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Back To The Future!

Four hours. That's how long it's taken me to come up with this sentence, which is a stupid and embarrassing amount of time just to think of this mediocre hook to a paper. I blame social media, the internet, and myself, of course. Those 4 hours were wasted scrolling through Instagram because I no longer possess the thinking ability or attention span to sit at my desk, without my phone, and do work like a functional human being. Unfortunately, I know for a fact that I'm not the only one who struggles with this loss of deep thinking. With the recent rise of advancements in modern technology, many people struggle with thinking deeply or focusing without the constant urge to pick up their phone. The loss of deep thinking and inability to accomplish work was written about by American Journalist/Author and Harvard graduate, Nicholas Carr, in his writing *Is Google Making Us Stupid?* He explores the mental effects that the online world is having on people. On a similar note, Mae Buchanan, a freshman at the University of New England, wrote "Technology's Effect on our Deeper Thinking" Analyzing the effects social media has on our deeper thinking. The final essay is by Natalie Bell, who is also a freshman at the University of New England. In her writing "The Powers and Drawbacks of Technology", she too discusses the negative effects of technology. From what I've experienced and from what I've heard from peers, I believe that technology has stunted our ability to think deeply or focus enough to accomplish work, because it hands us everything we could ever want

the second we want it, requiring such little input from us. Inevitably causing our laziness and reliance on the internet and our devices for quick information that we can trust.

The way we take in information and process it is different for everyone, whether it's our ability to read and absorb the information or our ability to pick out misinformation from real information online. On the topic of reading, Carr writes about a study conducted by University College London focused on the “study of online research habits.” The scholars examined computer logs and documented the behavior of the visitors on two popular research websites. The first site is run by the British Library, and the second site is run by a U.K. educational consortium. Both sites give access to e-books, journal articles, and many other sources of written information. Carr writes:

They found that people using websites 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. (Carr, 3)

The study shows concrete evidence of people being unable to focus on one task long enough to obtain any information, but whatever is shallow and right on the surface. Skimming could be the result of our inability or unwillingness to think deeper, causing us to “bounce” from place to place, from one article to another, only grazing the information without pulling any real value from it. The internet is most likely to blame for this mental laziness, as it gives us everything we want, the second we want it, without needing to work for it. On the very same topic of skimming articles, Bell writes, “Since I have nonstop access to Internet, I can access anything. I need to at any given point. When getting assigned readings for homework, I have found myself skimming over the passages to get it done faster. Nothing makes me not able to retain all the information I

was supposed to causing me to take more time and reread the assignment.”(Bell). In this quote, Bell’s experience with the internet, causing her to be unable to focus on work, perfectly proves the study that Carr brings up. While Carr doesn’t mention whether it has affected him, he does give instances where it has affected other people, which connects with Bell’s experience. Not only does Bell agree with what Carr presented, but she also solidifies his claim by providing the effects it has had on her.

When we use the internet, specifically for reading, a lot of us may tend to go about it differently than reading something physical outside of the online world. Carr brings up a point about our tendencies when reading online by stating, “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.”(Carr, 3). I’ve noticed this, not just with reading online but just whenever I’m using my phone or scrolling through Instagram with no specific reason or purpose to be on it (which is a majority of the time) I mindlessly float around from one app to another or one reel to the next not absorbing or learning anything. On the topic of social media, Buchanan takes a similar approach to the online shallow thinking that Carr brought up. She talks about how people are taking the information they find online at face value, rather than looking deeper into it to learn whether or not the information is true or not, stating:

With the influx of social media this can be seen better than ever before. And the main transition we are seeing is people going from deep thinking to shallow thinking.

Everywhere you look, there are gossip websites that portray themselves as news sites.

And many people fail to see this and end up believing what these sites post. (Buchanan). People have all of this information being fed to them from social media, and see no reason to do any work to look deeper into the topic to find out if what they are finding is true. But why would

they? If these “news” and “facts” are being shown to them with minimal to no effort on their part, then there's no reason for them to go out of their way to do extra work or use extra brain power to fact-check or rationalize the information. Both Buchanan and Carr address the idea of, as Carr puts it, “decoders of information” leaving our ability to make rich mental connections in pieces. While Buchanan sees it from the side of social media, as people take every bit of information that is thrown at them at face value. Carr sees it from the point of view of simply reading online. Both authors talk about people’s inability to look and think more deeply about what is being presented to them.

Our constant use of social media, phones, and the internet has stunted our ability to think deeply or accomplish work, by giving us quick bursts of information, removing the necessity of doing work to look it up. Causing our ability to focus on one thing at a time to be significantly worse than it used to be, so now we no longer have the attention span to successfully or productively read important articles or books and learn from them. It's as though technology is doing the thinking and work for us, but in a way that hurts us rather than helps us. Our inability to read without skimming or our ignorance to not think deeper to see past the facade of false information given to us by the internet and social media are prime examples of technology stunting some of our most important and necessary mental abilities.

Works Cited

Carr, Nicholas. "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" *The Atlantic*, July 2008