

Before Time Runs Out

Samantha Davis

Department of English, Anoka Ramsey Community College

ENGL 1121: College Writing and Critical Reading

Prof. Chris McCarthy

October 15, 2023

Before Time Runs Out

What's next? We can't stop scrolling. Time is running out. Today's society is falling into a compelling hole. It feels like we can't escape it. Social media is addictive. If it doesn't stop now, our society isn't going to exist in a few years. In the article "TikTok is dangerously addictive. We should regulate it now." from *The Washington Post*, Fareed Zakaria (2023) argues that TikTok is "scarily addictive" among many other social media platforms. Americans' lives are being lived on social media. He points out that the Bernstein researchers say that TikTok provides a stream of short videos and reels, which replaces "the friction of deciding what to watch," making our lives easier and keeping us scrolling longer. He also reveals that TikTok delivers "dopamine," which "triggers this sense of pleasure" in our brains which makes us crave the next scroll to the next video. Zakaria (2023) continues to say that the timing of when kids were replacing their flip phones and upgrading to smart phones, matches up with when people began being "hooked", and we started to see the "declining mental health". Zakaria (2023) mentions Jonathan Haidt who argues that we need to raise the age of social media accessibility without parental consent to 16 years old. Overall Zakaria (2023) believes that if we do not stop the rising use of social media that it will create "addiction machines" that could "hook us permanently". We need to act now while our brains are still correctly processing. I agree with Zakaria (2023) that if social media use continues to rise at the rate that it is, our society's mental health will cause us to not have a functioning society in a few years. Social media is luring millions of people and providing them with addictive videos that keep them scrolling for hours on end. This endless scrolling on social media has been correlated with declining mental health. So, we need to take action and start making restrictions, so that we can stop the addiction and save the next generations.

At the start of his article, Zakaria (2023) states, “I came to see that the real concern most had was not about TikTok’s Chinese ownership, but rather just how scarily addictive it — and much of social media — is. That’s true and deeply worrying, and we should do something about it — and soon.” I 100% agree with him. His realization will need to dawn on us sooner than later. Zakaria (2023) throughout his entire article continues to state how and why TikTok has reached the point of affecting our brains. Similarly, in the article “Social media is driving teen mental health crisis, surgeon general warns” from *NBC News*, Erika Edwards & Hallie Jackson (2023) state “Up to 95% of teens between the ages of 13 and 17 say they use a social media platform, according to the report. About a third say they're scrolling, posting, or otherwise engaged with social media ‘almost constantly.’” This isn’t just affecting a few teens; this is affecting the whole society. This statement is horrifying. These quotes show the amount of people using this compelling app constantly is only rising, causing our society to be more engaged in their screens. People barely even look up anymore. I see this in school every day, and it has affected me personally. The endless amount of lame videos that for some reason keep me scrolling everyday has done nothing effective in my life, except waste my days away.

After explaining the amount of people addicted to social media, but TikTok specifically, Zakaria (2023) poses us with a question, “What is it that TikTok does that is so distinctive?” what keeps “two-thirds of American teens” using this app, “with 1 in 6 saying they use it almost constantly.” Zakaria (2023) gives us the answer plain and simple. “Instead of an image or a post chosen by a friend, TikTok presents you with a stream of videos and gauges what you like to give you more of it, replacing the friction of deciding what to watch.” This causes satisfaction in our brains, and we keep scrolling. This single swipe to the next video is a daily occurrence that

turns into hours of scrolling. After I scroll for hours, I always think what did I get out of that? I don't even remember a single video I watched. I think of the hours I wasted when I could be doing more important activities. The article "Why is TikTok So Addictive? Experts Weigh in Amid New Safety Feature" from *Health Tech Digital*, MHealth (2023) continues to state TikTok is designed so that you can "scroll through an endless number of targeted videos." You can go from one short video to the next with one single swipe. The constant unlimited scroll "can be seriously addictive and contributes to the number of time users spend on the app." Not only do I see this in my everyday surroundings I experience it myself. The temptation to scroll is so difficult to resist. So then why resist, and not just keep going? This is the trap today's society is falling into.

The constant scroll isn't just addicting, there's more to it. Zakaria (2023) says "A distinguished social psychologist (he teaches at NYU), Haidt argues that the rise of social media and its reward system is closely correlated with staggering declines in teenagers' mental health." Without doing any research on this, people can just look around in any environment and the addiction to social media, and screens in general, is so evident. I see this in my everyday surroundings. Watching kids in my classes' mental health decrease rapidly, and all they do is sit on their phones in class makes you wonder. Edward & Jackson (2023) continue to state that Jean Twenge a professor of psychology at San Diego State University says, "Teen depression started to rise around 2012, a time that coincides with the popularity of smartphones." The timing between smart phone use and the decline in mental health aligns perfectly. In the 2010s is when people started to trade in their flip phones for smart phones. In the next couple of years is when indications of mental health declining appeared.

The negative effects of social media continue, and Zakaria (2023) is putting more ways out there to decrease the harmful effects. He says, “He argues that the age at which social media companies can collect children’s data without parental consent should be raised from 13 to 16, thereby protecting the most vulnerable years of early puberty”. Edwards and Jackson (2023) quote saying Vivek Murthy A Surgeon, long a proponent of mental health awareness said, “he believes even 13 is too young to be on social media...Twenge suggested that the age minimum should be set at 16.” I couldn't agree more. Without regulations, the rate of mental health will continue to rapidly decline, while social media use will increase. Between the ages of 13-16 years old, kids are highly influenced. When they spend hours a day on these addictive apps like TikTok they are being influenced by not always good influencers. Social media doesn’t guard kids from seeing nonage appropriate material, so kids may be experiencing videos not appropriate for their age. My parents set restrictions at an early age so there was no question about it when the time came. We couldn’t get social media until a certain age and even at that age the social media apps we were allowed to get were limited. Setting regulations on social media is to only protect and to hopefully save the next generation.

Social media is addicting. There is no simpler way to put it. It plays with our brains until all we know how to do is swipe to the next video. Smartphones have proven to decline our mental health. And if we don't put limitations on it now, what is our future going to look like? Throughout this essay and research, I have been horrified at the outcomes of social media on human bodies. People's lives are being lived through fake interactions, in a fake world. Someday people aren't even going to know how to interact face to face. Zakaria (2023) says social media is and will “create addiction machines of astonishing power that could hook us permanently, perhaps even rewire our brains with devastating consequences. We should act now, while we

have the time — and the attention span.” It’s now or never. While our brains can still process more than just scrolling to the next video.

References

- Edwards, E. & Jackson, H. (2023, May 23). Social media is driving teen mental health crisis, surgeon general warns. *NBC*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/social-media-mental-health-anxiety-depression-teens-surgeon-general-rcna85575>
- MHealth. (2023, April 13). Why is TikTok So Addictive? Experts Weigh in Amid New Safety. Feature *Health Tech Digital*. <https://www.healthtechdigital.com/why-is-tiktok-so-addictive-experts-weigh-in-amid-new-safety-feature/>
- Zakaria, F. (2023, April 14). TikTok is dangerously addictive. We should regulate it now. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/04/14/tiktok-teens-mental-health-regulation/>