"Dave, stop. Stop, will you? Stop, Dave. Will you stop, Dave?" So the supercomputer HAL pleads with the implacable astronaut Dave Bowman in a famous and weirdly poignant scene toward the end of Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey. Bowman, having nearly been sent to a deep-space death by the malfunctioning machine, is calmly, coldly disconnecting the memory circuits that control its artificial "brain. "Dave, my mind is going," HAL says, forlornly. "I can feel it. I can feel it."

I can feel it, too. Over the past few years I’ve had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been tinkering with my brain, remapping the neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory. My mind isn’t going—so far as I can tell—but it’s changing. I’m not thinking the way I used to think. I can feel it most strongly when I’m reading. Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I’d spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That’s rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do. I feel as if I’m always dragging my wayward brain back to the text. The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle.

I think I know what’s going on. For more than a decade now, I’ve been spending a lot of time online, searching and surfing and sometimes adding to the great
databases of the Internet. The Web has been a godsend to me as a writer. Research that once required days in the stacks or periodical rooms of libraries can now be done in minutes. A few Google searches, some quick clicks on hyperlinks, and I’ve got the telltale fact or pithy quote I was after. Even when I’m not working, I’m as likely as not to be foraging in the Web’s info-thickets/reading and writing e-mails, scanning headlines and blog posts, watching videos and listening to podcasts, or just tripping from link to link to link. (Unlike footnotes, to which they’re sometimes likened, hyperlinks don’t merely point to related works; they propel you toward them.)

For me, as for others, the Net is becoming a universal medium, the conduit for most of the information that flows through my eyes and ears into my mind. The advantages of having immediate access to such an incredibly rich store of information are many, and they’ve been widely described and duly applauded. “The perfect recall of silicon memory,” Wired’s Clive Thompson has written, “can be an enormous boon to thinking.” But that boon comes at a price. As the media theorist Marshall McLuhan pointed out in the 1960s, media are not just passive channels of information. They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought. And what the Net seems to be doing is shipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. My mind now expects the advantages of having immediate access to such an incredibly rich store of information that most of the information that flows through my eyes and ears and into my mind. For me, as for others, the Net is becoming a universal medium, the conduit for most of the information that flows through my eyes and ears into my mind.

I’m not the only one. When I mention my troubles with reading to friends and acquaintances—literary types, most of them—many say they’re having similar experiences. The more they use the Web, the more they have to fight to stay focused on long pieces of writing. Some of the bloggers I follow have also begun mentioning the phenomenon. Scott Karp, who writes a blog about online media, recently confessed that he has stopped reading books altogether. “I was a lit major in college, and used to be [a] voracious book reader,” he wrote. “What happened?” He speculates on the answer: “What if I do all my reading on the web not so much because the way I read has changed, i.e. I’m just seeking convenience, but because the way I THINK has changed?”

Bruce Friedman, who blogs regularly about the use of computers in medicine, also has described how the Internet has altered his mental habits. “I now have almost totally lost the ability to read and absorb a longish article on the web or in print,” he wrote earlier this year. A pathologist who has long been on the faculty of the University of Michigan Medical School, Friedman elaborated on his comment in a telephone conversation with me. His thinking, he said, has taken on a “staccato” quality, reflecting the way he quickly scans short passages of text from many sources online. “I can’t read War and Peace anymore,” he admitted. “I’ve lost the ability to do that. Even a blog post of more than three or four paragraphs is too much to absorb. I skim it.”

Anecdotes alone don’t prove much. And we still await the long-term neurological and psychological experiments that will provide a definitive picture of how Internet use affects cognition. But a recently published study of online research habits, conducted by scholars from University College London, suggests that we may well be in the midst of a sea change in the way we read and think. As part of the five-year research program, the scholars examined computer logs documenting the behavior of visitors to two popular research sites, one operated by the British Library and one by a U.K. educational consortium, that provide access to journal articles, e-books, and other sources of written information. They found that people using the sites exhibited “a form of skimming activity,” hopping from one source to another and rarely returning to any source they’d already visited. They typically read no more than one or two pages of an article or book before they would “bounce” out to another site.
Sometimes they’d save a long article, but there’s no evidence that they ever went back and actually read it. The authors of the study report:

It is clear that users are not reading online in the traditional sense; indeed there are signs that new forms of “reading” are emerging as users “power browse” horizontally through titles, contents pages and abstracts going for quick wins. It almost seems that they go online to avoid reading in the traditional sense.

Thanks to the ubiquity of text on the Internet, not to mention the popularity of text-messaging on cell phones, we may well be reading more today than we did in the 1970s or 1980s, when television was our medium of choice. But it’s a different kind of reading, and behind it lies a different kind of thinking—perhaps even a new sense of the self. “We are not only what we read,” says Maryanne Wolf, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University and the author of *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*. “We are how we read.” Wolf worries that the style of reading promoted by the Net, a style that puts “efficiency” and “immediacy” above all else, may be weakening our capacity for the kind of deep reading that emerged when an earlier technology, the printing press, made long and complex works of prose commonplace. When we read online, she says, we tend to become “mere decoders of information.” Our ability to interpret text, to make the rich mental connections that form when we read deeply and without distraction, remains largely disengaged.
8/20/2014

Is Google Making Us Stupid? - Nicholas Carr - The Atlantic

http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/

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Bruce • 5 years ago

Brucie-boy just realized the last 3 minutes of his life were wasted and he will never get them back again....What the frakk?

4 ▲ ▼ • Reply • Share

Tom • 5 years ago

I haven’t heard Imani Coppola since Chupacabra.
Coates, forget about about the door knockers and see the new Baltimore style. Guys are now rolling in old Lincoln Continentals and other large-size sedans. What were once old man cars are now slick. On some blocks in eastside Baltimore, you can find 4-6 of these Sebrings, Continentals and Buicks taking the space.

Ta-Nehisi Coates  •  5 years ago
I gotta get home. The neck-roll also. The neck-roll is definitely class.

ObieJoe  •  5 years ago
I love this blog.

lebecka  •  5 years ago
'Meh, I love the earrings. Reminds me of home.'

Kind of like how the drummer from the Roots who always has a pick sticking out off his afro reminds me of being a little kid on the bus in Pittsburgh in the 1970's. Makes me very nostalgic for those bus rides on those hot, stinky old buses!

Tony Comstock  •  5 years ago
Always wanted to bed a girl like that, but the opportunity never came up, and I was never will to go out of my way to find it.

the_ill  •  5 years ago
makes me miss jersey and at the same time feel glad that i moved out. which i guess is the proper response to anything regarding n.j. not sure if anyone who never lived there would understand.

ew.  •  5 years ago
i'm from jers but west-central.

Hill Rat  •  5 years ago
makes me miss jersey and at the same time feel glad that i moved out. which i guess is the proper response to anything regarding n.j. not sure if anyone who never lived there would understand.

I lived there for seven years, I feel you.

The thing I miss the most? The pizza, DC is pizza hell.

belhambone  •  4 years ago
I'm not sure that I can agree with your assessment that the internet overrides the ability to concentrate on a lengthy written article.

I am a 21 year old currently attending college for a degree in engineering. I can say that since a young age I have been hooked into video games and the internet. And it is true that I have often spent a great deal of time browsing through an innumerable bits of mental fluff (simply type something like "fail" or "owned" into a google image search and you'll find enough images to keep most college students entertained for hours) but I can still sit down and become immersed in a good book, or something like your article.

Looking at it from another perspective tho I feel that it may not be that the internet is making us stupid but making us more demanding. Before the internet we were given a limited number of topics that we could review from a newspaper, television, magazine etc. Since they were limited in scope they needed a greater amount of depth and
description. However now that we can delve a wider range of topics there is no need for such depth. In fact if a person was to spend as much time on any given topic today as was 50 years ago or more it would be hard to stay up to date on the numerous

see more

It is true that the new balance the internet brings causes people to think differently in order to survive (mentally). However, I think that the value of knowing a topic thoroughly is forgotten - While writing a history essay, it is quite simple to look up fifteen facts and have a three-pronged argument for a thesis with analysis based on those pieces of evidence. And yet, if I just pay attention in class, take notes, and know my topic inside and out with information at hand that I will never mention in my essay, I find myself arguing a different thesis in a different fashion. The connections in support are no longer based on the surface image of what happened in the past, but the motives, the implications, the possible conspiracies, and basically the intricate, infinite workings of any human mind.

I understand that it is necessary to work more efficiently with new amount of information any person is required to absorb on a day to day basis. But one thing in research has not changed from the way it was in the beginning of the human mind. To really argue the truth, I can't pick and choose the evidence I need. I need to spend as long as it takes knowing everything possible before I can participate in a mature debate. If you search for bits of evidence, with a

see more

its despair as one circuit after another goes dark

Well, said! I am in the process of researching my thesis in the humanities right now. I can support your articulation of the research process with my current experience with it. Being able to sit with your topic and allowing it to mold with the deep integration of research removes the personal bias and allows for a proper assessment of the materials. If this deep integration does not take place, the content becomes unreliable and could potentially foul the waters for future researchers.

I think the most ironic thing thus far is that Carr wrote this article without diving deeply into the topic. Carr didn’t study people’s capacity for prolonged concentration, or actually understand people’s ability to contemplate and understand complex ideas deduced and induced from brief snippets of information. Instead he took his own pre-formed opinion, “looked up fifteen facts”, and formed his “three-pronged argument”, with his analysis based on those nuanced pieces of evidence.

If you analyse the rhetoric of the article, Carr is essentially trying to convince you not that using Google is making you dumb, but that our use of the internet itself is forcibly making us behave mechanically. He is trying to appeal to your emotional instinct to not only fight change, but to rebel against a technology which is “tinkering with your brain” without your consent. He makes appeals of sympathy to an audience who has so much information at our fingertips, it’s impossible not to have been distracted by the internet before. He tells you the internet is changing your neural circuitry, with the single intent of making you uncomfortable.
Strawman. Internet discussions are not a book in your hand; often what you read on a forum, for example, is quite easily modified, deleted, or in some cases (depending on the method, for example, a newspaper or magazine’s online edition) directly licensed. Is it really necessary to remind people that a) books are damned expensive, even at the low end, and b) you’re already paying for the Net connection, and probably a decent rig in the first place?

It’s not a matter of ‘reduced attention span’, it’s the technologies involved taking what a given reader wants to read out of the hands of the people directly (or indirectly) providing it (which I posit would never have happened without online interaction or the Internet itself). This is the same as buying a newspaper (or, God forbid! in these days, actually subscribing to a print copy! Yeah, that was intentional sarcasm, but it’s on topic...) and choosing which sections or articles to read. Is it not being a good enough reader to have the flexibility to make that choice? Is it my job and matter of proof to read the whole damned paper so that a body can’t imply I’m a traitor to the paper and a ADD diagnosis.

see more

I don’t know if the internet is making us stupid, but I do know that “tho” is spelled though.

tho = though, thru = through... it’s in Merriam-Webster’s:

http://www.merriam-webster.com...

Way to go tho! You really zinged him good!!

This phrase, “You click too much, read too little, and remember even less,” is very true. When looking at the history of communication and how information and knowledge has been transferred and passed on.
through the ages, the internet has truly revolutionized everything beyond our ability to control it or ourselves.
When thinking about the internet, and what it has sprung from I am reminded of a quote I read years ago as a young student. I don't have access to the book so I "googled" :) part of the quote, and here it is:

Man has mounted science, and is now run away with. I firmly believe that before many centuries more, science will be the master of men. The engines he will have invented will be beyond his strength to control. Someday science may have the existence of mankind in its power, and the human race commit suicide, by blowing up the world. Not only shall we be able to cruise in space, but I'll be hanged if I see any reason why some future generation shouldn't walk off like a beetle with the world on its back, or give it another rotary motion so that every zone should receive in turn its due portion of heat and light.

— Henry Brooks Adams

http://www.todayinsci.com/A/Ad...
I haven't even read the article (seeing how long it is), but I absolutely love your commentary. Very well put together and very though provoking.

IRONY.

Reality!!

thank you for embodying exactly what the article has told us to fear

Your religious propaganda is flat out inappropriate. The reason you click too much, read too little, and remember even less, is not simply do to the abundance of "links" (otherwise known as related information) that is provided to you. Those links exist for you to broaden your understanding and define the boundaries of a topic, should you desire to do so. It's only bait if the link takes you to an advertisement. Other than that, it's actually the convenient organization of information. If you're opening up too many of these links, it's probably because you're thirsty for information, or you just lack the discipline not to. And if you're closing them all prematurely, it's because you need to give yourself more time to read, or gain the discipline to do so.

On the other hand, I would agree with you that information is not knowledge - not until you understand it's applications and implications.

I think that is actually the point of the writer. In the modern world, we "need" to be constantly updated and "need" to optimize our time so we skim through knowledge. The question lying her is: Is it real knowledge? or just superficial information we won't even remember tomorrow

as we come to rely on computers to mediate our understanding of the world, it is our own intelligence that flattens into artificial intelligence

Point proven: "tho" as opposed to "though."
It's changing the way we think, regardless of what we think.

First, look up the word "velveeta"........now, tell me you know what cheese is.

Think of mp3 files they are compressed and have a lower quality of sound, but it's still the same song. The computer is making us more efficient.
I believe the point you have made is the one being expressed by the author. This point is that our minds are becoming as efficient as machines with algorithms set to quickly access information and respond accordingly; a point that should hit close to home as you are studying to become an engineer.

Of course, the author also makes the point that many advances in media have been challenged by influential people. Nietzsche, Socrates, and others were mentioned throughout the article for their admonition of the typewriter and the written word respectively.

The type of knowledge you described can be extrapolated into the concept of what he calls "pancake people" with the knowledge of many things but at very little depth. The hypothetical "you" may be aware of something that happened but may be unable to answer the question of "why?", or, "how do we replicate this occurrence?", or, "how do we prevent it?".

In response to your question, I do think it is important to fully wrap one's head around a concept (though maybe not every concept) in order to be able to apply it more fully to other areas of life. For example: if you were to apply a ___

see more

As a member of the new generation, I'd say that we're just lazy. I think that people are, evolutionarily, lazy. Our minds and bodies don't want to expend excess energy. But in the past, kids were left with puzzles, books, family members, card games. They couldn't spend all their time messaging their friends or looking up random pictures or pop music. My generation, since we aren't forced to think - because we never have an empty moment - never develop an appreciation for thinking. It isn't so much that we want information to be instant as that we don't want information that isn't immediately applicable to our lives (friend had a break up, new music out) at all.

I think that the benefits or harm that the Internet can bring is decided widely on how it is used, or abused. I feel that since we are so constantly pelted with information and messages - human company and others' ideas - we are left little to no solitary time for deep thought to develop our own identities and ideas. We end up picking between set philosophies instead of creating our own. Entertainment and thinking are very different, but they don't always ___

see more

Write a paper on how specifically, the iphone, ipod, ipad, etc., has materially improved your life. Be specific and expound on how worse off you would be without these things.

you have every reason to say that Google is affecting all people using the internet and more bloggers. truth is a dilemma that many may think for long. but I think that Google's not making people more stupid google is becoming more lazy people because Google's mission is to organize all the global information that people can easily access this information. google does not stop to read a long book, google does not prevent google write a long book simply orders and summarizes information ___

Trabajos Medio Tiempo
Maleeha ElSadr ➔ belhambone • 2 years ago

Love the Dresden Files. I think it's a little more valuable to be able to focus deeply than you're making it out to be, though. On anything--books, yoga, the present, a craft, video games, acid trips, whatever. Something very special happens when you focus deeply... it changes my reality for sure.

akinoame ➔ belhambone • a year ago

Good points, but there is one trap in just registering information. Chances are it is inaccurate, biased or entirely wrong.

From my personal experience, almost everything I take an effort to dive into turns out to be different from the common opinion. This has an effect of mass brainwashing (often unintentional). We hear certain things on TV, do not research them, and they register as facts in our minds. Basically, our worldviews are formed by who is shouting louder and more persistently into our ears.

Having said that, I think internet and new media actually will be effective to fight such brainwashing. Information flows are much less controlled, much more diverse and accessible. On a personal level, it still makes sense to research important subjects in depth, even if you are sure about the "facts". On the level of society, once information becomes more diverse, different opinions will be harder to ignore. They will lead to more research and, on average, more informed public.

james_padfoot • 4 years ago

The proof is in the pudding; I skimmed through this, looking only for key points.

So what now? Abstain from the vast amount of information on the internet? Or find a new way of retrieving said information?

Doublestuff ➔ james_padfoot • 4 years ago

I think that a new way of getting information would have to be the old way - researching the same things (including internet sources but with attention to original accredited old-fashioned books) but with better habits. Consistent hard work is overrated, I think.

We need to start tiny, read an entire article and understand it. Since us young people are so impatient, we tend to try to finish our goals in one night. Too bad - it's necessary to take a long time on some things. The ents got it right :) After that article, though, we can find related articles, and over a long period of time we can have an objective pool of knowledge if we take everything with a grain of salt.

But I'm just spewing common sense. I don't know how to stop people from having the habits they do when they grow up with a dangerous double edged sword like the internet. Good parents, good teachers, good media? None of those things are a guarantee.

By "new way," do you mean an alternative to the internet entirely?

james_padfoot ➔ Doublestuff • 4 years ago

My friend, common sense is no longer common. (A+ for the LOTR reference, though.)

Personally, I think it's the important things that are not taught in school: all the soft skills we need in the real world. By that, I think emphasis should be given to not just a project, but how to do said research of a project. I also notice forcing students to make citations and references...
also means that they are more likely to read through their content as opposed to copy-pasting. It actually means they’re reading through the whole article and analyzing it.

Also, with what you said, it comes with discipline. You need the discipline to actually focus your mind and finish something, especially if it’s a term-heavy paper, and most people lack that today.

I didn’t mean an alternative to the internet, at least, not in this day and age when it’s the best form of media and communication. Merely a new methodology of retrieving information.

Doublestuff • james_padfoot • 4 years ago
I completely agree with the discipline factor. The problem is that teachers are always looking for what they are doing wrong, what they can do better, when really students are the ones who need to learn proper techniques. I think that teachers forget that students don’t learn as a collective, so they are surprised when, year after year, students refuse to do the required amount of work. :)

However, some programs are useful for good habits I think. AP and honors in high school are more rigorous and require more work, though I would prefer IB because it seems less intimidating and focuses more on method than resulting knowledge.

It is true that most of these skills, though, will come outside of school. The best people can do is honestly encourage discipline, and the people who want something will use it and the people who don’t care won’t. I don’t know if the world will ever be different.

simpulo • 4 years ago
On a friend’s recommendation, I googled for this article and just read the first couple paragraphs. It’s way too long. But in general I agree.

fngaz • 4 years ago
this article was too long for me to read. In today’s world we don’t have the time (or want to take the time) to read a whole article. You seem like a good writer, but I don’t care for the narrative.. I just want the information put in front of me short concise and to the point. If there is something that catches my interest, I will read further into it. (look at cnn articles. they are short, to the point and can be read in a few short minutes. by the time your attention is lost that article is done with).

Writers have to write to their audiences. The online audience will want to just get the information quickly and easily. I’ve made my way to your site. your title was catchy and the picture at the top made me laugh and kept my attention, however, further down there was just a vast sea of words and nothing else to keep my attention. You mean I actually have to read all this?!?

And yes.. i do believe that society today (Google included) has made us all have ADD. As I am writing this to you, I am listening to music, eating lunch and making it seem like I am doing real work (at work). This is today’s audience and the way society has made us. I don’t like it either, but to stay current, I must be this way.

Anders Bruce • fngaz • 2 years ago
Sounds like a problem with you, not with the article. It took 10-20 minutes to read in full. You have 10-20 minutes--you’d just rather spend it doing nothing (doing so many things at once is equivalent to doing nothing).
Is Google Making Us Stupid? - Nicholas Carr - The Atlantic

http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/