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How Technologies are Negatively Influencing the New Generation's Behaviour, Work Ethic, and Thinking Skills

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how modern technologies—including smartphones, social media, and artificial intelligence tools—are reshaping the behaviour, work ethic, and thinking skills of the younger generation. It argues that increasing dependence on AI is weakening critical thinking, while the addictive nature of social media fosters anxiety, unrealistic comparisons, and shortened attention spans. Additionally, the growing obsession with quick success and online fame is replacing discipline, patience, and long-term goal setting with a culture of instant gratification. Ethical concerns are also explored, particularly regarding harmful content exposure and algorithm-driven engagement that disregards age appropriateness. The paper concludes that while technology offers opportunities, its unchecked influence risks producing a generation less resilient, less creative, and more dependent on external systems. It emphasises the urgent need for education, parental guidance, and stricter regulation to ensure healthier digital habits and safeguard the future of young people.

Keywords: *Technology and Youth, AI Dependence, Social Media Influence, Critical Thinking, Instant Gratification, Work Ethic, Digital Addiction, Mental Health, Algorithm Ethics, Online Content Exposure.*

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, modern technologies such as smartphones, social media platforms, and AI tools like ChatGPT are becoming increasingly popular in everyday life. AI tools are reducing young people's reliance on critical thinking by giving quick and accurate answers. Social media influencers often promote unrealistic lifestyles, encouraging teenagers to drop out of school to start making money and get online fame. Many platforms also expose young users to inappropriate content at an early age as well as promoting life threatening challenges such as "the blue whale." In addition, the instant gratification they are getting from scrolling through endless videos, is affecting their attention span and their willingness to face challenges and learn. Many people now are heavily relying on these technologies for even the smallest tasks, whether it is using ChatGPT to complete homework, assistance for everyday tasks, or spending hours scrolling on TikTok and Instagram. The younger generation in particular are obsessively engaged with screens. Social media trends are heavily impacting how teenagers think, what they value, and how they interact with each other. At the same time highly accessible AI tools are making them more dependent on technology, reducing their need to solve problems on their own.

This research paper will explore the question: how are modern technologies negatively influencing the new generation's behaviour, work ethic, and thinking skills? It argues that these technologies are creating a generation that is lazier, more distracted, less socially capable, and unable to think independently.

This issue is highly relevant because it affects the future of education, employment, and society altogether. If young people lose key life skills and critical thinking abilities, it may lead to a lack in innovation, productivity, and mental health. This paper will address the topic by examining how social media, smartphones, and AI tools are shaping young people's behaviour and mindset.

The Reliance on AI Affects Critical Thinking

AI tools are being used at almost every level of education and in many industries. In schools, even young students in primary and secondary are turning to AI powered tools to help with their homework, write essays, and solve math problems. Many students no longer struggle through difficult problems or practice critical thinking skills because AI can give instant answers. In higher education, university students use AI for writing research papers, completing assignments, and preparing for exams. For example, ChatGPT is now being used for generating essays, answering highly complex questions, and simplifying large amounts of data. According to Turnitin, 56% of university students admit to using AI tools for academic work (BestColleges, 2023). In Scotland, universities have reported a 700% increase in AI related cheating incidents, with over 1,050 confirmed cases in a single year. These numbers show how deeply AI has been embedded in academic life. To respond to this growing issue, many schools and universities have introduced AI detection tools like Turnitin, implement strict academic honesty policies and redesigned assessments to include more oral exams and in person work.

Outside of education, AI tools are being used in industries such as business, law, customer service, and marketing. Professionals use AI to draft emails, create reports, generate code, and analyze data. While this helps improve efficiency, it also raises the question: are people still developing and using their own problem solving and critical thinking skills, or are they too reliant on AI to think for them?

However, when used responsibly, AI tools can be quite helpful, especially for those with ADHD or dyslexia as it gives the speech often and makes it easy and simple to understand. These tools can assist with organizing tasks, generating clear outlines, reducing overload, and making day to day tasks more manageable.
The increasing use of AI within industries is also weakening work ethic. In many workplaces, employees no longer need to fully commit to tasks that require focus, discipline, and effort. For example, instead of spending hours researching, drafting, or analyzing, workers can now generate full reports and presentations within minutes using AI tools like GPT. This convenience reduces hard work as tasks that once required dedication are now completed with minimal effort. Over time, employees may lose the motivation to develop expertise, problem solving skills or critical thinking, because they have become accustomed to allowing AI to handle the most challenging aspects of their job. As a result, the sense of personal responsibility would decrease, leading to a weaker work ethic in many industries. This trend is becoming more and more popular, with a decline in deep work and original content creation across companies that heavily rely on AI. While productivity may increase in the short term, the long term effects include reduced skill development, over dependence on machines, and loss of human creativity. There are also concerns about job displacement, as routine tasks become fully automated, potentially leading to fewer opportunities for entry level and support roles.

Social Media's Impact on Mental Health and Social Behavior

Social media use among children and teenagers has been linked to mental health concerns. A recent study of over 4,300 children aged 9–10 found that nearly 50% of them are highly addictive mobile phone use, and 10% showed high social media addiction). At this early age, excessive screen time can reduce attention span, and interfere with brain development. Another Journal of the American Medical Association study of more than 4,200 US teens reported that one third showed signs of social media dependency, which was associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts(The Washington Post, 2025) . Another research done at Yale Medicine found that children between 12–15 years old who spent more than three hours per day on social media were twice as likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety . These findings show a clear link between excessive social media use and mental health struggles in young people, warning the need for better boundaries and awareness at home and in schools.
Another serious issue is the comparison that social media creates. Teenagers scroll through feeds of filtered photos such exotic vacations, luxury lifestyles and more, which can cultivate unrealistic standards of success and happiness. This creates pressure upon users and may make them feel they're constantly falling behind socially or financially. In addition to these lifestyle comparisons, there are many dangerous trends such as normalizing performance enhancing drugs. For example, TikTok and Instagram hosts known as "trenfluencers" have normalized anabolic steroids to teens, with related videos earning over 100 million views among U.S. youth **(AP News, 2023)**.. Due to the idealization of muscular male bodies, some young teenagers are turning to illegal drugs to feel they fall up to the standard, which is a serious risk to their health. Beyond physical and social validation, social media comparisons can have many psychological effects. A 2015 academic study found that users of Facebook compare their achievements and incomes with their peers, leading to lower life satisfaction. There are also social and emotional costs. These platforms condition young users to feel like they need a validation with likes, comments, and followers, turning everyday life into a performance in order to impress their peers. A study using a quasi-experimental design found that passive Facebook use and social comparison correlate with lower self-reported happiness among young adults (Arad, Barzilay & Perchik, 2020).
Lastly, social media has also been shown to significantly affect attention span and the way young people interact. Studies have found that the average attention span has dropped from 2.5 minutes in 2004 to under 50 seconds today, mainly due to constant interruptions caused by short digital content like TikTok videos and Instagram Reels (Gloria Mark, 2023). These platforms encourage quick swiping and content consumption, giving a quick release of dopamine, reducing the brain's ability to focus on one task for an extended period of time. Neuroscientists have found that high screen usage is linked to reduced grey matter in areas of the brain responsible for attention, especially for young children and teenagers whose brains are still developing). Constant partial attention, where users are always mentally split between the online and offline world has been shown to weaken real life conversations and increase social anxiety. Many teens report feeling 'connected but lonely' as most of their socializing happens through screens instead of in person. High screen time has also been linked to lower emotional intelligence and weaker friendships, making it harder for teens to build meaningful relationships or handle social situations without a phone. Research conducted at the University of Queensland shows that excessive screen time during childhood is linked with weaker social skills and emotional intelligence. This was based on 132 different types of studies covering more than 290,000 children worldwide, and found that it worsened issues like anxiety, attention problems, aggression, and depression as children grow, online gaming being one of the strongest influencers. This problem has worsened since the Covid 19 pandemic, where children became highly dependant on screens and potentially developed discomfort around in person interactions, making them rely even more on online communication.

Ethical Concerns and Societal Implications

Social media has raised serious ethical concerns that are often ignored. One major issue is how these platforms are designed to keep people online for as long as possible, even if that means showing harmful or inappropriate content. Many teenagers, and even younger children, are being exposed to violent videos, sexual content, unrealistic standards, or posts promoting things like drug use. These platforms fail to properly check users ages or filter content by maturity level, because they require no official verification. This means that a lot of the material being shown is not suitable for the age group seeing it. Research done by Australia's Esafety commissioner shows that almost 50% of children aged 9-16 regularly encounter sexual content, while 57% of them are exposed to real and disturbing violence online (eSafety Commissioner, 2025). This type of frequent content can lead to desensitisation, which means that because they are being exposed to this type of content so frequently it starts to become normalised. This can cause them to copy what they see online without understanding the consequences, affecting their ability to tell right from wrong. In the long run, constantly seeing this kind of content can shape their values and decisions, potentially making them more likely to take risks, treat others badly, or accept harmful behaviour as normal in real life.
In addition to normalising harmful content, social media algorithms control what people see, and often promote the most extreme or emotional content just to keep the user engaged. This can severely impact the growth of younger people as it can confuse their understanding of right and wrong, and affect how they think about the world. They might start to believe that dangerous or unhealthy behaviour is normal.

The constant exposure can lead viewers to develop a very one sided and unhealthy view of life, and can make. An experimental study on Tiktok, Youtube and Instagram created test accounts aged from 13 to 18 to observe content feeds (Eltaher et al., 2025). The results showed that the 13 year old accounts were exposed to harmful videos significantly more frequently, on YouTube, 15% of the videos contained harmful content, compared to 8.17% for 18 year old accounts. Furthermore, inappropriate videos appeared in the feed within an average of 3 minutes and 6 seconds of passive scrolling without any searches on the account, showing that platforms fail to filter content based on age. The algorithm is designed to maximise user engagement by tracking their interactions such as how long a video is watched, replayed or liked. After watching a full video or interacting with it, it signals an interest to the algorithm making those types of videos resurface, if the user keeps showing the same amount of interaction then it begins reinforcing the pattern by flooding the feed with increasingly similar, and more extreme content. What makes this issue more concerning is that social media algorithms do not take age appropriateness seriously enough. Their main goal is to keep users engaged for as long as possible, not to protect them. These systems track user behavior—such as how long a video is watched, what is liked or shared, and even what is paused on—and then push similar content to keep the viewer hooked. The more time someone spends engaging with a particular type of video, the more often it will appear, regardless of whether it is harmful, inappropriate, or targeted at a much older audience. Since many platforms don't properly verify users' ages or filter content by maturity, the same algorithmic system that works for adults is applied to teenagers and even children. This creates a dangerous situation where young users are being exposed to extreme, violent, or sexual content simply because they watched something similar once. Ethically, this raises serious questions. If the core function of the algorithm is to boost profits through engagement, and it ignores the safety of its younger audience, then these platforms are failing in their responsibility to protect users. To address this, there needs to be stronger age verification, content filtering based on developmental appropriateness, and greater transparency about how algorithms operate, especially for accounts registered by or for minors.

This raises ethical concerns about whether these algorithms are built with age appropriateness in mind. Despite platforms requiring users to input their age, the algorithmic systems often do not adapt their content filtering to suit developmental stages or protect younger users from harmful exposure. Instead, the focus remains on maximising engagement, even at the cost of exposing children to content that may be violent, sexual, or emotionally distressing. This lack of ethical responsibility highlights the need for more transparent algorithms and stricter enforcement of content moderation. Possible solutions include mandatory child specific algorithm settings, external audits of content recommendation systems, and stronger regulatory pressure on platforms to prioritise mental health and digital safety. These failures show that the algorithm's priority is not the well being of their users, but to keep them hooked; even if that means exposing them to harmful and inappropriate content.

The Rise of Instant Gratification

In today's digital world, there's a growing obsession with fast results and easy success. Social media is filled with influencers claiming to make thousands of dollars overnight, without showing the hard work it took to get there; if any. This has started to change how many young people think about success and work. Instead of being patient or committed to long term goals, many are now chasing quick money, viral fame, or shortcuts that promise big rewards with little effort. Careers that were once built over years through education and experience are now being replaced in young minds by ideas like dropshipping, trading, or becoming a full time content creator. This shift is reinforced by social media platforms that reward instant success and visibility, making it harder for young people to value long term growth or delayed gratification. A 2023 survey by Morning Consult found that over half of Gen Z would become influencers if they had the chance, reflecting how online fame is now seen as a legitimate career path **(Morning Consult, 2023)**.

While there is nothing wrong with exploring new career paths, the problem is that this mindset is often linked to unrealistic expectations, weak discipline, and low resilience. When things do not work out quickly, many young people lose motivation and give up instead of learning from failure or improving their skills. For example, platforms like TikTok and YouTube are filled with videos that promote get-rich-quick methods, such as dropshipping or crypto trading, claiming that it is easy to earn large amounts of money in a short time. This makes traditional career paths like studying at university or gaining work experience seem slow or unnecessary. In reality, most successful people spend years learning, failing, and working hard before they achieve real success. A study by the London School of Economics in 2024 found that around 60% of teenagers believe that becoming an influencer or online content creator is more realistic than becoming a doctor or lawyer (Parents.com via Morning Consult, 2023). This shows how the idea of success is changing among the younger generation. As a result, many young people are no longer developing strong work habits such as patience, long term effort, and skill building. Instead, they are focused on fast results, which leaves them unprepared for real-life challenges.

To support the current generation, technology should be used in ways that help them grow, stay grounded, and think for themselves. This starts with making digital education a regular part of school, teaching students how social media works, how to recognise when they're being influenced, and how to manage their time online. Young people also need safe spaces where they can talk openly about the pressure they feel from comparison and the need to be available all the time. Instead of strict rules, simple boundaries like screen free time, age appropriate content filters, and breaks from scrolling can make a big difference. At the same time, tech companies should be held responsible for the impact their platforms have. They need to design apps that protect mental health, respect age limits, and avoid pushing extreme content just for engagement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while technology has brought incredible convenience and opportunity, its uncontrolled use has reshaped mindsets and changed the behaviour and values of the new generation in concerning ways. From weakened attention spans and poor critical thinking to rising anxiety and unrealistic expectations of success, the consequences are becoming harder to ignore. If nothing changes, we risk raising a generation that is emotionally unprepared, socially isolated, and heavily dependent on systems they do not fully understand. Moving forward, it is essential for parents, educators, and policymakers to work together to guide young people in developing healthier relationships with technology. Future researchers may ask: How can technology be better designed to support rather than replace thinking and effort? What long-term psychological effects will constant algorithmic exposure have on children as they grow into adults? And how can we rebuild a culture that values patience, deep work, and real-world experience in a digital-first world?

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