, plastic, gallon jug, and fill it with water, vodka, and flavor enhancers such as Mio or Kool-Aid. Little needs to be said about the dangers this trend has the potential to cause, but one thing is certain, trends similar to this will continue to rise. This paper will explore the effects of screen time on young teens and children, as well as the specific effects of the use of TikTok as a social media outlet.

**Complexity of Screens and Media**

As it’s been known in recent years, screen time has become increasingly complex due to the plethora of electronics, as well as internet-based forms of media which surge throughout the world. While it appears that TV is likely a large shareholder in the screen time space, it’s apparent that handheld and personal devices are beginning to take over. Still, TV remains the primary focus among children. However, computers, game consoles, and smart devices are moving their way on to the scene and have been doing so for some time. In addition, the popularity of social media platforms, particularly TikTok, have increased their presence within the online space. Research has begun to link excessive screen time from the use of TikTok and other social media platforms to negative outcomes such as physical and cognitive impairments, sleeping disorders, depression, anxiety, etc.

According to an article posted by The New York Times, a senior in High School by the name of Ruby McMahon had gotten hooked on TikTok during the COVID-19 epidemic. During this time, she and her friends would spend upwards of five hours a day on the well-known social media platform. According to Ruby, “It kind of affected my mental health. I was having a hard time sleeping when I was watching this many TikTok’s at night, but I couldn’t go to sleep without watching my TikTok’s first” (Maheshwari, NYT). After this, Ms. McMahon and her friends decided to go on a “TikTok sober” routine, where they would stop using the app cold turkey in hopes of lessening their screen time.

The specific mechanisms underlying the health problems, and the relation between screen types and various media outlets being consumed is unclear. Obviously, TikTok’s content is highly active, making it a perfect spot for people to get lost in time. Evidently, the main focus of TikTok developers is to target young people with the amount of imagination and curiosity that users can bring through their videos. This, of course, is but another reason why parents are beginning to weed out the use of social media platforms. TikTok’s algorithm is so highly advanced, it only takes a few videos for it to recognize what content you, the user, would like. Most can see where a problem like this can arise; say a child is exposed to a gruesome video. There is a high probability that the child will continue to receive videos very similar to the original one, and thus, begin them down a dark path.

On the other hand, the app faces challenges in the realm of monetization. Consistent users, who most consider to be “Social Media Influencers”, are only able to post limited-timed videos which may cause companies to be reluctant to pay for advertisements. However, with the constant user feed and consumption that TikTok has raised, developers are always on the lookout to add features to keep users coming back. A simple, but useful feature they’ve included is the ability to set a screen-time for users who find themselves overly active on the platform. Features and changes like this are necessary to help weed out the negative side of social media.

Drawing from various studies, there are many things that can be inferred:

* Excessive screen time, especially from social media platforms like TikTok, has been linked to negative physical and mental health outcomes in children and teens.
* Social media platforms are particularly concerning because of their ability to target young people with engaging content and the use of their advanced algorithms that can eventually lead to similarly cycled content.

Hopefully, in the near future, companies like TikTok will continue to push and advocate for a safe and healthier environment, where children and teens alike are not constantly glued to the blue-light emitting screen that eats time.

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**Images:**

**A group of boys looking at a tablet

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**Text

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