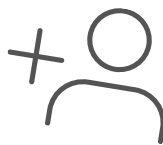# *Social Media:*

How it's Changed the Human Race

Katie Coen

2022

Executive Summary

"Digital media have been responsible for some of the most wide-ranging changes in society over the past quarter-century" (Schroeder, 2018).

Technology has changed all aspects of the world since it was created, from how people act to what they focus on in their life. With the popularity of technological devices, social media was able to erupt into something for the masses. It has become an addicting, repetitive process each day, as users get hooked and come back for more. Now, social media is used 92 percent of the time when someone is using an app on their smartphone (Flynn, 2022).

It has become more of a disruption and distraction than a benefit to the human race. This can be seen in many aspects of life, including the limitations on effective work and deep thinking. Instead of focusing on a task and thinking about the process, people tend to get distracted by notifications or thoughts in their minds relating to their social media addiction. This is something that is becoming extremely harmful to this generation, as it limits their abilities to think about their lives from a perspective outside of the media. Mental health has become a second thought aside from social media, as it damages the way people think about themselves. Yet still, they return to the same platforms day after day.

This essay will explain why stepping back from social media is important and how it can improve your quality of life. There are many methods that can be used to limit the usage of social media, a few of which are discussed. Whether it be hiding one's phone while studying or taking a break from the internet, these little acts can change the way one feels about themselves and can allow them to be more productive than they ever thought possible.
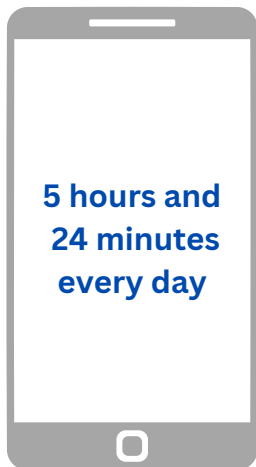
What's the Problem?

The average person checks their phone every

15

minutes
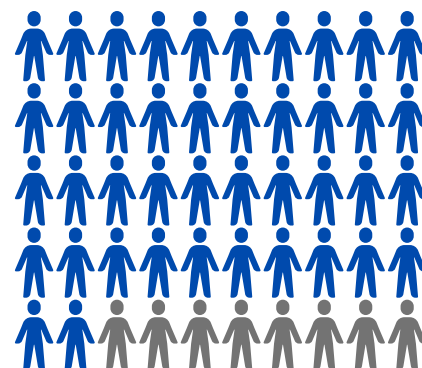
5 hours and 24 minutes every day

Since the creation of modern technology, the human race has seen many changes. The way people think and the way they act are extremely different now than it was 50 years ago, even 10 years ago. That's because of the introduction of mass technology to the population. It's not that people use technology, it's the way they use it. Technology has become an integrated part of our society, and it is the norm to use it for most of every day. Many use their smartphones from the moment they wake up to the moment they go to sleep at night. Professionals stare at computers all day and then return home after work to do the same. This has led to the average American spending 5 hours and 24 minutes on their mobile device each day. **This wide usage of different technologies, especially social media and the internet, have led everyday people to do less deep thinking, less effective work, and have a higher likelihood of mental health problems.**

Social media itself has very addicting qualities. Once people get started on one platform, they feel the need to download and use them all. Peer pressure is another factor in this, as applications gain popularity by being spread through friends. If your friends use one application, you will be likely to start using it as well. Social media has also become a common topic of conversation, as people discuss trends and things they have seen. Everywhere you go you seem to find people integrating their social media into aspects of a conversation. The constant stress about followers and likes has led the population to forget about more important aspects of their lives.

One of these aspects is thoughtful work, which has been extremely limited in the time since social media gained popularity. People spend most of their time online instead of thinking about things that are present in front of them. The average person spends less time evaluating their deepest notions and more time interacting on social media. This is shown in a statistic by S. Dixon that says the average social media user spends 147 minutes on their preferred applications every day. This is an increase from the 145 minutes spent on average in 2021. Before smartphones and social media became popular, this time was spent on reflection and thinking about the life one is living, rather than focusing on everyone else's lives.

Along with less concentrated work time, the quality of work that people produce now is not as good. The time spent online has also limited the amount of time people spend doing deep work. Deep work is a time of uninterrupted focus that is spent learning and completing tasks. With social media and constant notifications, it is so easy to get distracted from a task. This will continue to happen as more social media platforms and applications are added to the roster. Deep work is necessary to comprehend texts that are being read. Although the brain was never designed to read, it has become a large part of history and a way for people to learn new information (Harris, 2018). One form of deep work is active reading, as reading is the deepest form of focus an individual can achieve (Hari, 2022, p. 80). Active reading is reading with a purpose and a goal to comprehend and evaluate what the author is trying to say. Today, most people do their reading on technological devices, whether it be their smartphone, tablet, or electronic reading device. What most people do not know is that the way our brains read on a screen is different than when reading a physical book. This research was conducted by Anne Mangen, who is a professor of literacy at the University of Stavanger in Norway. She found that when people read on screens, they are more likely to skim for the information they are looking for, as well as jump around to different areas of the text. When this becomes a habit in the brain, it translates when someone is reading a paper book (Hari, 2022, 81).

Another aspect that keeps us from working deeply is multitasking. Social media is one of the reasons many people today attempt to do different tasks at once. When the brain is forced to switch back and forth between many tasks, completing those tasks will take longer. This is called the switch cost effect, described by Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Earl Miller (Hari, 2022, p. 38). He also explains another common result of multitasking. This is the screw-up effect, which occurs when one is changing tasks too often that they make a mistake. The average person only spends three minutes on a task before getting an external disruption, like receiving an email or phone call, or an internal disruption, like checking one's phone or looking at emails (Rosen et al., 2013). As a result of this fact, multitasking is prominent in society today, but it leads to mediocre work.
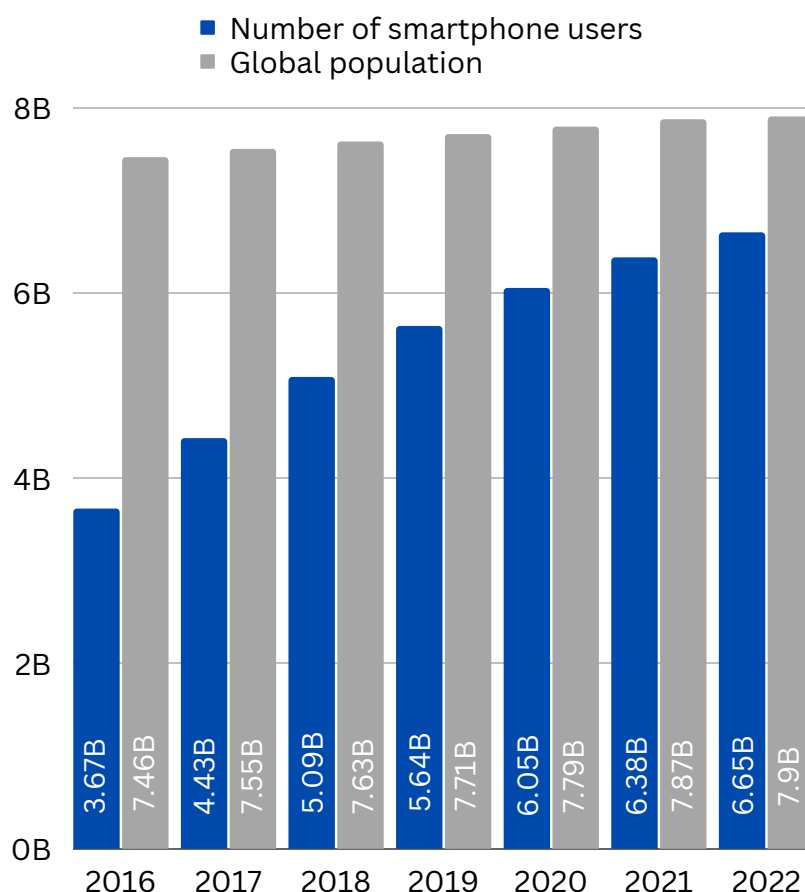
One issue that has been part of a larger conversation is how social media impacts one's mental health. Since Instagram became a hit in 2010, multiple news outlets have found studies suggesting that social media could increase the likelihood of depression, unhappiness, jealousy, negative body image, and loneliness (Miller et al., 2016, p. 195). This is caused by many aspects of social media.

42 out of every 50 people on Earth own a smartphone

2.5%

of people can multi-task effectively

One example is how people tend to put their best lives on the internet. If they are struggling, they hide it and make their profile look like they are always happy. Constantly seeing people who are doing exciting things and who look like models can damage one's self-esteem. Miller et al. did a series of research into the question "does social media make people happier?" Although they did find that social media made it easy to connect with people, they found that most people were reminded of why they stopped talking to someone when they found them on social media. And when social media does make someone happy, it's generally temporary happiness, which will fade once something new comes along. Getting followers and likes cannot make someone truly happy.

If social media continues to distract us or make us feel worse about our everyday lives, people will continue to live at the surface. Their curious minds will fade more and more over time as they get sucked into an addiction to the internet. If nothing is done, more people will struggle with things like addiction, disinformation, and exploitation. The population as a whole will continue to be damaged by the erosion of democracy and human rights abuse (Center for Humane Technology, 2022).

Legend:
- ■ Number of smartphone users
- ■ Global population

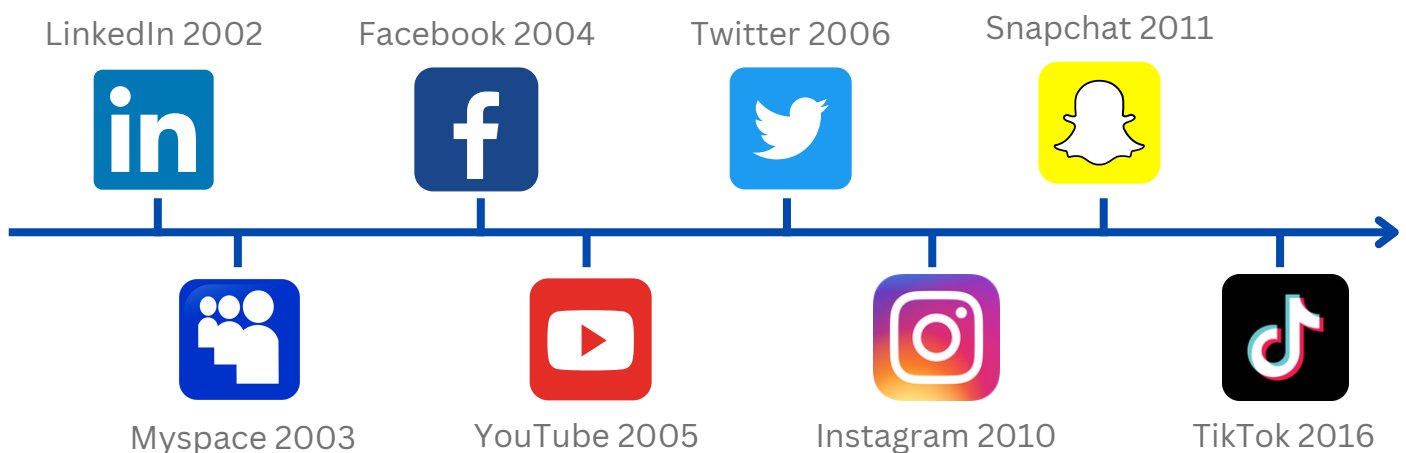| Year	Number of smartphone users	Global population
2016	3.67B	7.46B
2017	4.43B	7.55B
2018	5.09B	7.63B
2019	5.64B	7.71B
2020	6.05B	7.79B
2021	6.38B	7.87B
2022	6.65B	7.9B

How We Got Here

Social media has become one of the biggest players in the advancement of technology. Before this advancement, the world was a very different place.

The idea of social media has been around since the 1980s and 1990s, as the internet as we know it today was introduced to society. Emails, bulletin board messages, and online chat rooms began the communication to the masses over the internet. What we consider social media today began in the early 2000s with Myspace. Users could create a profile and post any content they wanted, whether it was pictures, videos, or sharing friends pages. It became the most visited website on the planet in 2006 but was soon pushed out of the spotlight by Facebook (Maryville University, 2022). Facebook is now used by 69 percent of all adults in the United States. Created by Harvard law students, it started as a way for students to connect with one another but branched out to allow millions of users around the world to connect. The social media sites that follow Facebook all have the same idea of sharing a glimpse of one's life while connecting with people who they may not see in their day-to-day lives.

Social Media Timeline

LinkedIn 2002   Facebook 2004   Twitter 2006   Snapchat 2011

Myspace 2003   YouTube 2005   Instagram 2010   TikTok 2016

Behind all social media platforms are large companies, that design and code their applications with purpose. These massive technology giants have a few goals for their apps. First and foremost, they care about the money. This money comes from advertisements, which pay more if more people see the ads. So, they do anything they can to make users stay on their app. When those users stay on the app, then they want them to engage in their content. The platform Twitter innovated a new way for users to stay on their app. It's now known as the "infinite scroll," which is a feature that allows users to scroll forever. Aza Raskin wrote the code to enable one to continuously scroll with no end. After it was released on the app, he saw a change in the people around him. He noticed that people were more addicted to their devices than ever (Hari, 2022, p. 120). Over time, other applications developed the same tool and it became the perfect way to keep users hooked for long periods of time. This way, they would see more advertisements and engage, which makes the companies money. The goal of these apps is distraction, which is why they continue to impact the work that people do.

Along with the "infinite scroll," algorithms are now used on almost all social media applications. Algorithms are another way to keep users coming back for more and more content. These companies track your data and collect it all. Eventually, they get a good picture of what you would want to see. Then they use that to their advantage to keep you online as long as possible. Many people believe the internet or social media platforms are listening to our conversations to know what ads to show us. In reality, the algorithms just know us so well that it shows ads of things we would talk about or be interested in (Hari, 2022, 130). Most algorithms for platforms are different, and some are widely spoken about in society. For example, the TikTok algorithm is a popular topic online. People attempt to "break" the algorithm to get more followers or likes. Studies show that algorithms detect negative posts and show them to more people. Words like "hates," "obliterates," "slams," and "destroys" make a video more likely to trend on YouTube. On Twitter, every word of "moral outrage" added to the tweet would increase the retweet rate by twenty percent (Hari, 2022, 131). For this reason, many people get angry at the algorithms. So why do they keep coming back?

One reason they keep returning is influencers, who are people on social media platforms with large followings. They post content for a specific niche and draw people in based on their interests (Santora, 2022). Influencers can be any age, but they tend to be younger, attractive girls. After seeing these people living their best lives, it causes many other users to become jealous and hostile.
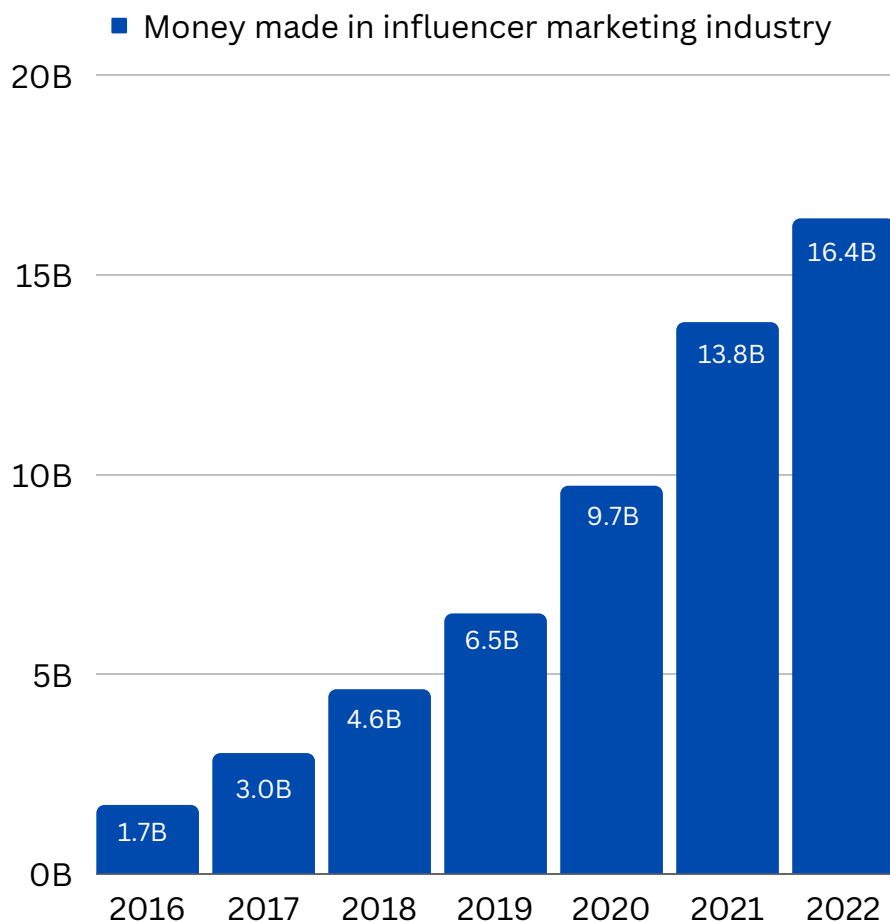
500M

Tweets are posted every **day**

350K

Tweets are posted every **minute**

6K

Tweets are posted every **second**

Money made in influencer marketing industry

Year	Value
2016	1.7B
2017	3.0B
2018	4.6B
2019	6.5B
2020	9.7B
2021	13.8B
2022	16.4B

This decreases the viewer's quality of life, as they are always comparing themselves to others. While some influencers stay in the spotlight for a long time, others fade when new people or trends become popular. Their goal is to stay relevant for as long as possible. A big part of being an influencer includes marketing. These "celebrities" team up with companies and show their products to audiences across the globe. This is how many young influences make their money, as companies pay them to talk positively about their brand. Influencer marketing has grown to be a sixteen billion dollar business in 2022, after increasing every year since 2016 (Santora, 2022). The market for influencers has also grown over the past year, with the number of influencer marketing services growing by 26 percent (Santora, 2022).

What You Can Do

Social media today is a space where billions of people worldwide share content. The number of projected users on social media worldwide is set to increase by more than two billion before the year 2027 (Dixon, 2022). Although platforms continue to gain popularity, some things that can be done to limit the distractions and harm caused by social media. Imagine a life full of deep thought, productive work, and better mental health. This can be achieved by anyone who works to break their bonds with the media. In order for this to happen, the following problems must be recognized.

Limiting Distractions

One of the biggest struggles people face when trying to be productive is the distractions caused by social media. Apps send notifications hundreds of times a day about followers, likes, new posts, and more. These companies have a goal of drawing you to use their site. They want your brain to forget about previous tasks and move to a new one, preferably involving their platform. Notifications have also created an addiction to social media by bringing people back again and again to see the newest trends or posts. The alerts dished out by platforms are a way of limiting concentration. Although complete concentration is very rare, there are things that can be done to increase its likelihood.

Minimizing alerts and notifications is one way to keep yourself focused on one task. This can be done by changing the settings in social media applications and websites. All platforms give the option for limited notifications, but most users do not take advantage of them. The flip of a switch in settings can make for a much more productive work setting. Without alerts going off every few minutes, the brain will be more likely to focus on one given task.

Another method is to hide technological devices that house social media platforms when trying to concentrate. Simply placing your phone in a drawer or in a place out of sight will allow the brain to continuously focus on one task without distraction. Data shows when something is out of our vision for a long period of time, we will stop thinking about it.

The average student only studies for 9.65 minutes of every 15 minutes

Setting a time each day for a technology break is one method that can be used by all social media users without deleting the platforms. This is something that is especially recommended for students. Researchers suggest setting aside time every day for a "brain reset," or a time to reflect on one's life without technology in sight. This can be a time to focus on the life in front of you, rather than scrolling through sites to focus on others.

A great way to plan for this time without technology is by using project management software. There are many free options, like Trello, Asana, and Podio. They all allow someone to make lists and plan their days using an organized online website. Not only are they extremely easy to use, but they have various designs and options. Many project management users are more organized with their thoughts and return to their pages daily to plan their tasks.

Focusing on Rest

Staying up all night on social media has become a norm in this society. People are unable to put their devices down and focus on their sleep schedule. This lack of sleep can cause various health and concentration issues. Experts say to think of sleep as a sacred time (Rosen, 2017). The act is necessary for our bodies to function and it allows us to do the things we want. Many people do not get the recommended eight hours of sleep a night and this can be because of technological usage.

Over 1/3 of adults do not get the recommended amount of sleep on a regular basis

One way to combat this is to set screen time limitations on your devices. This can be done in the settings of smartphones and can help to lower the time spent on social media. Once the allotted time is completed for the day, the device will not allow a user to open an app.

Another method is to limit the use of technology, especially social media, before going to sleep. Scrolling through posts and looking at entertaining topics can stimulate one's brain, which can make it difficult to fall asleep at night. The National Sleep Foundation urges people not to use technology within an hour of going to sleep (Rosen, 2017). Stopping the use of technology before going to bed gives the brain time to relax and get ready for a restful night. Experts recommend reading a paper book, watching a television show that you have already seen (because it requires less brain processing), or listening to music.

Changing Your Mindset

As discussed, social media can be a negative place for many users who do not feel content with their own lives. The best way to combat these negative feelings is to take time for a brain reset or digital detox. These times allow for more personal reflection, which can lead to better mental health overall.

Social media limits our face-to-face interactions, which can cause someone to feel lonely. This feeling of being alone and socially isolated all the time is proven to make a person more upset. Taking time away from social media to do something can improve one's mood, even if it is just for a short time. Researchers have found that 10-15 minute breaks are substantial enough to reset the brain (Rosen, 2017).

A digital detox is a time without any advanced technology, which includes social media. In his book, Johann Hari takes three months to himself. He gives up all technology, besides a flip phone for emergencies, and stays in a cottage in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Throughout this process, Hari feels refreshed. He found that a life without the media is not the end of the world, although it did take time to adapt. After his time in Provincetown, Hari decides to continue his trend of letting go of social media. He says he now takes breaks online for up to six months of the year broken up into smaller time periods (Hari, 2022, p. 269). He found this time to increase his workflow and improve the way he feels about himself. This is something that can be done by anyone who wants a break from social media. Three months is a long stretch of time, so it can be done in shorter increments. Time away from these addicting applications for a longer period can improve one's quality of life, as it did Hari's. It allows one to change the way they think about the people they see on social media. They are just humans who have learned to use the algorithms well, and they aren't that different from the rest of us.

DETOX: a period of time when one abstains from unhealthy behaviors
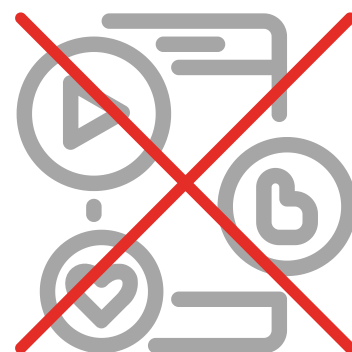
The Benefits

You are probably asking yourself, what do I get from limiting my social media usage? Although social media allows us to feel connected with people who we do not see every day, it has many more negative aspects. A life with limited or no social media can make someone happier, healthier, and more productive.

FOMO: fear of missing out

Happiness is relative to each person, but research shows that the use of social media platforms limits the joy one feels. Instead, it causes one to feel unhappy about themselves for a variety of reasons. Whether they are comparing themselves to others or feeling as if they are missing out, looking at social media has a negative impact on one's mood.

"Most large-scale empiric work in this area suggests associations between time spent on social media and increased symptoms of depression and anxiety and decline in subjective well-being" (Thapa et al., 2018, p.1)

1 in 5 people struggle with mental illness

Limiting social media can also make a person more healthy, both physically and mentally. Once someone who is addicted to social media decreases their usage, they would have more time to focus on themselves and their mental health. This time away from the internet could be used to improve the way they think about themselves or change their unhealthy habits. The amount of sleep a person gets also impacts their health. As discussed, social media is a common reason why people stay up at night, whether they are messaging others or scrolling through different apps. The lack of sleep can cause various issues in the body including memory issues, weight gain, mood changes, high blood pressure, and risk of diabetes.

Finally, without notifications and messages to distract someone, they can get more productive work done. The distractions from social media are a huge inhibitor of deep, focused work. Without notifications from all different platforms coming to your devices at all times of day, you would have more time to think deeply and assess the work in front of you.

Taking Action

Now that you know how to limit your usage and why it benefits you, take the time to do it. Spend time exploring the world. Make memories with the people in your life. Try a new hobby. Do things that make you happy.

We all have times when we want to scroll for hours, but I challenge you to look up from your smartphone. Imagine a future for yourself. Whatever your life goals are, take the time to plan steps to get there. We always talk about the future like it's so far in the distance, but if we work for the things we want in life, they will appear sooner. Although social media is a method for achieving some goals, it shouldn't be used at all times. Whether it's daily breaks when scrolling or an entire social media detox, we can all benefit from taking time to ourselves to reflect and also spend some time having fun away from technology.

Conclusion

In the modern world, it can be difficult to find time away from technology. Walking down the street, you are bound to see more than one person on their smartphone scrolling through various social sites or chatting back and forth with a friend. Although it can be difficult to put the devices away, it can benefit one's life in a variety of ways, as proven in this essay. Taking the time to do work and think deeply will lead to a more fulfilled life and it will be easier to reach one's goals. If this toxic use of technology is limited, the best work will be produced and it should be work one is extremely proud of.

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