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The Argument on Modern Technology and Society

Modern technology is so ingrained into our daily lives that we no longer know how to function without its presence. Not only have our day-to-day lives changed to adapt to the presence of technology, but so have our brains. And this adaptation we have made for ourselves as a society has led us down a road of distraction. The link to technology and a distracted society is agreed by multiple authors, however there is disagreement on whether or not technology and its distractions are mainly negative or positive. This distinction can be seen between Nicholas Carr who wrote, *Is Google Making Us Stupid?*, and Sam Anderson author of *In Defense of Distraction*. Both have strong viewpoints on the matter and their ideas mainly seem to clash with each other. While Carr has a strong negative viewpoint on the effects of distractive technology and the internet, Anderson points out various positives that come with technologies' distractions, and there are even some instances where they are in agreement. However, my viewpoint on the matter is complicated, I am impartial to both sides, as I can see and agree with various points made by both authors however I find myself mainly agreeing with Anderson on the positives of digital technology.

Nicholas Carr is a Harvard graduate; he is a journalist and writer with multiple books and articles about technology and its effect on society. In Carr's article, *Is Google Making Us Stupid?*, he believes that with immediate access to technology and the internet we are no longer focused and have a hard time keeping to one task before trying to jump to the next more

interesting things. He talks about how our minds have changed to process information too quickly instead of taking it in and fully digesting what we have read, and to Carr this is a negative. On the opposing side to this is Sam Anderson, the New York Times Magazine writer and author of the article, *In Defense of Distraction*. He believes that while yes Technology and the internet have increased our distraction load, we can use it to our advantage and be able to see that there are positives to the addition of technology in our daily lives. Anderson encourages adaptation to the internet and not to run away from the problems it can cause since there are ways to turn it around and make distraction a helping tool.

In my personal experience I can get easily distracted by technology since it is always in arms reach. Whether that be my phone or computer, I always have a way to stay connected to the internet. And while I find myself scrolling on my phone for hours as a form of procrastinating my work, I cannot help but feel that we would not be better off if we were to do away with digital technologies and the internet.

Both authors came to the idea about how distracted today's society is, disagreeing on whether this distraction is negatively affecting us or if there is a positive side to all of the distractions. Carr believes that we should slow down and find quiet spaces away from technology so we can try to reverse the effects it has on our brain. He encourages us to find, "the quiet spaces opened up by the sustained, undistracted reading of a book, or by any other act of contemplation, for that matter, we make our own associations, raw our own inferences and analogies, foster our own ideas." (Carr 7). The point that Carr is trying to get across is that we should be separating ourselves from digital technologies and trying to revert our mind back to a place where we use deeper thinking. He wants us to try and detach our mind from the computer so as to make our own original ideas more prevalent. However, Anderson believes that we should lean into the distractions and use them for our benefits and that too much attention to

things may be hindering us more than benefiting us. Anderson makes the counter argument, “It’s possible that we’re all evolving toward a new techno-cognitive nomadism, a rapidly shifting environment in which restlessness will be an advantage again. The deep focusers might even be hampered by having too much attention” (Anderson 11). His point being that having the ability for our minds to shift from one thing to another so quickly may become an advantage in our ever-changing society as technology begins to become a prevalent aspect of our day-to-day lives. Personally, I find myself agreeing with Anderson since I can see that digital technology is only going to increase its relevancy in our daily lives and tasks. Being able to keep up with all of the changes happening around us will be more beneficial than constantly isolating ourselves from technology. While yes, being able to ground yourself away from the internet can be beneficial to one's mental health, I don't believe it to be a solution to our innate ability to become distracted by not only the internet but life as well.

The topic of whether the younger generations being introduced to the internet and digital technologies at a young age is often debated on whether it will affect us negatively in the future. Anderson comes into this conversation with the argument that this early introduction may have given us an advantage to the contently evolving world. He points out that, “research suggests were already picking up new skills: better peripheral vision, the ability to sift through information rapidly.” (Anderson 12). What this means is that while people believe that we are being hindered by technology, it is actually adding to our skills, and we are adapting to the world around us at a high speed. The newer, younger generations are combating the event of getting left behind by always keeping up to date with the latest technologies as well as adding to our repertoire, Although, Carr adds in a point to this,

“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 ... my concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages, I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do ... The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle." (Carr 1).

What Carr is trying to get across is that digital technology is also taking away some of our skills, like concentration and deep reading. Furthering the argument that technology isn't only affecting the minds of children but even fully grown adults. I agree with both sides of this argument, mainly because I am able to relate to both. With Anderson's point I find myself reflecting on these skills and I can confirm that my peripheral vision makes me very aware of my surroundings and I am able to pick up on what is going on around me without directly looking at it. I also can sift through information quickly to find exactly what I am looking for without fully reading the article or the website it has come from. And yet I am able to see and relate to the downside of this, for while I can process information rapidly, I am not processing it fully hence the loss of deep reading. While I am capable of deep reading from time to time, I don't find myself doing it often.

Throughout both essays Carr and Anderson were able to find themselves in agreement on a few points, one of which being how the internet is changing the way we think down to a neurological level. In Carr's essay he is very big on how technology distracts us and has begun to change how we think, "we have come to think of [our brains] as operating 'like computers'. But the changes, neuroscience tells us, go much deeper than metaphor. Thanks to our brain's plasticity, the adaptation occurs also at a biological level." (Carr 4). Carr explains that when we see our brains like computers that they have begun to also function like computers, processing information rapidly, jumping from one topic to the next. He believes this may become our

downfall should we let it get too far. This point Anderson agrees with this assessment, “when forced to multitask, the overloaded brain shifts its processing from the hippocampus (responsible for memory) to the striatum (responsible for rote tasks), making it hard to learn a task or even recall what you've been doing once you're done.” (Anderson 3). Anderson gathered this information from neuroscience articles to make his point that the brain functions differently when multitasking. And now with technologies taking over our attention they have begun to make us multitask, trying to do multiple things at once while on the internet which ends up changing the way we think linking back to Carr’s point. I can agree with the idea that technology is rapidly changing how we think and function. I have found myself trying to multitask multiple times this week; while doing my calculus homework I am simultaneously trying to send a text to my friends about dinner. I am less focused on the task at hand most times and it will end up taking me longer to fully complete something since I am trying to do multiple things at once.

All in all, Anderson and Carr both make good points in their arguments on technology in society. I don’t think anyone can say with 100% certainty that the internet only brings negative or positives, because it seems to be an equal mixture of both. With how the world is changing there is no reversing the effects technology has on us, we are able to reach farther than ever to almost every part of the world. And while the way we think has been shifted due to the integration of the internet into our daily lives we are still ourselves at the end of the day. Technology may be able to hinder things like concentration and deep reading, but it cannot take away our core selves. And I think the best way to cope with our changing world is to allow ourselves to change with it while still stealing ourselves away from time to time to ground ourselves and decompress. The argument on technology is not black and white but a mixture of different hues of gray where opposite ideas can occasionally find common ground.

Works Cited

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