

30 MINUTES

88 videos

Less

15 SECONDS

More

34%

Skipped at the first 3 seconds

Skipped

Finished

36%

Finished the whole video

30%

Finished watching with 2X speed

Waking up every day, the first thing I do is reach for my phone, open one of the social media apps, and start scrolling through my For You page until I realize I have something else to do. This led me to wonder about the impact of this habit on my attention span, as I find it increasingly difficult to focus on tasks. When I read a book, my mind tends to drift, and I feel my attention span shortening.

One of the many social media apps I use is called Little Red Book. It's essentially an app similar to TikTok, where you can scroll endlessly. There's a subconscious impulse to continue scrolling; if you come across a video you don't like, you simply swipe up with your finger to reveal new content. If a video doesn't capture my attention within the first three seconds, I get tired of it and scroll down, which is just a simple finger movement. This allows me to glimpse the lives of strangers, cute pets, or funny videos of people messing up, akin to opening mystery boxes—you never know what you'll get with the next scroll, and that unpredictability is exciting. However, it's this very excitement that can lead to self-destruction.

When TikTok first emerged, it was revolutionary, introducing a unique form of entertainment I call the “endless scrolling mechanism,” which locks users into hours of engagement. Initially, I looked down on those who used it, but to my surprise, more social apps began to adopt this method of entertainment. Instagram introduced its Reels, and YouTube added Shorts, making it increasingly difficult for me to resist the allure. My favorite app at that time—a Chinese version of Instagram called Xiao Hong Shu—also adapted to this endless scrolling format. I hated it so much that I made my first post on that app, asking if it was possible to add a setting to disable the endless scrolling feature. Of course, no one listened. While I understand that self-control plays a significant role, it is precisely because I struggle with self-control that I want to help myself escape this cycle.

Xiao Hong Shu not only features endless scrolling but also invented a “2x fast forward” option. By placing my finger on the right side of the screen and holding it there, I can watch a video at double speed, allowing me to get through content in half the time. I often use this feature, especially for videos longer than 15 seconds.

To analyze my usage, I collected data for half an hour by screen recording myself while using Xiao Hong Shu. During this time, I viewed a total of 88 videos, using the 2x fast forward feature for 26 of them. I finished watching 30 videos completely (those watched with the help of the 2x speed feature didn't count towards this total) and skipped 32 videos within the first three seconds of it.

From this data, I realized that when watching longer videos that are interesting enough, I prefer to watch them at 2x speed or skim through the comments while the video plays in the background. I noticed that the videos I finish tend to be around 15 seconds or less; if they exceed

this length, I become impatient and often switch to 2x speed. I also found that I frequently use the 2x speed feature for low-paced, longer videos.

This realization led me to conclude that my attention span has diminished to the point where I can no longer watch longer videos without resorting to the 2x fast forward option or skimming through comments. This issue extends beyond short video platforms like TikTok, Reels, and Xiao Hong Shu; it also affects how I engage with YouTube videos and movies. While watching YouTube, I often skip forward five seconds repeatedly, trying to bypass the less engaging parts. This has become such a habit that I sometimes skip ahead without even thinking. The same applies to films and TV shows; I find myself continuously skipping forward to catch the intense or exciting scenes, often missing crucial plot points in the process. As a film lover, this frustrates me immensely, as I am no longer able to appreciate films as I should.

My attention span also affects my reading habits. I genuinely love reading because it not only expands my knowledge but also enhances my creativity as I visualize the scenes described in the books. I read through countless books in grade school and high school, but now, as a university student, I struggle to stay focused on my readings. My attention span is shortening; my mind drifts elsewhere, making it difficult to concentrate on the text. A shorter attention span also increases my likelihood of multitasking. I often find myself playing YouTube videos while gaming, quickly switching my attention to the video during loading screens. Additionally, I watch movies or shows while engaged in activities that require minimal attention, allowing me to do both simultaneously.

I believe this method of entertainment does not only affect me but also impacts everyone who uses it. As a film lover, I'm particularly concerned about how short-form content has influenced the film industry. An article by Erica Roa in The Poly Post, dated April 30, 2024, states that films are struggling to maintain relevance in a world dominated by short-form content and social media. With average daily screen times on the rise, people increasingly favor quicker entertainment, such as TV shows and social media, over longer films. Despite this trend, some believe that film still offers unmatched emotional depth and storytelling. The shift to streaming has also altered the traditional movie-going experience, and industry layoffs are compounding these challenges. Nevertheless, film continues to hold a special place in cultural storytelling.

I once attended a lesson on filmmaking and editing where the instructor advised us not to have any shot longer than three seconds, as audiences tend to lose interest. To support this point, I conducted my own research and discovered an interview with Dr. Gloria Mark from the American Psychological Association, where she states, "I was very surprised to learn that TV and film shot lengths have decreased over the years. They started out much longer. They now average about four seconds a shot length. That's on average. If you watch MTV music videos, they're much shorter. They're only a couple of seconds. So we've become accustomed to seeing

very fast shot lengths when we look at TV and film. Even commercials have shortened in length. Commercials used to be much longer. Now it's not uncommon to see six-second commercials, even shorter than that." This supports my instructor's claims about the relationship between shorter attention spans and the film industry.

Interestingly, I later found an article from Cornell University by James Dean that presents a different viewpoint: "For example, the norms include shot and scene durations, which have gotten shorter. I claim they've gotten shorter not because our attention spans have grown shorter—a myth—but because our visual processing has become more sophisticated." This claim contradicts both my instructor's and Dr. Mark's perspectives.

As I explore whether shortened attention spans have affected the film industry, particularly concerning Average Shot Length (ASL), I find it challenging to gather additional sources that support either argument. Thus, whether ASL has decreased due to our shorter attention spans or because our visual processing has evolved remains uncertain...

Reflection on using Chat Gpt to help this assignment:

For faster and easier searching, I asked ChatGPT to find a source discussing the film industry's average shot length and its connection to shortened attention spans. It provided me with a link to a podcast from the American Psychological Association featuring Dr. Mark. While there were transcripts available, they were quite lengthy, so I used ChatGPT to pinpoint the specific section that addressed my topic, and it directed me to the exact paragraph.

Additionally, I utilized ChatGPT to check the grammar of my essay after I had completed it. I submitted my essay and requested it to correct the grammar without altering any other content.