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SCREEN GENERATION: A SICK GENERATION?

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A documentary exploration of an important scientific investigation

Smartphones, televisions, computers, games consoles, and tablets – all these screens now take up a huge part of our lives, whether we're looking stuff up on the internet, reading books, checking the news, chatting on social media, or playing video games. This digital invasion has created a unique challenge for our brains.

What are the effects of this unprecedented screen exposure?

It is suggested that screen time for young children triggers autistic and hyperactive behavior, and for teens, can make them become addicted or even violent. As adults use screens to excess, some say their cognitive faculties are becoming impaired, such as memory or attention span. In May 2018, the World Health Organization included "gaming disorder" in its lengthy International Classification of Diseases.

But are we really harming our brains with these screens?

Through this investigative documentary, we will travel to the USA and across Europe to meet some of the world's leading specialists in neuroscience and addiction.

The investigation will take place in five countries: The USA, France, Switzerland, Belgium, and Germany.

At the reSTART Life digital detox center northeast of Seattle, gaming disorder is diagnosed when patients are suffering from at least three symptoms:

- They struggle to control their relationship with screens
- They put screen time ahead of other activities in daily life
- They do not stop using them despite the negative consequences of doing so, particularly in terms of their relationships with others

And that this has been going on for at least 12 months.

How a human brain reacts when a person plays video games was demonstrated for the first time at Ghent University in Belgium in 2011. The study showed that video games effect the brain in a similar way to drugs.

At the Free University of Berlin, Dr. Dar Meshi is examining users of Facebook and other social media sites such as Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter. Each time we create a profile on one of these networks, we are scored by our followers, our audience. The more hits or likes we have, the happier we are. And there's a reason for that: Dr. Meshi explains that there is a part of the brain that measures our performance compared to those of other people and creates a feeling of satisfaction when we are better. It is this mechanism that turns us into addicts. Social media sites are very aware of this cerebral process in terms of encouraging loyalty amongst subscribers.

For teenagers, the number of "likes" garnered has become a measurement of social value and is also part of FOMO syndrome, or the "fear of missing out" on some important news on social media.



Social networks are not alone in exploiting our brains.

In 2013, Netflix revolutionized the consumption of TV content by making complete series available to subscribers. But some say the Netflix model is very harmful to our health.

When we watch our favorite series, our brains continually produce dopamine, a neurotransmitter that helps control the brain's reward and pleasure centers. This extended pleasure injection pushes us to keep on watching more and more.

From birth to four years, the neurological diagnosis is incontrovertible.

Smartphones and tablets are often used as baby-sitters in homes to entertain and calm babies. In this respect, the scientific community is in agreement. From birth to the age of four, being exposed to TV

screens, tablets, and smartphones is catastrophic.

Today, we know that the use of tablets by very small children can harm the development of their brains. However, excessive screen time has been found not to cause autism, as some believe.

Today in Germany, prevention campaigns are being carried out in crèches, and in Taiwan, parents can be fined €1,400 for leaving a child under the age of two in front of a screen. In France, the authorities have yet to respond to warnings from professionals.

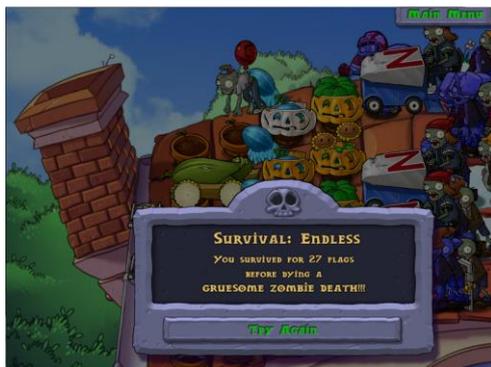
Psychiatrist Serge Tisseron suggests the introduction of a precautionary principle regarding the use of screens by children. He calls it the 3-6-9-12 rule.

- No screens before the age of three, or as limited as possible
- No portable games consoles before the age of six
- No internet before the age of nine, and from then on, only accompanied access until the child enters high school
- No internet alone before the age of 12, and even then, with caution

Can combat video games make people aggressive? Yes.

However, it is likely that such neurological disorders only effect those with a predisposition to such issues.

In Geneva, we will meet the leading specialist on this question, Professor Daphne Bavelier, who has spent the last 17 years carrying out a study into the impact of combat video games on our brains.



But can screens do us good, too?

According to Professor Bavelier, video gamers' spatial awareness and ability to focus are more highly developed than normal. This could suggest potential for therapeutic uses of video games.

A Boston-based start-up has even launched a gaming platform called Project: EVO, based on the use of screens. A study of 57 children who used the platform showed that Project: EVO helped combat attention deficit disorder, with or without hyperactivity. They also have projects for games to treat autism and Alzheimer's.

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