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The Digital Age

A lot of progress and advancements have been made from the 20th to the 21st century, which is the century we are currently living in. A lot of things to look back on and to be accomplished of, for how far civilizations and countries made it. One notable thing would be the advancement of our technology. Technology in of itself is a broad term, because it covers multiple facets of human life where we have made a variety of improvements and advancements. However, I want to focus on one specific form of technology that is ever present in today's day and age, and which might be one of our greatest feats yet for us all, digital technology. We are in the digital age, where we have succeeded in digitizing life itself, and it is ever so present around us. To put this into better perspective, we are living in a digital society where we have the access and power of information in the palm of our hands, whether it be through our phones, laptops, or other forms of digital technology. We live in an age where we can communicate with an individual thousands of miles away, and where one can work from the comfort of their own home through their screens. With all that being said, what I want to do is to explore the ramifications of the digital society that is today.

Exploring the ramifications of our digital society might be too much food to fit on a plate

for now, so I want to break this down into something more specific to ask. Are we utilizing digital means of life to the best of our abilities, or are we carelessly misusing it? On top of this, I want to provide a subset of different aspects within digital technology that are going to be a subject of scrutiny. Approximately 85% of Americans have had or currently use a smartphone, and one of the key factors of a phone is that it allows you to perform tasks you otherwise wouldn't be able to do on a regular basis. Apart from all the other apps and widgets the phone can come included, more than 65% of people who use a phone around the world text. Texting is a form of digital communication, as you get almost instantaneous information from other users. These percentages are, shall I say, a tiny bit jaw-dropping, considering we have just only recently entered the digital age. But given the context, it is easy to see why so many people around the world are connected. One of the key factors of why operating digitally is done so much is the fact of *convenience*. It is more convenient to get real-time communication with someone on a certain topic rather than wait days, weeks, or possibly even longer. It is more convenient to share knowledge or spread awareness with others rather than traveling miles around your city. It is more convenient to network with others who share similar interests. Digital communication starts off with this idea of convenience, which leads to visions and concepts by brainstorming, then ends by having groundbreaking innovation. These are among some examples as to how people utilize digital technology to the best of their abilities, as many different people can be productive and do certain tasks they wouldn't have done otherwise.

In a broader sense, digital communication on the surface has been nothing but an improvement for all of our lives. However, it is worth noting that unexpected byproducts surfaced from digital means of communication. What stemmed from digital communication is

social media. It is without question the noticeable change that social media has had amongst multiple groups of people of all ages. Everyone is connected or can be in an instant, because social media has made it possible. Many social media platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram, allow individuals to socialize with others and for relationships to be established. These relationships are established when people of similar interests meet and interact with one another, thus creating friends, whether it would be a small-knit group of individuals or a large group of people. People feel like they belong somewhere as a result. But social media can also be a space where people are excluded from the masses and where people socialize with others by throwing hurtful comments/language at each other. Comment threads are a great example of this, where people will go lengths to demonize, bully, or slander other individuals. This happens to the most famous/prevalent figures around the world to the most unknown and obscure people on the web. Claude Mellins, a medical psychologist at Columbia University, had said that “Although there are important benefits, social media can also provide platforms for bullying and exclusion, unrealistic expectations about body image and sources of popularity, normalization of risk-taking behaviors, and can be detrimental to mental health.” This is good and all to be aware about, but it left me wondering, why? I circled back to the main question to eventually figure this out. It turns out that, through works from psychology and other fields, social media has now been considered addicting due to many people constantly being on it. Within the many similarities of features that are well-known throughout almost every social media app, the most notorious one is the like-button feature. It has now been labeled under things that produce dopamine: the more likes a photo or post gets, the more reward an individual receives. Knowing the science as to how social media can affect people, results then show that almost 45% of teens are constantly online and using digital means of communications. People (and more focusing on the younger age

demographic) spend way too much time on social media. The prolonged duration of time on social media has led to undesirable outcomes previously mentioned, which ultimately explains the behavior of carelessly misusing it. People will post photos, write a post, or promote anything for that thumbs up that is in place, no matter how good or how damaging it can be for other individuals using the apps.

Nevertheless, I must note one interesting thing that came about from my research, which challenges my question of ‘are we utilizing digital means of life to the best of our abilities, or are we carelessly misusing it?’. One of the key functions on how digital technology is run is by using something called algorithms. Algorithms are “a set of instructions programmed to solve a mathematical problem or perform a function”. In the case of digital technology, it runs many instructions/programs to do basic or advanced functions such as providing relevant search results, seeing repetitions in order to bring about recommendations into feeds, and other activities. However, the algorithm produces things that are unknowing for users, and one example being a filter bubble. A filter bubble is when the algorithms have isolated us into what it thinks it wants us to view, and as a result we are left up to our own discretion. This challenges the question because the implication is that the user is not the one at fault here. No matter how well or how bad the user operates the digital means of technology and communication, we are subjected to the algorithms.

The digital society that we are living in today proves to hold many ups and downs. As of right now, there is no definite solution to fix the undesirable results from algorithms. We are living in a time where people have never been more close and connected, yet so divided and

polarized. It must be noted though, that all of this is relatively new. The digital age came about not too long ago, so we are all just getting our feet wet. We must be ready as the future holds many challenges and setbacks, but along with it comes successes and breakthroughs.

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