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REPERCUSSIONS OF DIGITAL DISTRACTION AMONG CURRENT GENERATION STUDENTS: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Abstract:

The tendency of the students to get distracted is not a new concept. It has been a matter of concern since ages. The sources of distraction among students are varied and are found to vary across generations. Technology and current generation inhabitants are inseparable. In fact, technology has gradually gained the status of a constant companion for the current generation inhabitants. The version is significantly valuable when it comes to the student life. But keeping in view the very tendency of the current generation students, to get easily distracted consequent to a multitude of factors, distraction caused by the strong affiliation with technology and the digital connect has emerged as an area of concern. Multiple studies portray the positives associated with the advent of technology and its allied products. But, pondering over the associated negative consequences with special reference to current generation students is also not something to avoid. This paper is an effort to gain an insight into the effects of digital distraction among the current generation student population, as projected by various researchers.

Introduction:

The past decade has been a witness to the massive changes in terms of technological upgradation. While on one hand such amendments have proven to be a turn-around point with respect to the ways in which people lead their lives, operate and communicate, whereas on the other, the said concept has resulted in the emergence of a new phenomenon called digital distraction. Although a number of events responsible for distraction are prevalent, but the significance accorded to digital distraction is immense. Digital Distraction can be understood as "the distraction caused by technology, electronic devices and media, which subsequently amounts to a decline in concentration appended upon the main work being attended to by an individual" (Agrawal, et al., 2017). Irrespective of the settingsin which one operates, whether it be a classroom, workplace, home, family or social gathering, digital overload (Rosen & Samuel, 2015) has emerged as a stringent issue. Throughout one's daily routine, all sorts of messages, notifications and alerts keep flowing in, which possess an immense potential to disrupt the focus of individuals. And keeping in view the very innate tendency of the current generation inhabitants to procrastinate, wide diversions are always available just through a feather-touch click. With technology emerging on a daily basis, digital devices have rightly gained the status of being ubiquitous in the lives of the current generation inhabitants. Reports suggest that almost 21% of the US based individuals check their phones approximately 50 times or more per day (Wiggington et.al, 2017). Smartphones have become the major and sole point of interaction for almost 39% of US based Millennial inhabitants who interact majorly with and through their smartphones than anyone else (Source: https://web.archive.org/web/20160705071734/https://newsroom.bankofamerica.com/files/press_kit/additional/2016_BAC_Trends_in_Consumer_Mobility_Report.pdf). The scenario is even more cumbersome from the point of view of the current generation students, who have grown up with technology and digital devices as their playmates.

Attributes of Current Generation Students:

A life devoid of technology and its exponents is just not imaginable for the current generation student population. They have rightly been mentioned as the "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001; Slavin, 2014), "born digital" (Palfrey and Gasser, 2011) or the "Net Generation" (Tapscott, 2009). There is an immensely high intervention of technology in the lives of the students who belong to the category of digital natives. As per a study conducted by Brooks (2016) among US based students, the proportion of students owing a smartphone, a laptop or a tablet were found to be 96%, 93% and 57% respectively. Additionally, 29% of the students under the study were in possession of technology capable of being worn, like, smart watches, headphones, etc.

A thorough review of literature led to the following insights into the very nature of the current student population.

Table 1: Attributes of Current Generation Student Population

Excerpts from Literature regarding Attributes of Current Generation Students	Reference
• Tendency to oppose popular practices and opinions • High propensity to adapt • Exceptional curiosity and self reliance	Tapscott, 1998

• Preference for quick reception of information • Preference for rapid processing of information • Preference for active learning over passive learning	Prensky, 2001
• Capability to multitask • Undue reliance on technology • Propensity to be out loud about ones' life • Hunger to remain connected and informed	Oblinger&Oblinger, 2005
• Natural proficiency towards digital technology usage • Seek instant gratifications • Portray high levels of impatience	Bayne & Ross, 2007
• Fearless about mistakes and favour trial-and-error learning	Jukes, McCain &Crockett, 2010
• Tendency to seek comfort in online spaces and reliance on online spaces for seeking required information	Palfrey & Gasser, 2011
• Highly social, entrepreneurial and global thinkers	Becker et.al, 2016

The above mentioned attributes are served scrumptiously by the technology and allied devices. In fact, these digital natives are known to spend a major chunk of their lives in the presence of computing devices, smart phones, virtual modes of recreation and entertainment and other technology by-products (Prensky, 2001). Further and consequent to this varied format of spending childhood, a student generation with a modified approach towards thinking and information processing has emerged (Prensky, 2001). Students are now habitual towards remaining constantly connected through texting, social media interactions, gaming, surfing internet for information search, etc. (Rykard, 2020). This propensity to remain connected to the world round the clock glaringly interferes with the concentration levels of the students and leads them towards being digitally distracted (Chen &Donmez, 2016).

Digital Distraction among students:the Consequences

Digital technologies, which have now become an integral component of the teaching-learning environment (Selwyn, 2016), possess immense potential to support and enhance learning among students. The use of word-processing systems, emails, Google, provision of LMS (Learning Management Sytems), etc., specifically in higher education teaching, are all aimed towards enhancing the effectiveness of the overall teaching-learning process. A lot has been inferred about the positive alley of technology and digital gadgets. They allow for students to engage in exceptionally effective exchange of ideas and experiences, thus enabling learning through collaboration and problem solving (Shatri, 2020). IT and its appropriate usage allows for development of skills pertaining to mathematics, communication, research, problem solving and critical thinking skills (Reinhold et.al., 2020). Through provision of access to information repositories, students are enabled to acquire information promptly (Borysiuk, 2013). Evidently, a number of advantages are conferred upon the category of current generation students by the emerging technology. But, the disadvantages caused as a consequence of the here-to-stay presence of technology cannot be ruled out either. Gaille (2018) has mentioned that IT and its usage in education can distract the students and detach them from face-to-face associations (Source: https://brandongaille.com/23-advantages-disadvantages-technology-education/). A multitude of studies have found a connect between the mounting reliance and use of digital

gadgets and the tendency of students to get distracted or swayed away from what they should be actually involved in.

An extensive review of literature led to the following observations with regard to impact of digital distraction on current generation student population.

Table 2: Summary of literature excerpts regarding impact of digital distraction

Technology Component and Related Activity leading to Digital Distraction	Impact of Digital Distraction	References
Text messaging through Mobile phones	Negative impact on learning and notes taking	Kuznekoff, Munz&Titsworth (2015)
Interacting over Social Media through Mobile phones	Low test Scores	Beland & Murphy (2015)
Social media usage	Reduction in study time; low GPA	Kirschner & Karpinski (2010)
Using Internet and search engines over laptops	Short attention spans; Negative impact on learning and performance	Richtel (2012); Fried (2008)
Involving in non-class related activities using technological devices (in general)	Cyber Slacking	Baturay&Toker (2015)
Overuse of and addiction to Internet	Online gambling, pornography, cyber bullying	Hong &Chiu (2016)
Use of technological devices (in general)	Involvement in online plagiarism	Çelik and Odaci(2013)

Conclusion:

Amongst the indications of the positive effects of technology and usage of digital gadgets in teaching-learning process, evidencespertaining to the students getting digitally distracted are immensely available. In addition to the academic repercussions, formation of certain behavioral attributes is also among the effects of digital distraction among students, which may again affect academic performances indirectly. Events of cyber slacking and cyber bullying are on the rise, which are a clear consequence of over reliance on technology. Nevertheless, the ubiquitous technological upgradation is bound to turn even more complex for the coming generations and keeping in view the review based findings, it becomes imperative to figure out strategies to minimize the incidences of the current generation students getting distracted digitally. This is significant because the affiliation between technological upgradation and current and upcoming student generation will continue to gain strength. It would be increasingly impossible to rule out the tendency of students getting distracted. The only way out will be to figure out measures to cater to the special and specific needs of the generational cohorts. This would be significant as the students will soon become an active member of the workforce and a distracted workforce will not contribute to or serve the intended purpose. There is a need to understand the fact that Upgradation of and reliance over technology could neither be minimized nor separated from the current as well as upcoming generations. Incorporating technology into teaching methodologies

rather than banning it will serve as a break through point. Measures must be taken to mitigate the resultant effect so as to strike a happy balance between the need of the generational inhabitants as well as the need of the situations.

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