

THE SOCIAL WORLD IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Technology and the Transformation of Social Life

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Abstract

The Social World in the Digital Age: Technology and the Transformation of Social Life examines how the rise of the internet and smartphone technology has transformed the ways people communicate, form relationships, navigate daily life, and participate in society. The project uses life before the internet as a point of comparison for understanding the social changes brought about by constant digital connectivity. Through archival research, interviews, and engagement with scholarship on technology and society, the research considers both what digital technology has made possible and what forms of social interaction may have been diminished or displaced.

Dumb Phones? Are phones too smart?



“Let the Phones Be Smart, Let us Be Wise”-Cornel West

What does it mean for a phone to be smart? Are modern technologies examples of unnecessary surveillance and technological overreach, or are they reasonable adaptations to a world that increasingly operates through digital infrastructure?

To opt out is not simply to delete Instagram; it is to potentially sacrifice convenience, accessibility, employment, and participation in everyday institutions. The smartphone has become less of a luxury and more of a prerequisite.

→ LOOKING AHEAD

[WHAT'S NEXT]

The Strother School of Radical Attention, Reading Rhythms, and The Offline Club show that reclaiming attention means rebuilding the social practices technology has displaced — not just deleting an app.

“Attention activism” is the practice these groups have in common — treating focus as something worth defending.

Guiding question: What everyday experiences are worth preserving before they disappear?

BY THE NUMBERS

[DATA SNAPSHOT]

186

average number of times Americans check their phone every day in 2026

205

Average number of times Americans check their phone every day in 2025

Reviews.org, 2025

43%

Of Americans express feelings of having higher-than-expected screen time, indicating a collective concern about digital dependency

ABA Therapy, 2025

8h 39m

Average screentime of teens ages 13 to 18 years from 2015 to 2021

American Academy of Pediatrics. 2026

41%

Of teens reported feelings of anxiety when without their smartphones.

ABA Therapy, 2025

Research Question

“What have we gained — and lost — as smartphones and the internet became the primary infrastructure through which we communicate, navigate, remember, and participate in everyday life?”



Reflection Questions

Do you remember the first website you ever visited?

Do photographs mean something different now that we can take thousands of them?

How did you stay in touch with friends before email, texting, or social media?

Have relationships become stronger or weaker because of technology?

Did people trust information more or less before the Internet?

What do you miss most about entertainment before the internet?

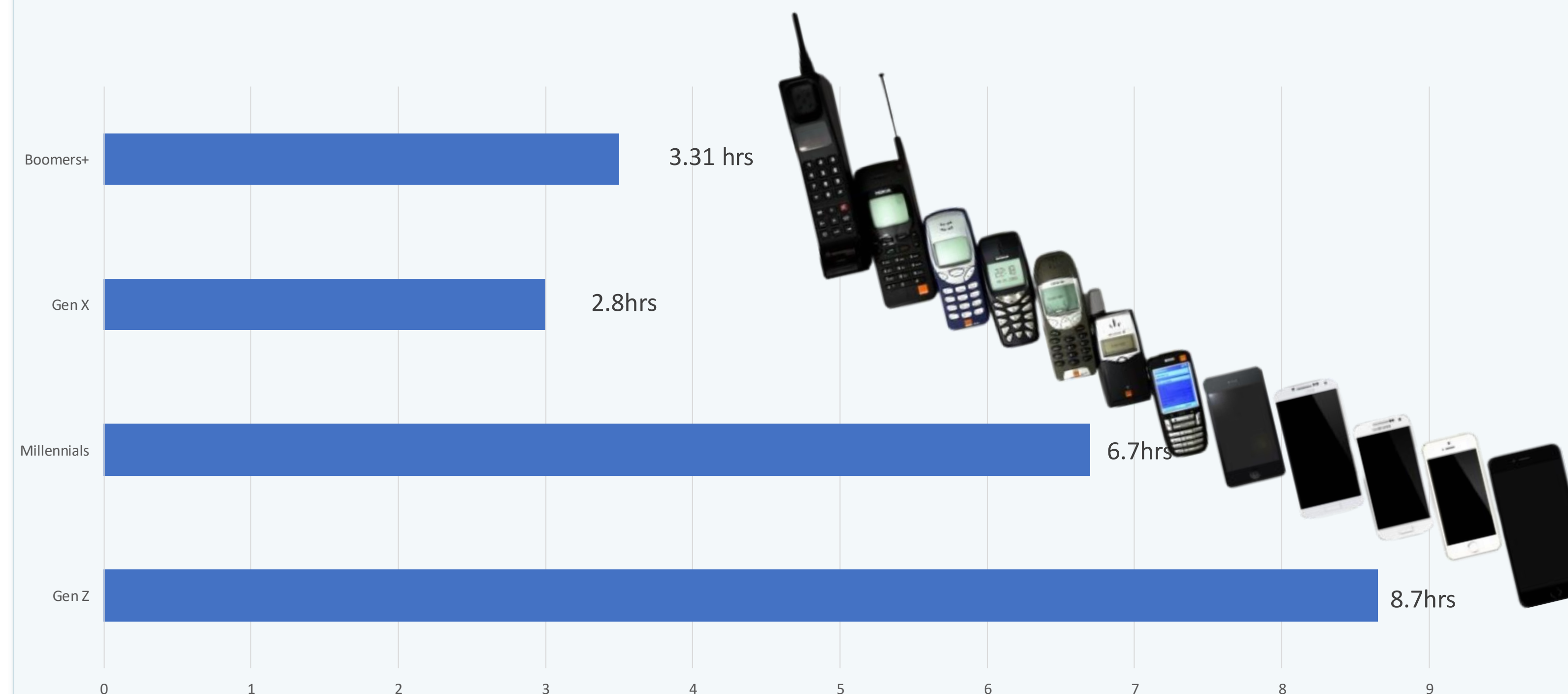
Do you think social media has made people more connected or more isolated?

Do you think life moved at a different pace before smartphones?



The Attention Economy

SCREEN TIME BY GENERATION



ABA Therapy, Average Screen Time Statistics, 2025 Image Credit: Wikipedia