
Social Media Replacing Reading: Consequences

George R. R. Martin once said, “A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies...The man who never reads lives only once.” For thousands of years, people have found joy in the simple act of reading a book. From action, to mystery, to romance, reading offers a whole new world of adventure. Many in society pride themselves on the knowledge that they detest reading, claiming it is a wave of the past. They see a future paved with online media influencers and the hottest, new fashion fads. Yet, there is no better way to pave the future, than reflecting on the past. A past which found reading a simple pleasure. A past where you could travel anywhere in the world by just sitting on your couch. Today’s society, however, is consumed by mindless scrolling and the constant strive for perfection. Striving which produces anxiety, depression, and self isolation. Nowadays, the people who receive the highest praise are not those who write incredible stories of redemption, or travel to the highest point on planet Earth; but are most often those who have a million followers on Instagram and live the life of a celebrity. Where has this simple joy of reading gone? “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Mark 8:36). Today’s social media platform has overtaken the simple joy of reading a good book.

Social Media consumes many hours of the day. According to Hannah Natanson, this claim rings true because “In 2016, 12th graders reported devoting about six hours of their free time every day to digital media. Tenth-graders reported devoting five hours, and eighth-graders reported devoting four hours” (Natanson 11). Thus, these students subject their minds and time to such activity. Whether it includes scrolling through endless highlight reels or watching other people for pure entertainment, students have become addicted to the instant gratification social media brings to the world. How much time goes by until they yearn to experience the ever changing moments of life? The small moments where one can grow as an individual, rather than be fed false information and fall into strategically placed, teen-targeted ads to capture their attention? So, what can be done about this detrimental addiction? How can one convince their child to stray from social media and begin the exciting adventure of reading a good book? “The solution can require a complicated dance between coercion and suggestion, said Daniel Willingham, a professor of psychology at the University of Virginia and the author of “Raising Kids Who Read” (Natanson 18). According to this professor, force is not the answer. Making a child do something without giving them a choice typically produces aversion to that activity. Thus, a parent should instead create more opportunities to make the shift from phone to book. For example, placing books around the house so the child can have the option to read is the next best step. Building small habits which encourage long lasting commitments is one way someone can go from not reading at all, to absolutely adoring the books they used to turn their nose up to.

The use of social media has a significant impact on mental health. “Social Media usage has been shown to lead to increased social isolation and mental health issues” (Natanson 16), Natanson also writes. Therefore, these forms of media are not simply “curing” boredom, they also lead to increased mental health issues. A good example of the cost of these activities is found when a teen is not being included by their friend group and feels lonely, then reaches to find consolation in their phone. Witnessing all their friends post pictures about what a good time they are having, or even seeing other people’s amazing friendships may send them spiraling

into self deprecation and self isolation. Occurrences like these can have a lasting influence on one's self esteem and potentially destroy friendships. Rather than connecting with characters in a book and developing empathic tendencies, these teens are sending themselves down a path leading to inevitable destruction. Human beings are social creatures and require companionship of others to thrive in life, says HelpGuide. Without this sort of connection, stress, anxiety, and depression would run rampant. Though social media can be a great way to develop new connections with people all around the world, it cannot be a replacement to true human connection and interaction, HelpGuide also states. However, on a more serious note, social media triggers anxiety, makes people covet the lives of others, and compels the people behind the screens to feel insecure. Since these media are rooted in highlight reels, people only post about the high points of their lives. Meaning that platforms such as Instagram and Facebook discourage honesty and simply promote perfection. "Even if you know that images you're viewing on social media are manipulated, they can still make you feel insecure about how you look or what's going on in your own life", (HelpGuide 6). Reading books, however, gives insight into both the positive and negative aspects of life. Showing the true colors of the world, rather than simply the ostentatious ones. Cyberbullying is also an astronomical downside to the use of social media. This is because people are more likely to spread rumors, lie, or verbally abuse others behind a screen. Statistics have shown, approximately 10% of teens have reported being bullied on social media (HelpGuide 10). Exposing that using such platforms can corrupt one's mind and make them think it is acceptable to bring others down, in order to lift themselves up; whereas people should rise by lifting others. These negative comments, since they are posted for all the world to see, never truly fade away; in both a literal and emotional sense. Once one person attacks someone else behind a screen, there is typically a breeding ground constructed for others to fuel the fire and verbally attack others with their abhorrent words. Reading a book cannot produce this type of damage, as a book cannot open wide its mouth and attack someone. Yet another negative mental impact is that the time spent on these forms of media develops an egotistical mindset. Constantly taking and perfecting selfies, divulging your thoughts for positive reciprocation, these are actions which flourish such a mentality. Overall, social media may contribute to social connection, yet it is in no way a true way to connect with others and develop positive, lifelong rectitude.

There are both joys and benefits that result from reading books. As explained by Sarah DiGiulio in her article, "Why 'getting lost in a book' is so good for you, according to science", "Reading has been shown to help us better understand and interact with other people, keep our brains sharp, expand our world views and grow as individuals, Green says. 'Stories allow us to feel connected with others and part of something bigger than ourselves'" (DiGiulio 4). Accordingly, the simple act of reading a good book matures lifelong habits which spread to all areas of people's lives. Because books range through so many genres, readers often mature with a wide sense of empathy, generating a deeper understanding of what others go through, what makes them tick, and how they can grow as an individual in learning from other's past mistakes. In contrast to social media's effect on social skills, reading books actually aids in social interaction, challenging readers to become better people at home, as well as in social settings. Reading also promotes healthy brain function, rendering readers pleasure by becoming an escape from boredom or stress, bringing tranquility and inner peace. Rather than promoting isolation, "Reading can give us a sense of belongingness that we all instinctively want as human beings, according to Green" (DiGiulio 11). The previous statement also proves that humans have an innate desire to have real-world social interaction. Hence, hiding behind a screen is not the answer. "Social connection is a strong, human need," the study's author Shira Gabriel, PhD, associate professor of psychology at UB... 'Anytime we feel connected to

others, we feel good in general and feel good about our lives” (DiGiulio 13). Connecting with others truly impacts the mind and spirit, giving one the sense of belongingness they yearn for. No amount of scrolling or likes can produce this level of inclusion or fulfill the true, intrinsic feeling of connection. In terms of brain function, reading “[stimulates] the neural networks in the brain that improve our social cognition and conceptual processing of abstract content” (DiGiulio 19). Reading books floods our mind with new bits of knowledge, challenging the brain to learn new things. The simple act of reading a book sharpens the memory and also improves focus and concentration. Since reading improves essential life skills such as speech and writing abilities, it further stimulates the brain. Altogether, making reading one of the most beneficial activities for both mental and emotional health.

Social media consumes the very best of people, yet taking the time to read a good book can bring out the best in them. The positive impact of reading upon the brain and personality is greatly evident. While it is a way to expand the borders of one’s mind, this activity is capable of much more. Reading has been proven to develop deeper senses of empathy in individuals, while also becoming a beloved pastime. Social media, in most cases, however, has not been as influential in terms of the growth of an individual. Those who spend all their time scrolling through endless snapshots of other people’s lives tend to be weighed down by the cloud of perfection. Thus, finding solace in the quiet moments of life, while also diving into a new adventure, can relieve the stress and anxiety of everyday life. Whether one chooses a book of adventure or even the Bible, reading opens up a whole new world to those who take the time to open the door to it.