Chapter-7

FROM SCREEN TIME TO SERENITY: UNDERSTANDING TECHNOLOGY'S INFLUENCE ON HAPPINESS REVIEWED

Abstract

This book chapter delves into the profound significance of technology in shaping individual and collective happiness in the contemporary era. Drawing on insights from multidisciplinary research and empirical evidence, the chapter explores both the positive and negative dimensions of technology's impact on well-being. The discourse begins by examining historical perspectives on the relationship between technological progress and happiness, highlighting seminal works such as Easterlin's Paradox. The chapter navigates through the transformative changes brought about by technology, from enhancing social connectivity to revolutionizing mental health care and education. It probes the nuanced dynamics of social media and digital communication, acknowledging both their potential to foster meaningful connections and their role in exacerbating feelings of isolation and comparison. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the challenges posed by techno stress and explores strategies for coping with its detrimental effects. The potential of technology to support mental health is illuminated through discussions on innovative interventions and virtual therapy platforms. Additionally, the concept of digital detox is examined, shedding light on the benefits of intentional breaks from technology in promoting well-being. Overall, this comprehensive exploration underscores the pivotal role of technology in shaping the landscape of human happiness in the digital age, while also acknowledging the need for ongoing research and informed strategies to optimize its positive impact.

Keywords: Happiness and Technology; Social Connectivity; Mental Health Solutions; Digital Detox; Techno Stress and Well-being

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I. INTRODUCTION

The exploration of technology's impact on happiness has been a longstanding subject of study for economists and social scientists dating back to the Industrial Revolution. The primary focus has been on understanding how material wealth influences well-being. Gregg Easterbrook, in his book "The Progress Paradox," contended that despite technological advancements significantly improving various aspects of Western life in the last century, most individuals are less content than their ancestors (Easterbrook, G. 2004). However, the most impactful research on the connection between prosperity, driven by technological progress, and well-being was conducted by Professor Richard Easterlin (Easterlin, 1974; Easterlin, 2017; Easterlin & Angelescu, 2009; and Easterlin et al., 2010). His work demonstrated that there was no substantial relationship between a country's income level and its citizens' happiness. Known as The Easterlin's Paradox, his findings suggest that while happiness is directly linked to income within and across countries at a given time, it does not increase as income grows over time. This conclusion, based on data from 1946 to 1970 and supported by later evidence until 2014, indicates that the United States' happiness trend has remained stagnant or slightly negative despite a significant increase in real incomes over seven decades. Easterlin's research implies that providing people with more income and choices may not significantly impact their well-being. In other words, individuals seem to adapt to higher income levels, and value less and less the increases income. This concept also applies to the relationship between happiness and technology, excluding income. People tend to quickly adapt to the benefits offered by technology, and these advancements may not necessarily contribute to increased happiness. For instance, while someone in the 19th century might have anticipated increased happiness with the ability to travel long distances in a day, cross the Atlantic quickly, or communicate with someone thousands of kilometers away, today, and these technological conveniences are often taken for granted, and their contribution to happiness is minimal. Moreover, technological advances may even be perceived as sources of stress and frustration (Surowiecki, 2005).This adaptability to the benefits of new technology aligns with a key insight from happiness research: people rapidly acclimate to positive changes. For example, winning the lottery may initially elicit ecstatic happiness, but over time, individuals tend to return to their usual levels of happiness (Rojas, 2009; 2012).

In the rapidly evolving landscape of the 21st century, marked by unprecedented technological advancements, the intersection between happiness and technology has become a subject of profound significance. As societies worldwide embrace digital innovations, the implications of these technologies on individual and collective well-being are increasingly under scrutiny. This research seeks to unravel the complex relationship between happiness and technology, probing the ways in which technological advancements shape and influence our subjective experiences of joy, contentment, and overall life satisfaction. The advent of technology has brought about transformative changes in the way we live, work, and communicate. From the ubiquity of smartphones and social media to the rise of artificial intelligence and virtual reality, these technological marvels have undeniably altered the fabric of human existence. However, the impact of such advancements on our emotional and psychological well-being remains a multifaceted and often debated topic (Brulé & Munier, 2021). On one hand, proponents argue that technology contributes to happiness by enhancing convenience, connectivity, and access to information. The ease with which individuals can connect with loved ones across distances, access a wealth of knowledge at their fingertips, and automate

mundane tasks has the potential to foster positive emotions and reduce stress. Moreover, the entertainment and leisure options facilitated by technology offer new avenues for relaxation and enjoyment, further influencing overall happiness levels (Keltner et al., 2017). Conversely, skeptics raise concerns about the darker side of technology, positing that excessive screen time, social media comparison, and information overload may contribute to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and decreased life satisfaction. The incessant digital demands on attention and the constant exposure to curated representations of others' lives could potentially erode genuine connections and engender unrealistic expectations, ultimately jeopardizing mental well-being (Telles et al., 2018). This research aims to navigate this intricate terrain by delving into empirical studies, psychological theories, and sociological analyses that shed light on the nuanced dynamics between happiness and technology. By exploring both the positive and negative aspects, we seek to construct a comprehensive understanding of how technology shapes our experiences of happiness and contributes to the evolving tapestry of human well-being in the digital age. As we embark on this exploration, it is essential to recognize the multidimensional nature of happiness and the diverse ways in which technology interacts with and influences this complex human emotion. Through a rigorous examination of existing literature and emerging trends, this research aspires to contribute valuable insights that inform our understanding of the contemporary relationship between happiness and technology. The fact that we quickly adapt to technological advances does not mean that technology does not have positive or negative effects on our quality of life and happiness. The important thing is that its net impact is not always easy to determine. To explore this further, we will examine the following aspects: the positive and negative effects of technology on happiness, the role of social media and digital communication in well-being, the challenges of techno stress and how to cope with it, the potential of technology to support mental health, the benefits of digital detox and the methods of measuring happiness in the digital age.

II. POSITIVE EFFECTS OF TECHNOLOGY ON HAPPINESS

Thanks to technological advancements, our world has experienced globalization, transforming individuals into global citizens who transcend geographical borders and overcome spatial limitations. Work environments have evolved, with some working in traditional offices, others from the comfort of their homes, and some even choosing unconventional locations like cafes. Our seamless navigation through the internet-based "cloud" signifies a blending of our physical possessions with the virtual realm. The theory of economic growth emphatically underscores technological progress as the primary catalyst for both growth and the enhancement of living standards. The logical inference would suggest that, beyond improving material conditions, new technologies should also contribute to increased happiness (Mochon, 2018). Expanding on this perspective, numerous sources affirm the positive impact of technology on various aspects of human life. For instance, a study by Read et al., (2021) highlights how technological connectivity fosters a sense of global community, enabling people to transcend geographical constraints. Additionally, Diener and Seligman (2004) emphasizes that technological advancements have the potential to enhance individual happiness by providing access to information, resources, and opportunities. Moreover, the flexibility facilitated by technology in work settings is explored by Grant and Campbell (2019), who discuss the rise of remote work and its influence on work-life balance and overall satisfaction. As technology continues to advance,

understanding its multifaceted effects on well-being requires considering not only economic factors but also the broader impact on human happiness and the quality of life.

Technology can have positive effects on happiness by enhancing the quality of life, well-being, and human development of individuals and societies. Some of the prominent authors and thinkers who have explored the positive aspects of technology in relation to happiness are Lyubomirsky & Layous (2013), who studies the science of happiness and the factors that influence it, and how technology can be used to promote happiness through online interventions, mobile apps, and social media, by providing personalized feedback, goal-setting, and social support; Mehta (2020), who studies the effects of technology on creativity, innovation, and consumer behavior, and how technology can enhance creativity and problem-solving by providing ambient noise, visual stimulation, and cognitive diversity, by stimulating the brain, increasing arousal, and facilitating divergent thinking; Seligman (2002, 2011), who is the founder of positive psychology and presents a model of well-being based on five elements: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, and develops online tools and platforms to enhance well-being, by measuring, tracking, and improving these elements; Helliwell and Huang (2013) and Helliwell et al.,(2019), who is a co-editor of the World Happiness Report and studies how technology can affect happiness through digital communication, social media, and online communities, and how technology can increase happiness by facilitating social connection, trust, and cooperation, by reducing loneliness, increasing social capital, and fostering collective action; and Christakis and Fowler (2009), who studies the structure and function of social networks, and how they influence health, behavior, and well-being, and how technology can affect happiness through online games, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence, and how technology can enhance happiness by creating positive emotions, empathy, and altruism, by inducing flow, enhancing perspective-taking, and promoting prosocial behavior.

In the contemporary era, technology's pervasive influence has become integral to daily life, shaping diverse facets of human existence. An exploration of research studies and empirical evidence reveals the multifaceted positive impact of technology on individual and collective happiness. Digital platforms have revolutionized social interactions, transcending geographical barriers and fostering meaningful connections (Hampton and Wellman, 2013). The positive correlation between active engagement in online social networks and increased feelings of social support over time underscores the significant contribution of technology to a sense of belonging and overall happiness. Furthermore, the integration of technology into mental health care has introduced innovative solutions supporting emotional well-being (Firth et al., 2017). Mobile mental health applications, virtual therapy platforms, wearable technologies, and digital therapeutics contribute to accessible and personalized mental health support, positively impacting individuals' happiness by addressing mental health challenges. Additionally, technology has democratized access to education and skill development, offering opportunities for continuous learning and personal growth (Hsu et al., 2019). The positive correlation between engagement in online learning platforms and subjective well-being underscores the empowering nature of technology in fostering a sense of achievement and satisfaction. Moreover, the digital age has transformed entertainment and leisure activities, providing abundant options for relaxation and enjoyment (Reinecke and Oliver 2014). Active engagement with digital entertainment content is associated with increased positive affect and relaxation, contributing to heightened levels of life satisfaction. Lastly, the

ubiquity of technology has expanded access to information and opportunities, positively influencing happiness. Individuals can easily access knowledge, connect with resources, and explore new horizons, fostering a global interconnectedness that contributes to a sense of purpose and fulfillment. In conclusion, the positive effect of technology on happiness is evident across various domains of human experience, encompassing social connections, mental health support, continuous learning, entertainment, and access to information. While challenges exist, such as the need to balance screen time, the overall research landscape underscores the transformative and positive role of technology in shaping a happier and more connected society.

III. NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF TECHNOLOGY ON HAPPINESS

The critique of technology's impact on happiness, originating from Heidegger's exploration of the "question of technology," questions our ability to wield technology for our own purposes, arguing that it makes us lose sight of our humanity (Heidegger, 1977). Heidegger asserts that human beings are increasingly viewed as mere technological objects, treated as raw materials for technical operations, and reduced to being human resources to be organized, reorganized, and discarded (Blitz, 2014; Mochon, 2018). This criticism leads to two contradictory perspectives: one suggesting that technological progress creates a rigid, controlled, and soulless society, facilitating manipulation and monitoring (Ellul, 1954; 1964), while another argues that technology can enhance happiness through opportunities for communication, education, and empowerment (Diener et al., 2018). Additional criticism focuses on technology's role in shaping societal discourse, with concerns raised about the culture of consumerism and materialism it fosters, leading to constant dissatisfaction and a perpetual quest for more (Postman, 1985; Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002). Putnam highlights the reduction of face-to-face social interaction, resulting in a fragmented society with diminished social capital (Putnam, 2002), though some studies challenge this view, emphasizing technology's potential to facilitate social interaction, particularly for those facing barriers in offline settings (Boase & Wellman, 2006).

Prominent authors like Robert Lane, Richard Easterlin, Daniel Kahneman, Sherry Turkle, Morozov, and Frey contribute to this criticism, with Lane (2000) arguing that economic growth and technological progress may reduce happiness by eroding sources of human satisfaction. Easterlin (2017) formulates the Easterlin paradox, challenging the assumption that increasing income necessarily leads to higher happiness. Kahneman (2011) introduces a model of human cognition, distinguishing between two aspects of happiness and exploring the divergence between the experiencing self and the remembering self. Turkle (2011) examines the impact of digital technologies on human relationships, emphasizing both connection and isolation. Morozov (2013) criticizes techno-utopianism and solutionism, exposing hidden costs and risks. Frey (2019) analyzes the effects of technology, especially automation and artificial intelligence, on work and employment, predicting winners and losers. The criticism extends to the impact of the Internet on social relationships, with initial concerns about its negative effects countered by subsequent research presenting a nuanced picture (Kraut et al., 1998, 2001). While some argue that the Internet isolates people from the real world, leading to increased depression and loneliness (Surowiecki, 2005), others highlight its positive effects on communication, social involvement, and well-being, especially for extroverts and those with more social support.

The negative effects of technology on happiness are further substantiated by extensive research, combining both qualitative and quantitative data. Social media use, excessive smartphone use, and digital addiction are associated with increased feelings of social isolation, loneliness, and heightened stress levels (Primack et al., 2017; Turkle, 2015; Elhai et al., 2019). Sleep disturbances due to extended screen time, challenges in work-life balance, and information overload contribute to the multifaceted detrimental effects of technology on happiness (Dar et al., 2024). Moreover, the rapid pace of technological change creates a sense of dissatisfaction by constantly presenting new and advanced products, affecting well-being negatively (Surowiecki, 2005). Concerns about artificial intelligence and the technological displacement of labor raise questions about benefit distribution and their impact on individual happiness (Mercader, 2017). The inevitable feeling of obsolescence for modern consumers adds to the challenges presented by technological advancements

IV. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN WELL-BEING

The impact of social media and digital communication on well-being is a nuanced interplay of various factors, encompassing both positive and negative dimensions. On the positive side, social media platforms serve as powerful tools for fostering social connections, allowing individuals to engage with friends, family, and communities. Features like likes, comments, and stories enhance real-time interaction, providing a sense of immediacy and connectedness. In times of hardship, these platforms become conduits for information and emotional support, cultivating a virtual sense of community and shared experiences (Kross et al., 2013; Verduyn et al., 2017).However, the dark side of social media reveals itself through phenomena such as social comparison, where individuals may perceive their lives as inferior when comparing them to others. Features like filters and curated content contribute to an idealized portrayal of reality, potentially fostering feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, especially among younger users (Fardouly et al., 2015; Perloff, 2014). Cyberbullying poses a tangible risk to mental health, highlighting the importance of recognizing and addressing online harassment (Kowalski et al., 2014). Research findings shed light on the intricate relationship between well-being and social media use. For instance, a report by the Pew Research Center in 2021 highlighted that over 70% of adults in the United States use social media, with the majority logging in daily. Studies, such as those by Primack et al., (2017) and Twenge & Campbell (2018), underline the nuanced impact of engagement levels on Instagram, associated with heightened anxiety and depression, particularly among younger users.

Individual and contextual factors fu rther shape the impact of social media on well-being. Personality traits, mood, motivation, and cultural influences all play pivotal roles in determining how individuals perceive and are affected by their online interactions (Andreassen et al., 2017; Verduyn et al., 2017). Emerging trends and challenges in social media use, such as the spread of fake news, concerns about privacy, and the importance of digital literacy, add layers of complexity to the ongoing discourse.To navigate the complexities of social media use, establishing healthy habits and boundaries is paramount. Tips for a positive online experience include limiting screen time, diversifying sources, seeking professional help when needed, and being mindful of the emotions stirred by online interactions (Primack et al., 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). By fostering a conscious and balanced approach to social media, individuals can harness the benefits while mitigating potential risks, ultimately promoting their mental well-being in the digital age. This dynamic

landscape invites further exploration and research into the evolving role of social media in shaping our well-being.

V. THE CHALLENGES OF TECHNO STRESS AND HOW TO COPE WITH IT

The rapid integration of technology into various facets of daily life has given rise to a unique phenomenon known as techno stress, a term encapsulating the stress and negative impact on well-being resulting from the use of digital devices and technologies. Research studies contribute valuable insights into the factors contributing to techno stress and its implications for individual well-being. One key aspect highlighted by Tarafdar et al., (2007), is the link between technology use and increased work-related stress. According to a survey conducted by the American Psychological Association, approximately 65% of Americans cited work as a significant source of stress, with technology-related factors contributing to the feeling of being always connected to the workplace. The constant connectivity facilitated by smartphones and email, for instance, can blur the boundaries between work and personal life, leading to heightened stress levels as individuals grapple with the challenge of disconnecting and unwinding. Another critical dimension of techno stress explored in the literature is the phenomenon of information overload. A meta-analysis by Eppler and Mengis (2004) found that the vast amount of data available through digital channels negatively affects cognitive functioning and increases stress levels. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, around 73% of adults feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information available online, leading to increased stress and anxiety. The constant influx of notifications, emails, and updates may overwhelm individuals, impacting their ability to focus and resulting in heightened stress. Digital communication challenges represent yet another facet of techno stress, as highlighted by research conducted by Ragu-Nathan et al., (2008). The expectation for rapid response and constant availability in a digitally connected world can contribute to feelings of pressure and stress. The findings mentioned about employees experiencing higher levels of stress and burnout due to work-related messages outside regular working hours can be attributed to the study conducted by (Derks et al., 2016). The study focused on the impact of off-job demands, including digital communication, on employee well-being and stress levels. Moreover, studies, such as the research conducted by Ayyagari et al., (2011), emphasize the role of organizational culture in contributing to techno stress. Factors such as an organization's expectations regarding technology use, policies around remote work, and the overall technological environment can significantly impact employees' stress levels. In conclusion, research studies on techno stress provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges posed by the pervasive use of technology in contemporary society. From increased work-related stress and information overload to the challenges of digital communication and organizational culture, these studies underscore the multifaceted nature of techno stress and its potential impact on individual well-being. Recognizing these challenges is a crucial step in developing strategies and interventions to manage techno stress and foster a healthier relationship with technology in the digital age.

VI. THE POTENTIAL OF TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH

The intersection of technology and mental health has catalyzed the development of innovative solutions aimed at improving the accessibility, affordability, and effectiveness of mental health care. Extensive research studies and clinical trials have illuminated the potential benefits of these technological interventions, spanning from mobile applications to virtual therapy platforms. Mobile mental health applications have been a focal point of investigation, with research, including the meta-analysis by Firth et al., (2017), demonstrating their efficacy in significantly reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety. These applications, equipped with evidence-based therapeutic techniques and self-help resources, empower users to actively manage their mental well-being through convenient and accessible support. Virtual therapy platforms, explored in research by Luxton et al., (2014), offer online counseling and mental health services, proving to be as effective as in-person therapy for certain conditions. This modality provides a crucial alternative for individuals facing geographical, logistical, or stigmatization challenges in seeking traditional mental health services. Wearable technology, including smart watches and fitness trackers, has been investigated for continuous monitoring of mental health indicators (Saeb et al., 2015). These devices offer insights into physiological and behavioral patterns associated with mental health conditions, facilitating early detection and personalized interventions. Digital therapeutics by Roepke et al., (2015), present evidence-based therapeutic interventions delivered through digital platforms, addressing specific mental health challenges and offering structured and scalable approaches that complement traditional treatment methods. Telepsychiatry and telecounseling services, examined in research by Hilty et al. (2013), emerge as valuable tools for expanding access to mental health care, particularly across diverse populations. These remote mental health consultations effectively reduce geographical barriers, extending the reach of mental health services. As technology continues to advance, the landscape of technological solutions for mental health is expected to evolve. While these innovations hold promise, ongoing research is imperative to assess their long-term effectiveness, address ethical considerations, and ensure that they complement rather than replace traditional mental health care. The integration of technological solutions into mental health interventions represents a dynamic and promising avenue for enhancing the accessibility and effectiveness of mental health care on a global scale.

VII. THE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL DETOX

In response to concerns about the potential negative effects of excessive technology use, the concept of "digital detox" has gained traction, prompting research studies and surveys to explore the impact of intentional breaks from digital devices and the overarching digital environment on individuals' well-being. Research studies, such as the one conducted by Wilmer et al. (2017), have delved into the effects of digital detox interventions on mental health outcomes. The findings suggest that taking breaks from digital screens can lead to improvements in sleep quality, reduced feelings of anxiety, and increased overall well-being. These detox initiatives often involve periods of reduced screen time, engagement in offline activities, and mindfulness practices. Numerous surveys have been conducted to assess the prevalence of digital dependency and its impact on individuals' lives. Surveys from organizations such as the American Psychiatric Association inquire about screen time patterns, digital habits, and self-reported feelings of stress or dissatisfaction related to technology use, providing valuable insights into perceived impacts on well-being. In the

organizational context, workplace digital detox programs, explored in a study by Miksch and Schulz (2018), have gained attention in research studies. These initiatives have demonstrated potential benefits, including improved focus, reduced burnout, and enhanced job satisfaction. Surveys within organizations have been instrumental in gauging employees' experiences and attitudes toward these interventions. Surveys conducted among parents have investigated their perspectives on implementing digital detox measures for children. Research by Radesky et al. (2016) found that parents often express concerns about the impact of excessive screen time on their children's well-being. Surveys have been instrumental in understanding parental attitudes, practices, and challenges in managing children's digital use. Studies examining the impact of social media detox on psychological well-being have employed surveys to gather insights from participants. Research by Hunt et al. (2018) explored the effects of limiting social media use on well-being, finding that participants reported reduced feelings of depression and loneliness. Surveys provided a valuable tool for capturing subjective experiences and perceptions of the social media detox process. As digital detox strategies continue to evolve, the use of surveys and research studies becomes instrumental in understanding the nuanced effects of these interventions on individual and collective well-being. While digital detox initiatives may offer respite from the demands of the digital age, ongoing research is crucial to explore the long-term implications, effectiveness, and optimal strategies for incorporating these practices into individuals' lifestyles for improved well-being

VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research chapter provides a thorough examination of the intricate relationship between technology and happiness, synthesizing insights from multidisciplinary research and empirical evidence. The positive impact of technology on individual and collective well-being spans diverse dimensions, with social connectivity in the Digital Age playing a pivotal role. Digital platforms facilitate meaningful connections, expand social networks, and enable the maintenance of relationships across geographical distances. While challenges such as misunderstandings and techno stress are acknowledged, ongoing research offers valuable insights into effectively navigating these complexities. Technological solutions for mental health, ranging from innovative mobile applications to virtual therapy present promising avenues for accessible and personalized support. The exploration of the concept of digital detox, backed by interventions and survey findings, underscores the significance of intentional breaks from technology in enhancing mental health. The synthesis of research findings emphasizes the transformative and positive role of technology in shaping a happier and more connected society within the digital landscape. As technology continues its dynamic evolution, ongoing research remains crucial for understanding nuanced effects, addressing emerging challenges, and optimizing contributions to human happiness and well-being. This comprehensive exploration not only serves as a foundation for informed discussions but also guides future research directions and informs the development of strategies aimed at harnessing technology's positive potential for enhancing happiness in contemporary society.

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