

The craving for the  
fleeting pleasure of



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The effect of the internet on our concentration span is among one of the most notable. The author has in fact sarcastically described the modern electronic screen as an ecosystem of interruptive technologies. For a regular computer user, it is difficult, close to impossible to ignore the desire to glance at their mailboxes or social media platforms. The mind craving for the fleeting pleasure of new information and the feebleness of human attention making it impossible to resist even the minor temptations causes the effect above.

Impulsive web browsing and lingering in sites too long, which is rampant among a majority of internet users consolidate the author's argument especially characterized by (destructive) features such as infinite scrolling of web pages in popular social media platforms (Carr, 2011). Carr extends his observations by linking them to the plasticity of the brain, which he continues to say is shaped by experience. Mental malleability, which in essence refers to the flexibility of the mind has unfortunately turned us into servants of technology; this concept is used by mainstream internet advertising companies which have earned a fortune by flashing ads on web pages and getting paid when we (sometimes inadvertently) click on them or even just view. However, the author seems to ignore the fact that the internet and related technologies are occasionally good for the mind.

A good example is in the case of a comprehensive study carried out in 2009, which discovered that playing of video games led to significant improvements in performance on various cognitive tasks such as visual perception to sustained attention. Another study conducted seven years earlier and published in Nature demonstrated that just after ten days of

playing Medal of Honor, a violent shooter game, participants showed dramatic increases in visual attention and memory. After the study, scientists concluded that even simple computer, games can increase the speed of information processing (Nicholas, 2010). Search engines, as depicted by Carr have fragmented our knowledge. One of his most convincing piece of evidence is a study conducted in 2008 that reviewed 34 million academic articles published between 1945 and 2005. The digitization of journals made it far easier to find information; however, this led to narrowed citations, with scholars emphasizing more on recent publications.

“ Why is it that in a world in which everything is available, we all end up reading the same thing?” Carr is not necessarily against Google and its endless sprawl of hyperlinks. Instead, he is horrified by the way; computers are damaging our powers of concentration. The favorite search engine, Google is not making us stupid; instead, it is exercising the mental muscles that make us smarter. A study carried out by neuroscientists at the University of California; Los Angeles found that performing Google searches led to increased activity in the dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex, in comparison to reading a book-like text (Carr, 2008).

The writer has documented the losses that accompany the arrival of new technology. The rise of written text led to the decline of oral poetry, the increase of movable type wiped the market for illuminated manuscripts, the surge in television shows obliterated radio play, for instance, just to mention but a few. Several surveys suggest that the internet has diminished our interest in reading books. Additionally, literacy itself has led to the loss of critical mental talents, observed when children learn to decode letters losing

abilities in object recognition. In the end, literate humans are less able to read the details of the natural world. Years before, Socrates started the first ' technology scare.

' He lamented that the invention of books creates forgetfulness in the soul and that readers instead of remembering for themselves were blindly trusting in written text; the library was ruining the mind (Carr, 2008). Robert Burton, in the 17th century, complained, in " The Anatomy of Melancholy," of the " vast chaos and confusion of books" that makes the eyes and fingers ache. With the invention of the telegram the speed of transmission became a problem, in fact, one eminent physician blamed the pelting of telegrams for triggering an outbreak of mental illness. Television and radio technology then came, poisoning the mind with passive pleasure, which diverted the attention of children from reading books. The " vast chaos and confusion of books" is a contrast to the near infinitude of information on the internet with the vast numbers of e-books available, videos, photos and all kinds of digital literature (Nicholas, 2010). The writer argues that the modern mind is like the fictional computer. He writes how over the last few years he had had an uncomfortable sense that someone or something had been tinkering with his brain remapping the neural circuitry and reprogramming the memory. We are, sabotaging ourselves, therefore, by trading away the seriousness of sustained attention for the frantic superficiality of the Internet.

It has now become more challenging to engage with complex ideas as well as challenging texts due to the mere existence of the online world. Carr stated further, " Once I was a scuba diver in a sea of words, now I zip along like a guy on Jet Ski." Therefore, the writer admits that the internet has

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reduced our thinking capacity making us highly dependent on the information published on the Internet, in essence without the internet we would be information starved (Carr, 2011). The writer supports the studies on the habits of Internet users, which had shown a spike in, brain activity when they performed search engine searches though they have been debated widely. One side argues that the spike in brain activity overburdens the mind, therefore, lowering its ability to carry out cognitive tasks or process the read information which made the users absorb and retain less information.

The other side argues that this increased activity is, nonetheless, necessary in exercising our mental muscles that are necessary for controlling decision-making and complex reasoning skills and we become better at such tasks by using the Internet (Carr, 2008). Although the writer has criticized the Internet, he has embraced the use of modern technology. At the same time, he wants to let us know what we lose in exchange for the dynamic internet-fueled world. The book is a warning to those who without question accept a life in which information is unlimited, easily accessed and not in context. He argues that the Internet physically ‘rewires’ our brain until we end up acting like computers by gobbling up large chunks of information which makes our grip on the info slacken. As described by him, in-depth reading is a capacity given to us by virtue of being human.

Carr spends half of his book giving a history of the written word to show the internet amongst the long series of tools that have helped mold the human mind, all in the effort to ensure that *The Shallows* is far from half-baked (Nicholas, 2010). With the book, the writer tries to snap us out of the

hypnotic pull of our devices by revealing why we are having a hard time focusing at length on any given thing and compulsively checking our e-mail at the same time never getting any work done. He wants us to value wisdom over knowledge and advises us to use new technology intelligently; at the same time, we should not allow ourselves to be oblivious to the possibility that we have numbed an essential part of ourselves (Carr, 2008).

Unsurprisingly, Carr is somewhat uncomfortable with change. He says that the internet is too noisy and has too many flashing lights. The author points out that he spent all his savings on a Macintosh while at the same time stating that he is more comfortable with digital devices that help him with analog tasks than entirely new digital forms such as Facebook. He has devoted a significant amount of effort to explain how the web encourages us to click and flick such that before we know it, we are less interested in reading novels and soon “ the linear, literary mind” becomes “ yesterday’s mind.” This book blames the Internet for learning becoming so much more laborious nowadays (Carr, 2011).

Conclusion Reading this book will give you many exciting ideas, many thoughts provoking theories about the brain and insights about Internet use. Once you finish reading it, you get the satisfying sense of having at an individual level, disproved its thesis. To some it might not be what you expected or even imagined yet at the same time you will learn some stimulation connections along the way (Nicholas, 2010).