America’s Addiction to Technology

How long has it been since you have mailed a letter, an actual letter, not an email or quick text message, but an actual hand written, stamped letter that was mailed through the postal service? Americans have drastically changed the way they view the news, read books, find locations, and even how they spend time with friends or family. How do these differences affect us? What has changed in our society due to technology? Would our ancestors really see technology as advancement or something that hinders our thoughts and consumes us? If used correctly, then we could be advancing, but when overused, technology becomes…an addiction.

Sunday papers use to be the main source of news. The paper was delivered straight to your mailbox/driveway; all you had to do was walk outside to collect it. But, why walk all the way outside when you could have the news at your fingertips? By using any mobile device or computer, you could visit one of the many news sites on the web. You could read not only local news, but world news as well. There are even text messages alerts that are sent when “breaking” news happens or is being reported. This advancement in technology is a great way for Americans to keep up with news in their area, but the old fashion newspaper is taking a major hit. As reported by Paul Grabowicz. “A steady decline in print circulation and a precipitous drop in advertising revenue in 2008 and 2009, especially classified advertising, have taken their toll on newspapers and newspaper chains. Some have been forced out of business, while others have had to file bankruptcy” (Grabowicz). The simplicity of online news may make life easier, but the
sources can be unreliable. When a reporter would write an article in the newspaper, they were required to find reliable sources. On the web, however, the “reporter” is not always held accountable for the “news” they report on. It seems that America’s addiction to technology outweighs their emphasis on honest reporting.

The first book published in America was in 1640 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Since then, the way Americans read their literature has taken a big turn. Due to the invention of eReaders, the sales of hardback, print books have drastically declined. More and more Americans are opting to buy books on their devices instead of purchasing the printed book. This could be due to the cost and convenience of the eBook versus the printed book. An eBook can be purchased for $1.99 and downloaded immediately to the device. For a printed book, you would have to drive to the book store and make the purchase of $15.99 or more. Valerie Peterson makes a compelling argument for the shift to eReaders, “Like their print book counterparts, eBook readers are highly portable. One clear advantage of the eBook reader over its print progenitors is that the device can contain literally hundreds of books on a single device” (Peterson). It would be much easier to carry one device instead of hundreds of books at one time. Some Americans could have second thoughts when purchasing eReaders because of the feel of the printed book itself. Many eReaders are made lightweight for comfort, but sometimes all a person wants to do is to feel the heaviness of the printed book, have the smell of an old book, and to be able to fold the paper pages back to serve as a bookmark. eReaders have made a giant leap into mainstream entertainment, but printed books will always hold a place in some American’s hearts.

How did Americans get from place to place before the technology boom? Most drivers kept an atlas in the glove compartment. The atlas, for many, has now been replaced with GPS devices. A GPS is a digital map that works off satellites in order to give real time directions,
which is much different than opening an atlas, finding a map, and trying to follow the little road images in order to arrive at a location. GPS allows the driver to remain focused on the road by announcing turns ahead of time and is much safer for drivers who do not have to take their eyes off the road in order to check the paper map. It is almost effortless to key a location into the GPS and see an estimated arrival time compared to the difficult process of mapping out the directions on a paper map and calculating the time of the trip. In big cities like Atlanta, with one way and confusing streets, a GPS is a driver’s best friend. According to Barbara Rodriguez with *USA Today*, “In Georgia, where public demand has gone down, officials are printing about 1.6 million maps to cover a two-year period — less than half of what they were printing a decade ago” (Rodriguez). So, just like newspapers, the printing of paper maps have decreased compared to previous years. A majority of Americans either own a GPS or have bought a car that contains a GPS. Not having to argue with your spouse over which turn to make is also a great selling point for the GPS. The technology involved in the making of GPS has made travel much more enjoyable. Men may never have to stop and ask for directions again….

Social media popularity has grown over the past couple of years within America. “An estimated 56% of Americans have a profile on a social networking site” (Baer). This means the main way of communicating is through posts on each other’s profile, tweets, or by being tagged in someone’s status update. Birthdays, holidays, and family affairs were treated much different before social networking. When it was someone’s birthday, a nice card or phone call would be a way to celebrate that person’s special day. Now with Facebook, a quick “Happy Birthday!” post on the birthday person’s profile is embraced. Facebook has made it even easier by actually telling the user when one of their “friends” is having a birthday. Does that change the actual meaning of the term? Some say no, while others think it has made the term seem disinterested.
Holidays have also changed since more Americans are switching to their social media sites to celebrate or send well wishes. Instead of getting the family Christmas photo card in the mail, it is posted as the person’s profile picture for everyone to see at once. This straightforward approach to posting picture cards could have some family members upset over not receiving a card since they are not members on the site. While the uncomplicated post may seem like a great idea, it is probably in the best interest to mail those cards as well. Families are even hashing out their problems online instead of in the privacies of their own homes. Some may not want the world reading about the skeletons in the family closet. While posting or tweeting may seem faster than calling or driving to see a family member, it could cause a division in the family unit. A key point to remember when dealing with social networks is if you would not say it in front of grandma, it is probably best that you do not post it.

Baby boomers are a large group that is now embracing the advancements in technology. Steve Coley, who was born in 1956, is part of the baby boomer era. When asking Steve what he thought of how technology affects everyone, he stated, “I think everyone is affected different with the use of technology. I would rather keep my flip phone while my 87 year old mom now has an iPhone!” (Coley). When asked how he thought society has changed since the many advances in technical gadgets, he said, “Our society is one of those things that will always change over time. I guess it is better to move forward than to go backwards but we shouldn’t forget where we came from. That is a mistake I believe we all make daily” (Coley). He continued to elaborate by saying, “If we forget where we came from, everyone is likely to just get lazy. We need the inventors of the world. We need the people that will go out and test the water. We need people to know that it is ok to fail and we need those people to decide not to wait around for someone else to try. They just need to remember that each of those failures is a
lesson. And those lessons are what continue to move this society forward” (Coley). After being asked if he thought our ancestors would see all the new technology as advancement or a something that consumes us, he said, “I think they would see it as accomplishments to have an electric car or healing medicine, but to see how many people just stay inside all day playing on their computers or phones, while they ignore their family and friends…I think our ancestors would be ashamed of that” (Coley). This baby boomer has made some great statements about not only the differences in technology, but in the way some people can conform while others are more apprehensive. Technology isn’t all bad, but there is a price to pay when ignoring family and friends.

In closing, the way Americans now complete tasks are leaps and bounds above the methods of the past. The technological advancement of online news, eReaders, GPS, and social networks has brought Americans into the twenty first century. But, with those advancements also comes the lack of honest reporting, not having the feel of an old book, never fighting that atlas back into the glove compartment (which may not be so bad after all), and missing out on those personal experiences with family and friends. Letting technology take over our lives isn’t the way of the future. It is an addiction that we need to break free from. Put down the phone, turn off the computer, and go outside. Watch kids play, and hug loved ones because time doesn’t stand still and the world will continue to move forward. After seeing what can be lost when always relying on technology, will it still be that easy to click the send button on that next email?

Works Cited
Baer, Jay. “New Statistics in American Social Networking”

www.convinceandconvert.com, n.a. 2014. Online
Coley, Steve. Email Interview. 10 April 2014.

Grabowicz, Paul. “The Transition to Digital News Reporting”

www.journalism.berkeley.edu. n.a. 2014.


www.publishing.about.com. n.a. 2010. Online

Rodriguez, Barbara. “Amid GPS Boom”