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Reading and Writing in the Digital Age

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In today's society, digital technologies and their use are under heavy criticism. However, in future generations, these current technologies will no longer be criticized. The current critique of the technology used by the youth is in large part due to generational superiority, the belief that the way the an older generation grew up is better because it is what that generation is comfortable with. History has clearly depicted this progression consistently for hundreds of years. Companies want to produce what will appeal to their primary consumers, which in most cases is the youth. Of course, there is research that clearly describes some of the potential negative impacts of digital technology use, however, the benefits outweigh the negatives if used appropriately. At a far less personal level, digital technology is where the money is. Therefore, companies will continue to produce devices in a high quantity at with quickly increasing quality and capabilities.



Presumed generational superiority has existed for centuries. Older generations have always looked down upon the devices of younger generation simply because they are unfamiliar with them and did not have access to them as children. What these devices are is entirely insignificant. The phrase "back in my day we only had..." brings such satisfaction to the generations that believe the way they grew up was infinitely better than the current youth. This is clearly displayed in the 1820 text "On Novel Reading". This article describes reading for

pleasure as toxic to children and nowadays it is looked upon as an intelligent, sophisticated activity. “Older generation” does not necessarily refer to the elderly with a “those damn kids” mentality. The mentality is prevalent through all ages. Those born in the 1960-1970s will comment on teenagers and the plethora of devices they use, and those same teenagers will comment on all of the elementary schoolers with iPhones. There is nothing inherently evil about the increase in device use. That is simply how societies progress. Things change and technology develops exponentially. The main reason it is viewed as negative is because it is new and different than the childhood of the older generations. When the current youth become the future elders, their technologies will age with them, and whatever devices are unknown to them will become the poison. This is not to say that current technology is not without flaws, or that it is necessarily superior to older technology. It is simply to say that in a few decades, it will no longer matter because devices will continue to progress further, and the perceived generationally superior mentality will not change. Therefore, it may not be the devices that are toxic, rather the refusal to accept the future of humanity utilizing what is around them.



Of course, technology, or digital reading in particular, has its drawbacks and concerns. Studies have shown that people read less proficiently on a screen, however, as people grow up accustomed to screen reading, the disparity in comprehension between paper and screen will likely fade. To most people, there is something that just feels right and naturally about reading hard copy text. This is simply because this is what most people in current society grew up with. Children in modern times are growing up with screens from a very early age and will therefore be far more accustomed to them than even current teenagers. On a related note, e-reading technologies will continue to rapidly improve to better suit the needs of the reader. Digital



reading provides several major benefits over paper, especially in future years. To begin, size is a significant factor. E-reader databases and/or the internet provide an essentially unlimited library of texts at the user's fingertips. A single physical textbook can be a hassle. So much is available instantly which is an indisputable benefit. Furthermore, books are still incredibly expensive in hard copy form. Textbooks in particular can cost hundreds of dollars. Reading digitally saves an enormous amount of money. There may always be a lingering soft spot for physical texts in terms of pleasure reading, or for the aesthetic, but digital texts typically prove to be more practically. Devices are more portable and accessible and texts can be found on whim. Reading physical copies is by no means inferior to digital, however society is moving towards a future where digital reading is less criticized than it is at the moment.



Economics play a significant role in every aspect of life and this includes technology and device development. At the moment, the money is in devices and the future technology. There was a brief period of time where it appeared as if e-reading was going to completely overtake paper texts. Although book sales and e-book sales are more even than they were, it is not an entirely accurate representation of how most people do their reading. The majority of reading is not novels, but news, learning materials, and other shorter forms of texts that are primarily accessible on devices. It is because of this that many bookstores such as Borders have been forced out of business. Stores such as Barnes and Noble have retained business because they accepted the e-reading devices and sold multimedia alongside books. E-reading vs. paper reading is, in many ways, quite similar to the current state of the music industry. Music listening has shifted almost entirely towards streaming. Reading has shifted towards digital, and this impacts authors and publishers just as it impacts songwriters and producers. "Should the most avid



readers switch to subscriptions, this could cut at the root of revenue for both publishers and authors, reducing the number of titles that appear. Or it may shift yet more power to Amazon, which has in-house publishing imprints” (The Economist 2014). The creators in both industries are negatively impacted by the shift into digital consumption. However, hard copy and digital sales have stabilized and libraries have seen a significant increase in text circulation. In the music industry, vinyl records, a relatively antiquated technology, still hold a niche presence and are actually making a bit of a rebound in sales due to their collectability and aesthetic. Therefore, it is quite possible that books make a similar return to popularity, however, digital reading will likely not fade in the slightest and will continue to be readers primary medium. Books will hold their place, a more significant place than that held by vinyl records, but more for the aesthetic and less for the practicality. For now and for the foreseeable future, the money will continue to be in the easier, cheaper methods of reading and listening.



Regardless of the negative associations with reading digitally, the technologies will not be fading any time soon. Furthermore, in several years, the critiques about current technology will have faded almost entirely. The current negativity is in large part due to perceived generational superiority, meaning that when younger generations become adults, the focus of critique will switch to whatever technology is newest and least understood and accepted. As technology improves and people grow up with these devices, the disparity in reading comprehension between paper and digital will fade significantly. The benefits of digital reading, such as ease of access, price, and database size far outweigh the short term negatives. The medium people choose to read with is not as important as that people are able to continue reading. Finally, the economy favors digital technology by a large margin. Physical forms of



books and music will continue to hold their own at least at a collectible level, but streaming and e-reading will maintain precedence. As shown through historical progression, it is likely that within the next few generations, the current criticized technology will become nearly fully accepted and there will be a wave of new devices to turn attention to.

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