

Goldfish have longer attention spans than Americans, and the publishing industry knows it

By [Kai Ryssdal](#)

February 11, 2014 | 6:07 PM

<https://www.marketplace.org/2014/02/11/business/goldfish-have-longer-attention-spans-americans-and-publishing-industry-knows-it>



A goldfish for sale swims in an aquarium at a market in Kuwait City. - Yasser al-Zayyat
On Friday, Netflix will unveil its second season of House of Cards, and fans are chomping at the bit.

Can you say binge watching, anyone?

But it turns out it's not just TV we want to binge on.

Books, too.

The [New York Times published an article](#) that described something called "series publishing." It's not an entirely new concept, but it's a big pivot away from the one-title-per-year model most of the industry has been abiding by for decades.

Publishers are now rolling out shorter books faster and faster, and **Harvard Business School historian Nancy Koehn says it's largely because we're getting less attentive and more anxious:**

"The average American attention span in 2013 was about 8 seconds. The average attention span in 2000 was 12 seconds. And then get this kicker - the average attention of a goldfish is 9 seconds."



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Nancy F. Koehn

[Send a message](#)

*Name:

Morton Ann Gernsbacher, PhD

*Email:

magernsb@wisc.edu

Subject

contact and question

Comments:

attention span has dropped precipitously and is now shorter than that of a goldfish's.

The earliest place I can find the claim is in a Marketplace episode (from February 11, 2014
<https://www.marketplace.org/2014/02/11/business/goldfish-have-longer-attention-spans-americans-and-publishing-industry-knows-it>)

"Publishers are now rolling out shorter books faster and faster, and Harvard Business School historian Nancy [Koehn](#) says it's largely because we're getting less attentive and more anxious:

'The average American attention span in 2013 was about 8 seconds. The average attention span in 2000 was 12 seconds. And then get this kicker - the average attention of a goldfish is 9 seconds.'

I was hoping you could point me to where you might have heard this claim prior to the Marketplace episode.

Canadians now have shorter attention span than goldfish thanks to portable devices: Microsoft study

May 12, 2015

<http://nationalpost.com/news/canada/canadians-now-have-shorter-attention-span-than-goldfish-thanks-to-portable-devices-microsoft-study>

OTTAWA — People now have shorter attention spans than goldfish — and our always-on portable devices may be to blame, a new study suggests.

The study from Microsoft Corp. draws on surveys of more than 2,000 Canadians who played games online in order to determine the impact that pocket-sized devices and the increased availability of digital media and information are having on everyday life. Researchers also used electroencephalograms (EEGs) to monitor 112 people.

The study found that, thanks to our desire to always be connected, people can multi-task like never before. But our attention spans have fallen from an average of 12 seconds in 2000 to just eight seconds today.

A goldfish is believed to have a nine-second attention span on average, the study says.

[NB: There was no link to any study or any data provided.]

We Finally Did It! Canadians Now Have Shorter Attention Spans Than Goldfish

<https://techvibes.com/2015/05/13/canadians-attention-spans-goldfish-2015-05-13>

[Knowlton Thomas](#)

May 13, 2015

Everyone is by now aware of the real reason for the invention of the smartphone: to slowly erode human attention spans until we stand inferior to the lowly goldfish.

Rejoice! According to a new study from Microsoft, Canadians' attention span has fallen from 12 seconds in 2000—already miserable—to a mere eight seconds today (downright pathetic!). Goldfish everywhere are mocking us until, nine seconds later, they forget the subject of their mockery.

[NB: There was no link to any study or any data provided.]

Things like social media, mobile devices, and utter stupidity are to blame for our reduced focus, the study says (the stupidity is implied). In particular, Canadians who lead “more digital lifestyles”—AKA the multi-screen-toting, early-adopting, media-consuming, social media whackos—have seen the sharpest decline in attention.

Moreover, Microsoft says we are displaying addiction-like behaviours. No kidding. The study says 77% of young people reach for their phone by default when bored; more than half check their phone at least every half hour; and almost everyone uses portable devices while “watching” television.

This is all pretty worrying to me, and I for one believe we must—wait, what was I talking about? Hey, look, a new tweet!



Our attention span is now less than that of a goldfish, Microsoft study finds

Christopher Hooton

13 May 2015

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/our-attention-span-is-now-less-than-that-of-a-goldfish-microsoft-study-finds-10247553.html>



Humans have become so obsessed with [portable devices](#) and overwhelmed by content that we now have attention spans shorter than that of the previously jokingly juxtaposed goldfish.

Microsoft surveyed 2,000 people and used electroencephalograms (EEGs) to monitor the brain activity of another 112 in the study, which sought to determine the impact that pocket-sized devices and the increased availability of digital media and [information](#) have had on our daily lives.

Among the good news in the 54-page report is that our ability to multi-task has drastically improved in the information age, but unfortunately attention spans have fallen.

In 2000 the average attention span was 12 seconds, but this has now fallen to just eight. The goldfish is believed to be able to maintain a solid nine.

[NB: There was NO link to any study or any data provided.]

You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span Than a Goldfish

By [Kevin McSpadden](#)

May 14, 2015

The average attention span for the notoriously ill-focused goldfish is nine seconds, but according to a [new study](#) from Microsoft Corp., people now generally lose concentration after eight seconds, highlighting the affects of an increasingly digitalized lifestyle on the brain.

[NB: Link to “new study” links to <http://advertising.microsoft.com/en/cl/31966/how-does-digital-affect-canadian-attention-spans> which now redirects to <https://advertising.microsoft.com/home> as shown in below screenshot]

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Advertising banner. At the top left is the Microsoft logo. Below it, the word "Advertising" is written in a sans-serif font. The banner is split into two main sections. The left section has a teal background and features the Bing ads logo (a white play button icon followed by the text "Bing ads"). Below the logo, there is a short paragraph of text: "Connect with millions of searchers on the Bing Network that Google just can't reach. [Explore how Bing Ads can help new customers find your business.](#)" At the bottom right of this section is a white chevron arrow pointing right. The right section has a dark grey background and features the Oath logo (the word "Oath:" in a large, bold, white font, with "A Verizon company" in a smaller font below it). Below the logo, there is a paragraph of text: "Microsoft's consumer properties—including MSN, Outlook.com, Skype, Windows, and Xbox—empower people and organizations to achieve more and help brands make valuable connections across display, video, and mobile. To advertise on Microsoft properties, visit [Oath Americas](#) or [Oath International](#) if you're outside the U.S." At the bottom right of this section is a white chevron arrow pointing right.



Study: Thanks to portable devices, our attention spans are now shorter than those of goldfish

Nadine Kalinauskas May 13, 2015

<https://ca.news.yahoo.com/blogs/daily-buzz/study-thanks-to-portable-devices-our-attention-165215074.html>

The Kimpton hotel chain across Canada and the US will put a goldfish in any guests hotel room for the duration of their stay if they are feeling a bit lonely. It is called the 'Guppy Love' program and hotel staff will make sure it is fed and cared for.

Ever wonder if that device that never leaves your hand [is taking a toll on your attention span?](#)

A 54-page Microsoft study that looked at surveys of more than 2,000 Canadians — and monitored 112 people's brain activity — says it is.

[NB: The above link to [A 54-page Microsoft study](#) does not indeed link to any study or any data. Rather, the link goes to an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper that simply repeats the goldfish claim.]

In fact, we now have shorter attention spans than goldfish, a fact researchers believe can be linked to our inability to put down our smartphones and other portable devices.

[NB: No data or study is provided to confirm this information.]

A study in 2000 revealed that Canadians had 12-second attention spans, on average. That number [has now dropped to 8 seconds](#), an entire second shorter than that of goldfish.

[NB: The above link to the claim that our attention span “[has now dropped to 8 seconds](#), an entire second shorter than that of goldfish” does not link to any data or a study to confirm this claim. Rather, the link goes to an article in the (Canadian) *National Post* newspaper that simply repeats the goldfish claim.]

Our attention span now worse than goldfish's

Neal Colgrass, Newser staff

May 14, 2015

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/05/14/attention-span-human-worst-than-goldfish/27293073/>



(Photo: Atta Kenare, AFP/Getty Images)

(NEWSER) – Your attention span is, uh... well... whatever, but it probably can't beat that of your average goldfish, a new study says. Microsoft reached this conclusion after surveying more than 2,000 Canadians and monitoring the brain activity of 112 people, [Yahoo! Canada](#) reports.

[NB: The above link to *Yahoo! Canada* article goes to the article presented in this packet on the previous page. Again, no data or reference to a study is provided to confirm the claim.]

In our age of buzzing phones and 140-character news items, they say, the Canadian attention span has dropped from an average of 12 seconds in 2000 to the jittery low of eight seconds today. The average goldfish, it's believed, can concentrate for nine, researchers say.

This story originally appeared on Newser.

The Telegraph

Humans have shorter attention span than goldfish, thanks to smartphones

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2016/03/12/humans-have-shorter-attention-span-than-goldfish-thanks-to-smart/>

15 May 2015

[Leon Watson](#)

The average human's attention span is... oh look, a bird! According to scientists, the age of smartphones has left humans with such a short attention span even a goldfish can hold a thought for longer.

Researchers surveyed 2,000 participants in Canada and studied the brain activity of 112 others using electroencephalograms.

The results showed the average human attention span has fallen from 12 seconds in 2000, or around the time the mobile revolution began, to eight seconds.

Goldfish, meanwhile, are [believed to have an attention span of nine seconds](#).

[NB: The link for “Goldfish, meanwhile, are [believed to have an attention span of nine seconds](#).” goes to another Telegraph article, from July 01, 2014, which is titled “Memory of a goldfish? Actually fish can recall events 12 days ago.” Meaning: The link to support the claim that goldfish “are believed to have an attention span of nine seconds” goes to an article not about goldfish attention but about goldfish memory – and the previous article about goldfish memory actually suggests that goldfish have great memories.]

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS

WITH LESTER HOLT

05/15/2015

<https://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/is-your-attention-span-shorter-than-a-goldfishs-445825091809>

NB: This is a (24 second) video clip of a segment that aired nationally on the NBC Nightly News TV show.



Transcript:

Human beings may now have a shorter attention span than a goldfish. **This according to a study from Microsoft about the effects of today's digital world.** By 2013, according to the report, the average human attention span was down to 8 seconds. That's a second shorter than a goldfish, which means, if true, I lost some of you in this story about a paragraph back.

Opinion | Contributing Op-Ed Writer

The Eight-Second Attention Span

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/22/opinion/the-eight-second-attention-span.html>

Timothy Egan JAN. 22, 2016

This weekend, I'm going to the Mojave Desert, deep into an arid wilderness of a half-million acres, for some stargazing, bouldering and January sunshine on my public lands. I won't be out of contact. I checked. If Sarah Palin says something stupid on Donald Trump's behalf — scratch that. *When* Sarah Palin says something stupid on Donald Trump's behalf, I'll get her speaking-in-tongues buffoonery in real time, along with the rest of the nation.

The old me would have despised the new me for admitting such a thing. I've tried to go on digital diets, fasting from my screens. I was a friend's guest at a spa in Arizona once and had so much trouble being "mindful" that they nearly kicked me out. Actually, I just wanted to make sure I didn't miss the Seahawks game, mindful of Seattle's woeful offensive line.

In the information blur of last year, you may have overlooked news of our incredibly shrinking attention span. A survey of Canadian media consumption by Microsoft concluded that the average attention span had fallen to eight seconds, down from 12 in the year 2000. We now have a shorter attention span than goldfish, the study found.

[NB: No link provided to the study.]


Attention span was defined as "the amount of concentrated time on a task without becoming distracted." I tried to read the entire 54-page report, but well, you know. Still, a quote from Satya Nadella, the chief executive officer of Microsoft, jumped out at me. "The true scarce commodity" of the near future, he said, will be "human attention."

Attention Span Statistics

<https://www.statisticbrain.com/attention-span-statistics/>

Attention Span Statistics	Data
The average attention span in 2015	8.25 seconds
The average attention span in 2000	12 seconds
The average attention span of a gold fish	9 seconds
Percent of teens who forget major details of close friends and relatives	25 %
Percent of people who forget their own birthdays from time to time	7 %
Average number of times per hour an office worker checks their email inbox	30
Average length watched of a single internet video	2.7 minutes

Statistic Sources & References

 **Source:** Statistic Brain Research Institute (Online / Direct Response Mail)

Content Author: Statistic Brain

Date research was conducted: July 2, 2016

Attention Span Statistics

Demographics

ABOUT US

Statistic Brain Research Institute

Founded in 2004, we are a group of passionate number people.
We love numbers, their purity, and what they represent.

Numbers can bring humans together, they tell us how we are alike and how we are beautifully unique.
Numbers are a way to reflect on how far we've come and give us hope for the future.

Our goal is to bring you accurate and timely statistics.
We will never become number analysts because we believe numbers should only be interpreted by the reader.
We want to educate, assist, and sometimes entertain with numbers on every subject.

Statistic Brain is used by over 3,000,000 people each month to discover more about their world.

We hope that today you learn something new, find inspiration for tomorrow, and use your knowledge for something good

NB: The following inquiry was made to the Statistic Brain website.

Your Name (required)
Morton Ann Gernsbacher

Your Email (required)
magernsb@wisc.edu

Your Organization (required)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

You must be contacting us in regards to the following or we will not return your email.
I'm contacting you in regards to an error on Statistic Brain

Your Message

Greetings. Can you provide the source of the data that you list on <https://www.statisticbrain.com/attention-span-statistics/>, in the top box (i.e., The average attention span in 2010 = 8.25 seconds; The average attention span in 2000 = 12 seconds; The average attention span of a gold fish = 9 seconds).

At the bottom of the page, the data are said to have been gathered from "Online / Direct Response Mail" on July 2, 2016. But it's hard to believe that goldfish respond to online/direct response mail -- or that accurate measures, in precise seconds, of human attention span can be gathered from online or direct response mail surveys.

So I'm wondering if there is an error. Many thanks -

NB: No response has been received from this inquiry made to the Statistic Brain website.

NB: Warning: Going to the StatisticBrain.com website now elicits the below warning from Firefox (browser):

AdGuard has detected an attempt by this website to use your browser as a crypto-currency miner. It can create significant CPU load. Press "Cancel" to prevent it.

Cancel

OK

The Vanishing Attention Span of Consumers (Infographic)

<https://www.business2community.com/infographics/vanishing-attention-span-consumers-infographic-01222971>

[Miguel Conner](#) — May 12, 2015



It's no secret that multiple mediums have given consumers vast amount of choices—and no one has been able yet to discover more minutes in the day. It's no secret that competition in a soft economy is stiffer than a Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster with Red Bull (for those of you familiar with *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*).

It's no secret the world has shrunk with information, but that same information has shrunk our attention spans. What is a secret, though, is the unbelievable levels attention spans have declined during the Digital Age. It's far more than many in marketing or market research would like to face.

That is what this week's infographic deals is based on our article [What Will You Do When Your Customers No Longer Have Attention Spans?](#) The article does offer some solutions for marketers, but until we accept there is an issue...wait...what was I saying?

Never mind. Please enjoy the infographic, and I hope you find the attention to have a lovely day.

A Marketer's Guide

TO UNDERSTANDING THE VANISHING ATTENTION SPAN OF CONSUMERS

In a world of instant gratification, an alternative website is just a mouse click away. Marketers need to find ways to grab the attention of a user, and more importantly, keep it long enough to get your message across. If you don't, their cursor will be heading to the back button and on to a competitor in a blink of an eye. It's truly never been harder to catch a consumer's attention. Here are stats to help understand their vanishing attention spans.



10 seconds

is the amount of time it takes a visitor to decide whether they're going to stay on your web page



30 seconds

is the considered length of an elevator pitch

It used to be 118 seconds, the average length of a New York elevator ride

If someone stays on your page for more than 30 seconds, they will likely stay for more than two minutes, and will likely return later



5 minutes

is the average attention span of a person

Dropping from 12 minutes in the course of the last 10 years

The average attention span of an internet user is only

8 seconds

For a goldfish, it's 9 seconds!



40%

of visitors will leave a website if loading takes more than three seconds



20%

is the average email open rate of any business email

While 95% of visitors never fill out a form in any industry's website



90 seconds

is the drop off attention in viewer retention to any marketing video



30 seconds

30 seconds is the average length of a television commercial

Down from one minute in the 1950's and 1960's

Our brains are being rewired in the information age, according to The Washington Post article on neuroscience. We no longer read left to right and absorb words, but are more like: "Our brains form shortcuts to deal with it all — scanning, searching for key words, scrolling up and down quickly. This is nonlinear reading, and it has been documented in academic studies."



"It is the people who figure out how to work simply in the present, rather than the people who mastered the complexities of the past, who get to say what happens in the future." — Marketing Author Clay Shirky

What Will You Do When Your Customers No Longer Have Attention Spans?

03/30/2015 qSample



In ancient times, marketers enjoyed plenty of time to prepare their campaigns, somewhere in between solar eclipses and seasonal equinoxes. Even as history progressed into a postindustrial world, marketers could find breathing room before and during campaigns in a static media world (think of 80s martini lunches or lounging in the office as in the show *Mad Med*).

Now it's all changed. Maybe the Large Hadron Collider has already found a [parallel universe](#), because it seems either time or human consciousness is moving faster.

Regardless, it's never been harder to catch a customer's attention. It's threading a needle to the smallest of eyes that will blink of you're too slow.

Here are the mind-numbing statistics that leave researchers awake in the dark night of the market analysis soul:

– [10 seconds](#) is the amount of time it takes a visitor to decide whether they're going to stay on your page. (If someone stays on your page for more than 30 seconds, they will likely stay for more than two minutes, and will likely return later).

– [5 minutes](#) is the average attention span of a person (dropping from 12 minutes in the course of the last 10 years).

[NB: This link goes to <http://www.adweek.com/digital/attention-spans-have-dropped-from-12-minutes-to-5-seconds-how-social-media-is-ruining-our-minds-infographic/> But the Adweek article also fails to provide any data or links to any study.]

NBA will consider shortening games due to millennial attention spans

[AJ Neuharth-Keusch](#), USA TODAY Jan. 13, 2017 | Updated Jan. 15, 2017

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nba/2017/01/13/nba-shortening-games-millennial-attention-spans/96535434/>



(Photo: Steven Flynn, USA TODAY Sports)

A [2015 study by Microsoft](#) revealed that the average person's attention span in this wild world of technology and social media is down to eight seconds — which is less than that of a goldfish.

[NB: The above link to “A 2015 study by Microsoft” goes to a previous USA Today article presented on the seventh page of this packet. Again, no data or reference to a study is provided to confirm the claim.]

If you're an NBA fan and you're still reading this (and kudos to you, if you are) ... there's no need to worry. NBA commissioner Adam Silver has it covered.

You know those late-game situations, where timeout after timeout make the final 30 seconds last 10 minutes? During a press conference in London before the [Denver Nuggets' 140-112 rout of the Indiana Pacers](#) on Thursday, Silver noted that the league tracks the end of games — specifically the number of timeouts that are allowed — “very closely” and said the NBA's competition committee will likely take a “fresh look” at game length at the end of the season.

“It’s something that I know all of sports are looking at right now, and that is the format of the game and the length of time it takes to play the game,” Silver said. “Obviously people, particularly millennials, have increasingly short attention spans, so it’s something as a business we need to pay attention to. ... When the last few minutes of the game take an extraordinary amount of time, sometimes it’s incredibly interesting for fans, other times it’s not.”

Well done, commissioner Silver. Well done.