

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Ethical Clearance Reference Number:HR-24/25-46677



YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of project

Effects of Technology on Cognitive Ability in Youth

Invitation Paragraph

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information, ask me.

What is the purpose of the project?

This project aims to understand the effect of technology on the cognitive ability of young people. Digital technologies have become part of daily life, and this might be shaping how young people think. However, scientists are still unsure whether technology is good or bad for children's brains because the evidence is mixed and comes from small studies.

In this project, we want to gather information from a large and diverse group of children, to study the benefits and harms of technology. We will study how technology affects cognition (thinking abilities such as attention span, memory, language), wellbeing, and social engagement. By taking part, you can help produce evidence on how digital technologies *really* affect young people, which is important to children, parents, and people in schools and governments making decisions about technology.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You are being invited to take part because you requested an invitation, or because you or your parent/guardian has previously took part in the REACT study, or the Great British Intelligence study, and agreed to be contacted about future studies.

What will happen if I take part?

If you choose to take part in the project and **you were 12, 13, or 14 years old at your last birthday**, your parent/guardian will complete a 25-minute survey about you and your use of technology. Then, you will be asked to answer a short survey (10 minutes) about yourself, then complete a set of brain games probing your attention, memory and problem solving ability (up to 20 minutes). Your parent/guardian has to consent for you to take part, but you do not have to if you do not want to.

The study is entirely online. You can use any internet-connected device of your choice, but we recommend you use a laptop or a desktop computer in a quiet environment free of distractions.

This is a follow-up study, and you and your parent/guardian will be invited to take part over time. You will be invited to take part when you start, 6 months later, 12 months later, then once a year after this. Taking part will be similar each time. You don't have to take part every time. You may also be invited to participate in other parts of the study during this time.

The survey has questions about your health, experiences, habits, behaviours, interactions with others, behaviour at school, and engagement with technology, including social and communication apps and sites, AI (artificial intelligence), and unpleasant experiences like cyberbullying. Questions are multiple choice with options like "Never, Sometimes, Often, Always, I don't know".

These are the type of questions you will be asked:

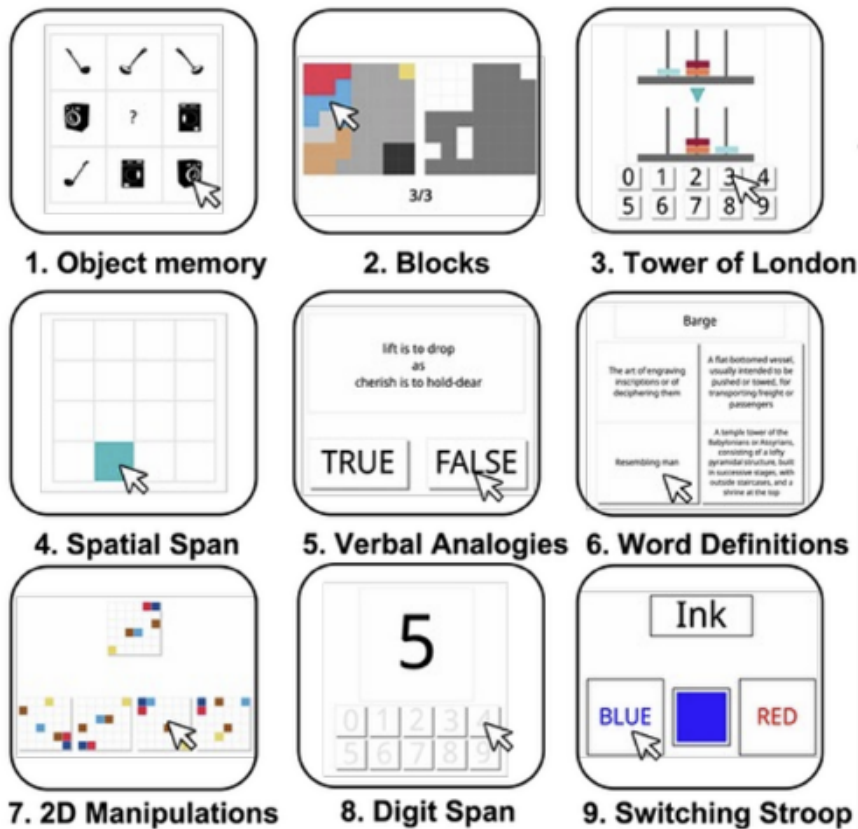
'At what age did you get your first smartphone?' Option: 0-18 age

'Have you ever experienced someone being mean or hurtful to you online?'
Options: Yes, No

'How often do you use artificial intelligence tools, like chatbots or apps, to help with schoolwork or other tasks?' Options: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always

Your answers and your brain games results will not be shared with your parents, teachers or health professionals. There are no consequences to anything you choose to share as part of your participation. The survey is for research only, and it is not possible to make diagnoses of educational or medical conditions from responses. Signposting information is provided if you are concerned about any of the issues raised in the study.

Here are examples of the different kinds of brain games in the cognitive test. In the study, you will be given instructions before each test.



Do I have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary. You should only take part if you want to. Choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Your parents have to consent for you to take part, but you do not have to if you do not want to. Once you have read the information sheet, please contact us if you have any questions that will help you decide about taking part. If you decide to take part, we will ask you to consent to the terms on the welcome page. You may take a screenshot of this for your records.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

This is an online survey presented alongside a set of brain games. There are no risks associated with taking part besides those associated with spending time on the computer.

The study includes sensitive topics like wellbeing and mental health. If you are worried about any of the issues raised, or distressed by any of the questions, we provide information on where to get support:

"If you are worried about any of the topics in the questionnaire, you can get help. Speak to your parent, an adult you trust, or a professional like a teacher or GP. You can also contact these organisations:

- **Childline:** For advice and support on bullying, abuse, safety, feelings, relationships, school, and other topics. Phone 0800 1111 (free, 24/7) or visit www.childline.org.uk for advice or one-to-one online chat support.

- **internetmatters:** For advice on online safety, including cyberbullying, inappropriate content, and other topics, visit www.internetmatters.org
- **Samaritans:** Phone 116 123 (free, 24/7) for confidential emotional support.
- **Talk to Frank:** Phone 0300 123 6600 or text 82111 for advice on drugs, alcohol, or vaping."

If you want to pause or leave the study, you can do this at any time during the study - see the section, 'What if I change my mind about taking part?'

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We cannot promise that participation would be of a direct benefit for you. However, by taking part, you could help children, parents, schools, and governments understand the effects of mobile phones and other technologies on children.

At the end of the brain games, you will have the option to see some fun, personalised feedback. This will show which type of brain game you did best in, and what this might mean about your strengths. This will show an animal according to which type of test you did best in (e.g., 'Wise Owl', 'Clever Beaver'). It will also give you some statements based on your answers to the personality and technology use questions. The feedback is just for fun, and highlights different strengths that come from the ways everyone is different.

You only get the feedback if you request it. The feedback does not define how you will do in school or other areas of life. The report can't diagnose learning differences or medical conditions, and serves strictly entertainment purposes. If you are concerned about this, speak to a trusted adult such as a parent/guardian, or a professional such as a schoolteacher or GP.

Data handling and confidentiality

Kings College London is the Sponsor of this research and is responsible for looking after your information.

We will need to use information from you for this research project. The research team and authorised administrative staff will use this information to do the research or to check your records to make sure that the research is being done properly.

If you took part in the REACT study, we will use the information you gave in that study in this study. Your information is stored and linked up in the secure computers in Imperial College London, so your information stays private and confidential.

Your data will be processed in compliance with UK data protection laws, including the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Categories of Personal Data	The online survey platform will collect personal information such as demographic information (age, ethnicity, education), and information about disability and health status. Each participant's data will be stored securely. Identifying information such as email address and name will be stored separately to personal and other data, which will be labelled by an identifier
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	code. Access to these codes will be limited to the principal investigator and approved team members. For previous participants in REACT, identifier codes will be used to link to responses you provided as part of your participation in the REACT study, which contain personal data such as age, ethnicity, and health status.
Data Storage	In brief, data will be collected by the survey platform, Cognitron (H2CD Ltd). Following collection, data will be held on secure servers at Imperial College London for processing and linkage to data collected during the REACT study. Imperial College London has regular internal and external audits of their information security controls and working practices and are accredited to the International Standard for Information Security, ISO 27001. During collection, data will be stored on a remote web server (www.cognitron.co.uk), hosted in the EU using Amazon Web Services (specifically, the London-based eu-west-2 datacentre). Names and email addresses, passwords for the study website, and anonymous codes, will be stored separately from personal data, survey data, and test scores, in a database 'key'. The database is encrypted and password protected. The servers are behind a firewall in the secure Amazon cloud computing facility described above. These measures represent a high-level of data security that are the standard for any website that requires users to login and enter potentially sensitive information. Approved study investigators will be the only users who can access data, and they will require two-factor authentication to download datasets. No direct access to the database (MySQL) will be granted to any computer outside the King's College Network or the private network within the Amazon Web Services environment controlled by King's College Investigators. All data will be transferred under encryption using industry-standard HTTPS protocols.
Data Sharing	Fully anonymised data will be shared with members of the lab for the purpose of analysis. So that the maximum information can be obtained from your participation in this study, we may also make deidentified data available to other researchers in the UK and overseas. Researchers who wish to access the data from this study and/or to contact participants about future research will have to apply for approval from study investigators. Where this information contains your personal data, it will be transferred in accordance with data protection legislation. For the purposes referred to in this participant information sheet and relying on the bases for processing as set out above, your personal data may be shared with certain third parties: Other Imperial College London employees, agents, contractors, and service providers (for example, suppliers of printing and mailing services, or suppliers who help us carry out any of the activities described above). Third-party service providers are required to enter into data processing agreements with Imperial College London, who will only permit them to process your personal data for specified purposes and in accordance with the policies of the REACT study and they are required to delete the data when no longer needed to provide the service.
Data Retention	Once we have finished the study, we will keep some of the data so we can check the results. Research data will be retained for a period of 20 years.
Anonymity in Research Outputs	Participants will be fully anonymous in research outputs such as reports.
Archiving/Future Use	Upon study completion, there will be an open-access anonymised data release (for example alongside the research paper, or in a data repository).

Further information on how King's processes research data can be found at:

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/support/research-ethics/kings-college-london-statement-on-use-of-personal-data-in-research>

Please contact the research team if you require further information on data processing or a printed version of the webpage link above.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

You are free to stop or leave at any point in the study up until 1st September 2029. You don't have to give a reason. Withdrawing from the project will not affect you in any way.

If you choose to withdraw from the project we will not keep the information you provided. After 1st September 2029, the study will be completed, so withdrawing your data will not be possible as it will be anonymised and archived.

How is the project being funded?

This project is being funded by a grant awarded by the Huo Family Foundation to investigate the effects of technology use on young people's cognitive ability.

What will happen to the results of the project?

The results of the project will be summarised in open-source research papers and press releases. The anonymised data will be published in an open-source repository once the study is completed.

Who should I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or require more information about this project, please contact me using the following contact details: maria.balaet@kcl.ac.uk

What if I have further questions, or if something goes wrong?

If this project has harmed you in any way, or if you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the project you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information:

The Chair, Health Faculties Research Ethics Subcommittee, rec@kcl.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.