

Yzzy Gonzalez (student essay)

Technology Taking Over?

[University Times, California State University, Los Angeles, February 11, 2013]

BEFORE YOU READ

How technology dependent are you? How many times a day do you use technology in your daily life?

WORDS TO LEARN

- dependent* (para. 1): reliant on someone or something else (noun)
- supreme* (para. 2): highest in rank (adjective)
- impact* (para. 5): influence (noun)
- avid* (para. 5): enthusiastic (adjective)
- portability* (para. 6): the quality of being able to be moved or carried easily (noun)
- redundant* (para. 6): unnecessary or repetitive (adjective)

Let me tell you about my morning routine. I wake up to the sound of Sleep Time, a smartphone app that keeps track of my sleep patterns during the night. Afterwards, I jump in the shower, get dressed for the day (based on what weather.com is telling me to expect), and start making breakfast to the sound of my iPod dock blasting Kate Nash. I eat my breakfast reading theSkimm, Deadline Hollywood, Cupcakes and Cashmere, and many more news sites and blogs, all on my laptop. Finally, when it's time for school or work, I make sure to grab my phone before I leave, because without it, I would have absolutely no means of survival in the real world. Hi, I'm Yzzy Gonzalez and I'm technology dependent.

I wouldn't be surprised if some of you realize that your routine is extremely similar. It's how today's society works: technology reigns supreme. While a lot of the newest technology is made so it's easier for us and our lifestyles, it also makes us extremely dependent on whatever gateways it opens for us. I can't even count the number of times you hear about people driving back

It's how today's society works: technology reigns supreme.

Yzzy Gonzalez is a student at California State University, Los Angeles.

home because they forgot their phone or the number of times someone checks their mobile Instagram feed during one hour. Whatever the reason, today's current generation is technology-obsessed.

There are a few peeves I have about current technology. First, it enables me to do things that I will probably regret at the end of the day. For example, mobile banking that allows you to transfer between your accounts instantly. While its main benefit is to give you money when you need it, it also enables your increasing spending habits. Yes, I could think, "oh I don't have money to buy that cardigan" knowing I could have money in a few minutes, but it would be a lot more reasonable for me to know I can't have money to buy that cardigan unless I drive to the nearest ATM or Bank of America and ask for an account transfer.

On that note, technology is killing face-to-face interaction. Going out into the real world is so much less appealing when you can accomplish everything you need to from the comfort of your bed with a few keystrokes. It astounds me that online grocery shopping is currently a thing. You're going to wish that you went to the store and personally picked out your strawberries when the ones you get delivered are half-rotten. (I'm kidding, don't worry.)

Meanwhile, technology's impact on the newspaper and book industry is making them obsolete. People buy Kindles and Nooks so they can have ten million books in their hands rather than just one, but because of that, places like Borders and Barnes and Noble are closing stores and going out of business. As an avid fan of paperback books (and paper products in general), this breaks my heart, but that's technology for you. Improving on what already exists.

Please don't see me as a technology hater. There is definitely a silver lining to this cloud. Technology constantly succeeds because of its portability and ways of connecting people. It can be redundant when it comes to the mundane everyday things, but when you can talk to your friend in another state because of FaceTime on your iPhone, you really can't deny how amazing that is.

Technology will always change, try to make life easier, offer cool new advances, and be important to a growing society, but it's just as important not to become dependent on it and rely on it to do things we've known how to do for years. No one will get hurt if you just take a day away from the phone or computer and enjoy the outdoors, or pick up a newspaper instead of staring at an electronic screen; it might just be the right amount of change in your daily atmosphere.

This article was written with a MacBook. A pen and paper were not used during the writing process at all.

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STUDENT WRITER AT WORK

Yzzy Gonzalez



Courtesy of Yzzy Gonzalez

R.A. What inspired you to write this essay? And publish it in your campus paper?

Y.G. I wrote this essay based on my real life experiences with using technology while going to college. I published it in the campus paper as part of my weekly column, "Freshman Focus," in which I wrote about topics that I felt like freshmen on the campus could relate to.

R.A. What was your main purpose in writing this piece?

Y.G. I wanted to look deeper into the loss of "old school" traditions due to the convenience of technology.

R.A. Who was your prime audience?

Y.G. My audience was the freshmen students at my university, though my piece could apply to any student, or even anyone living in the digital era.

R.A. What response have you received to this piece?

Y.G. This piece has gotten more favorable reviews than other works of mine, partly because people have said it was extremely relatable. The feedback has just made me realize how everyone is affected by the rise of technology.

R.A. Have you written on this topic since?

Y.G. Not long after I wrote this piece, I wrote a research paper on technology's influence on friendships. I've read a few novels on the interaction between humans and technology, and how it is preferred over real human interaction.

R.A. What topics interest you as a writer?

Y.G. I am interested in human profiles when it comes to news writing, but I also enjoy freestyle creative writing. I usually focus on topics of change, like growing up, and life in designated areas such as the city or the suburbs.

R.A. Do you plan to continue writing for publication?

Y.G. I do!

R.A. What advice do you have for other student writers?

Y.G. Write often and write what you like!

Spotlight on Research

Clive Thompson

The Parent Trap: How Teens Lost the Ability to Socialize

[Wired, January 2014]

Clive Thompson is a blogger, journalist, and technology writer. He has been a freelance contributor for The New York Times Magazine, The Washington Post, Lingua Franca, Shift, Entertainment Weekly, and others. He is a columnist at Wired, and is a long-time blogger, launching his science-and-technology blog, "Collision Detection," in 2002.

Are teenagers losing their social skills? Parents and pundits seem to think so. Teens spend so much time online, we're told, that they're no longer able to handle the messy, intimate task of hanging out face-to-face. "After school, my son is on Facebook with his friends. If it isn't online, it isn't real to him," one mother recently told me in a panic. "Everything is virtual!" Now, I'm not convinced this trend is real. I've read the evidence about the "narcissism epidemic" and the apparent decline in empathy in young people, and while it's intriguing, it's provisional. Lots of work offers the opposite conclusion, such as Pew surveys finding that kids who text the most also socialize the most in person. But for the sake of argument, let's agree that we have a crisis. Let's agree that kids aren't spending enough time together mastering social skills. Who's responsible? Has crafty Facebook, with its casino-like structure of algorithmic nudging, hypnotized our youth? If kids can't socialize, who should parents blame? Simple: They should blame themselves. This is the argument advanced in *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, by Microsoft researcher Danah Boyd. Boyd — full disclosure, a friend of mine — has spent a decade interviewing hundreds of teens about their online lives. What she has found, over and over, is that teenagers would love to socialize face-to-face with their friends. But adult society won't let them. "Teens aren't addicted to social media. They're addicted to each other," Boyd says. "They're not allowed to hang out the way you and I did, so they've moved it online."

It's true. As a teenager in the early '80s I could roam pretty widely with my friends, as long as we were back by dark. But over the next three decades, the media began delivering a metronomic diet of horrifying but rare child-abduction stories, and parents shortened the leash on their kids. Politicians warned of incipient waves of youth wilding and superpredators (neither of which emerged). Municipalities crafted anti-loitering laws and curfews to keep young people from congregating alone. New neighborhoods had fewer public spaces. Crime rates plum-

continued

meted, but moral panic soared. Meanwhile, increased competition to get into college meant well-off parents began heavily scheduling their kids' after-school lives.

The result, Boyd discovered, is that today's teens have neither the time nor the freedom to hang out. So their avid migration to social media is a rational response to a crazy situation. They'd rather socialize F2F, so long as it's unstructured and away from grown-ups. "I don't care where," one told Boyd wistfully, "just not home." Forget the empathy problem — these kids crave seeing friends in person.

In fact, Boyd found that many high school students flock to football games not because they like football but because they can meet in an unstructured context. They spend the game chatting, ignoring the field and their phones. You don't need Snapchat when your friends are right beside you.

So, parents of America: The problem is you; the solution is you. If you want your kids to learn valuable face-to-face skills, conquer your own irrational fears and give them more freedom. They want the same face-to-face intimacy you grew up with. "Stranger danger" panic is the best gift America ever gave to Facebook.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

1. Who or what is the potential problem for teens who have lost the ability to socialize? Who or what is the real problem, in Thompson's opinion?
2. What do you believe is the assumption Thompson makes about parents in this article? Where do you find words that make Thompson's assumptions clear to the reader?
3. What example does Thompson give that indicates teens actually do want to socialize? What about this example speaks to the importance of face-to-face time?

Henry David Thoreau

Nothing Important to Communicate?



The first telegraph.

The telegraph, invented simultaneously in Europe and America in the first half of the 19th century, was perhaps the most significant innovation in communication to its date. One of its inventors, Samuel Morse, used the machine in 1838 to transmit a short message by means of coded electric charges across a 3-mile stretch in New Jersey and shocked the world. Within a few years, Morse's famous code was being used to send nearly instantaneous messages across continents and oceans, something people had only dreamt of for centuries. One modern writer, Tom Standage, has called the telegraph "the Victorian Internet," referring to the era in which it debuted, because of the revolution in communication this sudden connection brought about.