Electronic Gadgets: Beneficial or Distractive?

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Electronic gadgets are becoming more and more a part of every person's life. People of all ages from different walks of life become dependent on gadgets like laptop, notebook, tablets, mobile phones or cellphones or smartphones, just to mention the most common ones, and seems could not function at all without these. Observe what keeps people busy in different places. Mostly, texting, playing games, reading, talking, and many other activities they can do with their phones. This is a common everyday scenario at homes, workplaces, schools, inside the vehicles, and even on the streets.

Uses of Gadgets

Apparently, gadgets are invented for different uses and purposes. It created a need as well as a want to people. Cellphone, as the most common gadget is very useful for communication which is either charged or free through social media. These days, as technology becomes more upgraded, more features of cellphones are enjoyed by users. Students can do research work in their phones, read e-books, record presentations, download and save files, shop and many more especially if it is connected to the internet. Phones are also avenues for entertainment like watching movies and videos, listen to and record music, and play games. As Watson, (2015) states, "electronic gadgets help us stay personally and professionally connected by providing access to email, text messages, phone services, video chat and social media. We use them to make new connections, both online and in the real world."

The Digital Natives

Young people, especially students, are the generations to grow up with new technology and use it with ease and confidence. They are what Prensky (2001) call "digital natives". They are spending most of their time using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age. Essential part of their daily existence are computer games, e-mail, social networking sites, cell phones and instant messaging.

In school, teachers find it difficult to hold the students' attention. Reading a book seems to be a very heavy burden for both young and old students especially if the book has no colors and pictures. It is not entertaining for the students and they feel bored. As Prensky (2001) emphasize, "today's average college grads have spent fewer than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours

playing video games." They would always find excuses not to study their lessons unless there is an exam because they are so much preoccupied with their phones. The gadgets that the students use are more interesting and entertaining so they pay more attention and spend more time using those gadgets. One research finding states that students' screen time spent on smartphones and tablets has gone from 4% in 2011 to 35% in 2017 (Rideout, 2017). Thus, the teacher has to compete with technology in order to gain their students' attention and willingness to learn. Sometimes, students are allowed to use their phones during classes but only for a specific purpose or for an activity where it is needed.

Additionally, at home, parents would complain about their children being lazy, irresponsible, inattentive, and so on. From the time they wake up until they go to bed, they are with their phones. Some would even pressure their parents to buy them new and latest model of phones. Call it peer pressure or social acceptance or simply just a want. Many of these children don't just realize the difference between a need and a want or don't even know what to prioritize. Gone were the days when family would gather together and just watch television and enjoy it, when children would interact with each other through physically active games, and when they can focus more to one task at a time. These days children would just enjoy games on their phones for long hours without minding what is happening around them. It is just very common to see them doing multi-tasks with different gadgets in front of them: watching television, playing games and listening to music on their phones, and working on laptops or computer.

Effects of Gadgets

Gadgets are helpful in the sense that it makes life easier. Obviously, communication and becomes easier for almost all people. Messages are just sent in a matter of seconds anywhere in the world. In like manner, transportation has been facilitated by technology through online bookings, checking, and guiding (GPS). Time spent in shopping and business transactions become shorter and convenient which is favorable for both the clients and business people or companies. It is undeniable as well that in the field of education, gadgets are a lot helpful as it can facilitate in class and online learning. Thus, making learning more interesting to many students.

On the other hand, League (2015) cites long-term effects of modern gadgets on a kid's brain as well as their overall development. First, it is not good for the brain. She quotes that researchers at the University of Washington reveal that modern gadgets are not necessary in child development. Overexposure to gadgets has been linked to attention deficit, cognitive delays and impaired learning. Second, it causes language delay for toddlers since according to American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) there is no such thing as educational TV for kids under 2 years old. Third, less active play equals delayed development which means spending more time in front of screen results in delayed development and affects brain functions. Fourth, not good for bedtime as the late-night glow of laptops and mobile phones are depriving children a good night sleep. Fifth, not good for

school because being sleep-deprived affect the child's performance in school. Sixth, terrible child aggression as found out in one study the increase in use of modern technology can break the old boundaries of family, values, behavior and children's well-being. Seventh, kids suffer mental illness as revealed in one study, children who spend longer than two hours in front of a screen or another entertainment medium are more likely to suffer psychological difficulties. Lastly, gadgets cause tantrums because some kids are too attached to gadgets so they throw a tantrum when their electronic devices are taken away from them.

Similarly, gadgets can also affect the environment. The manufacture and disposal of electronic devices have a significant impact on the global environment. Many devices contain hazardous materials such as lead, cadmium and mercury that can contaminate ground soil if not disposed of properly (Watson, 2015). In addition, too much use of gadgets is also dangerous to health. Persistent use of gadgets encourages a sedentary lifestyle and may lead to poor posture and weight gain among users. In extreme cases, this may cause obesity, neck and back issues and wrist and hand pain (Gillespie, 2019).

Implication to Teaching and Learning

In this modern era, teaching and learning need to be adjusted to cope with the kind of attitude and thinking the students have. Teachers need to be "digital immigrants" to be able to be more effective to teach the "digital native" learners. As Prensky (2001) define, "digital natives" were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in their lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology. Along with this, teachers need to be equipped with technological skills to be able to deal with the digital natives who are used to receiving information really fast and most of the time would like to parallel process and multi-task. Parents have also the responsibility to instill to their children the proper use of technology. They should include in their parenting the dos and don'ts of gadgets both in their education and everyday life.

To conclude, technology brings ease to life as it makes work easier and faster. Gadgets are helpful to some degrees but it steal time, focus, interaction, and most of all healthy lifestyle from people especially children. Anything that is too much is not good. Proper use of these gadgets are just fine but spending most of one's time, energy, and sometimes resources are not good at all. Reports of accidents and untoward incidents due to gadget use are widespread, yet many don't give much attention into it. Unless maybe it has a big personal impact to an individual. So the question whether gadgets are beneficial or distractive has obvious answers depending on what a person gives values in life. Things created or invented have always its advantages and disadvantages so it is up to the user how to make use of these things wisely.

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