

My Short Fifteen Years

One thousand words. One thousand words is all I have to write on the topic of 'the planet'. Sitting at my desk in a dimly lit room with only the light of my computer screen on my face, I think about my short fifteen years on this earth and wonder if my little knowledge of the world around me will amount to anything in this piece. What first comes to mind is the environment and climate change, the tragedies of forest fires and deforestation, but my lack of first-hand experience makes me ill-equipped to write about either event. The harsh light of my computer screen glares back at me as I think. I crave something different. Something I know. The planet the way I see it. My planet.

On my planet, It is common knowledge that had the temperature been a few degrees too high or low, or if the earth were a few inches closer or further from the sun, the human race may not have emerged. We grew as a parasite does, sapping nutrients from and polluting the earth with inventions that enabled laziness and commercialism to be the driving force behind our actions. However, without human ingenuity, we would not have been able to achieve amazing feats like exploring space and curing disease. Whilst I appreciate the magnitude of these achievements and have benefited from them, there can be a price to pay for this ingenuity.

On my planet, babies are born vulnerable and innocent. They are trusting individuals who have no clear idea of the world they will have to navigate for the rest of their lives. They live their lives as empty vessels with their eyes fixated on screens, as mine are now. Play is now competing with youtube, subway surfers and candy crush, encouraging an entire generation to lock itself in the impenetrable shackles of technology.

On my planet, young children are exposed to the volatile nature of the internet and the media. Their young brains seem to be the most receptive to the content they are presented with, lapping it up like cats do milk. The repercussions of being exposed to such an unrestrained environment during your formative years are endless - People my age are now so dependent on social media that it consumes their lives, and I know I cannot escape from it. Noone can now. My whole generation has become addicted to validation and has developed a dependence on technology that social media and the internet has caused. Exposure to such an environment at such a young age is only the start of a bigger pandemic of mindless online consumption and over-reliance on technology in younger generations, thanks to the increased development of technology in such a short period of time.

And I know this problem will only grow.

The people I live around have grown up with little knowledge of how easy it is to influence their thinking. Companies and influencers use this to their advantage, prompting an increase in consumerism and allowing us to continue living our lives ignorant of how effortless it is to exploit our defenceless brains into buying the latest product or watching the latest video, or encouraging us to take a particular point of view, all for their monetary or personal gain, washing away individuality and uniqueness, which is only heightened with the use of social media.

And from my experience, I have realised that there is a fine line between having influence and having control. Social media encourages more dogmatic views in its consumers in order to rope in new victims of false news and celebrity stories, and becomes a platform for conflict and bullying. Views are expressed with the intent to polarise the views of others, and arguments are started with no clear reason as to why. Social media encourages us to follow a tribe without question, and can stifle people from thinking for themselves, thus limiting our ability for original thought.

In my short fifteen years, I have developed a fairly cynical view of my planet. In my short fifteen years, I have been exposed to endless conditioning from the internet and social media which has influenced my views and opinions, sapping me, as well as everyone around me of imagination and originality as the world slowly burns at our feet. As a teenager, I am the most impressionable I have ever been. The internet preys on us because we are the most vulnerable. We fear being different, and we fear the unknown. After growing up on a planet so focused on consumerism and petty beauty standards, all we can resort to for comfort is the shelter of the internet and social media - all that we know, but what causes our problems. You are immediately sorted into a category by algorithms, fed certain information because of your likes and dislikes, and are targeted by people you don't know, your opinions shattered and your personality drained, as you become the person the internet has conditioned you to be. In my short fifteen years, I have been exposed to consumerist ideals and manipulation by social media, and that has become my planet. My world. Everything my mind focuses on. And now, sitting at my desk in a dimly lit room, with only the light of my computer screen on my face, I finally understand the effect it has had on myself and my generation. Whilst I reflect on the global environmental crisis, I am struck that the digital crisis I have described will make it harder for my generation to solve it, because, ironically, the same human ingenuity that has developed the digital world has ended up stifling ingenuity and original thought.

I turn off my glaring computer screen and revel in the darkness.

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