

The Digital Era

Digitization is a hallmark of the 21st century. Companies are beginning to target consumers through digital ads to keep engagement up.¹ Increased engagement through screentime increases the likelihood a consumer is going to be influenced by an ad. Data sharing and tracking further help companies achieve their goals by utilizing targeted ads based on a consumers search history, daily media/ internet patterns and/or conversations.²

Additionally, many people are on their devices, including cellphones, computers, and tablets for a substantial amount of time per day.³ Our reliance on devices is often mandatory and voluntary. Many of us are looking at multiple screens for the duration of our work or school day. In schools, most students take notes on their computers or tablets while looking at PowerPoint presentations 6-8 hours per day/ 5 days a week. At many offices, an employee's ability to do their job often depends on the help of 2-3 monitors⁴ that they are staring at for the duration of their workday. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated our reliance on devices and created a greater need for digitizing information.⁵ While in quarantine employers were forced to adapt to work from home formats or lose serious revenue and productivity. Schools were also forced to adapt to online learning to ensure students were getting quality education and access to class materials remotely while in quarantine. At the conclusion of the work or school day, many choose to scroll on social media, watch YouTube, binge a new series on Netflix, or play video games to decompress. These voluntary activities/ stimulations add to our daily screentime intake and keep our brains from being able to fully relax and reset.

Even though concerns about COVID-19 have calmed down, our reliance on these devices has either stayed stagnant or increased. The pandemic showed us the many benefits of implementing more flexible online learning options and work from home policies long term.⁶ Many have adapted to relying heavily on these policies and employers and schools have followed suit in ensuring those policies are here to stay.⁷ For example, some work offices operate on a hybrid model allowing their employees to work from home 2/3 days of the week.

Most people are exposed to excessive amounts of screentime throughout their daily lives. We have screens on our smart watches, in our vehicles, at gas stations, in waiting rooms, on

¹ Nik Froehlich, *The Truth In User Privacy And Targeted Ads*, Forbes (Feb 24, 2022 8:30 AM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2022/02/24/the-truth-in-user-privacy-and-targeted-ads/?sh=7f2e29b3355e>.

² *Id.*

³ Brooke E. Wagner, et al. *Recreational Screen Time Behaviors during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the U.S.: A Mixed-Methods Study among a Diverse Population-Based Sample of Emerging Adults*. INT'L J. ENV'T RSCH. PUB. HEALTH. Apr. 2021 at 2.; Sarah Burkart, et al. *Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on elementary schoolers' physical activity, sleep, screen time and diet: A quasi- experimental interrupted time series study*. PEDIATRIC OBESITY, 9 (2021).

⁴ Ann Mazotta, *Work From Home Tips: Functions And Uses Of Computer Monitor*, CALIF. BUS. J. (accessed Feb. 27, 2023), <https://calbizjournal.com/work-from-home-tips-functions-and-uses-of-computer-monitor/>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Zechuan Deng et al. *Running the economy remotely: Potential for working from home during and after COVID-19*, STATISTICS CANADA, May 28, 2020.

⁷ *Id.*

billboards, and in most public areas. With an influx of information constantly bombarding us at every turn, should there be a call for concern? What are the negative effects of overstimulation and are those effects serious enough to warrant concern? The National Institute of Health released numerous studies about the negative effects of screentime on adolescent development and associated brain disorders that can result, including premature children.⁸ They have also issued numerous guides outlining effective measures to reduce your screentime.⁹ Overstimulation from increased screentime alters the biological composition of our brains because our brains never get a break from constantly taking in information.¹⁰ Additionally, screens contain blue light which aggravates problems with our vision and ability to focus.¹¹ Are these concerns serious enough to prompt politicians to advocate for regulations on screentime? And if so, should this be allowed.

China is one of the only countries to implement limitations on screentime for children.¹² The ban only applies to the amount of time children are allowed to play video games.¹³ There are additional questions about enforcement and whether parents should be the ones responsible for regulating their children's screentime and not the government. What about policies that attempt to address screentime for the population as a whole? Any policy is going to receive pushback on multiple fronts including from companies who rely heavily on ads, employers who are now fully digitized, and the population in general who depend heavily on these devices. Current possible solutions include further education on the effects of screentime and the benefits those solutions can bring.¹⁴ An added awareness about these issues will likely help a person increase their overall quality of life including sleep.

⁸ Sierra Clifford, et al., *Effortful Control Moderates the Relation Between Electronic-Media Use and Objective Sleep Indicators in Childhood*, ASS'N. PSYCH. SCI. (2020); Betty Vohr, et al., *Association of High Screen-Time Use With School-age Cognitive, Executive Function, and Behavior Outcomes in Extremely Preterm Children*, JAMA PEDIATRICIAN (July 12, 2021)

⁹ NAT'L HEART, LUNG, AND BLOOD INST., TIPS TO REDUCE SCREEN TIME (2013); NAT'L HEART, LUNG, AND BLOOD INST., TIPS TO REDUCE SCREEN TIME TOOLS AND RESOURCES (2013).

¹⁰ Paniz Jasbi, et al., *Microbiome and metabolome profiles of high screen time in a cohort of healthy college students*, SCI REP. 12, 3452 (2022).

¹¹ Mary Helander, et al. *A Public Health Side Effect of the Coronavirus Pandemic: Screen Time-Related Eye Strain and Eye Fatigue*, POPULATION HEALTH RSCH BRIEF SERIES. 50 (2020).

¹² Helen Coster, *'Oh, that's an idea...': U.S. parents respond to China screen time ban*, REUTERS (Sept 1, 2021, 11:46AM), <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/oh-thats-an-idea-us-parents-respond-china-screen-time-ban-2021-08-31/>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Lei Wu, et al., *The effect of interventions targeting screen time reduction: A systematic review and meta-analysis*, MEDICINE (Wolters Kluwer Health, Inc. 2016).