

Devon Carlson

Is Google Making use Stupid?

DART 449

September 22, 2019

Is Google making us stupid? Personally I think my answer is riddled with mixed feelings. Nicholas Carr begins this piece lamenting about how we are always connected to the web, be it in the form of social media, text messages, you name it. Even if we're not holding our devices in our hands, many of us often listening to a steady stream of nonstop podcasts. This abundance of media has turned us into a generation of skimmers with incredibly short attention spans, to the point that "A blog post of only three or four paragraphs even feels out of reach". Efficiency and speed ends up coming before all else, which does not seem to be the best way to consume information. Especially when it comes to difficult subjects with many sides. The New York Times even started writing abstracts to their articles for skimmers who can't be bothered to read the full thing.

"For all that's been written about the Net, there's been little consideration of how, exactly, it's reprogramming us. The Net's intellectual ethic remains obscure." Algorithms are shaping our brains by deciding what we view, when we view it, and the frequency in which we're stimulated by certain media. Socrates bemoaned the development of writing. He feared that, as people came to rely on the written word as a substitute for the knowledge they used to carry inside their heads, they would, in the words of one of the dialogue's characters, "cease to exercise their memory and

become forgetful.” It’s been worried that with the internet, we “risk turning into “‘pancake people’ — spread wide and thin as we connect with that vast network of information accessed by the mere touch of a button”. Personally I can understand the worry and the concern, because it’s absolutely impossible to meet people in daily life who’s brains are not plugged into the world wide web. It would be hard to study the long term effects of the internet’s effects on humanity because it would be next to impossible to find study participants who are internet-virgins. But as time goes on, the world will always be changing, and newer technologies will always disrupt the status quo. Who knows which piece of tech will revolutionize our lives (and our brain’s thought patterns) next.