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# COGNITIVE DECAY IN THE POST-DIGITAL ERA

*An Analysis of Semantic Saturation and the “Brainrot” Phenomenon*

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**Abstract:** In Internet culture, the term brain rot (also *brainrot* or *brain-rot*) describes digital media deemed to be of low quality or value. The term also more broadly refers to the harmful effects associated with excessive or disordered use of digital media, especially short-form entertainment and *doomscrolling*. Popularized by *Generation Z* and *Generation Alpha* social media users, the term has since entered mainstream usage.

## I. Introduction

Mario, the Idea vs. Mario, the Man. Everyone knows Mario is ~~eeool as fuck~~. But who knows what he's thinking? Who knows why he crushes turtles? And why do we think about him as fondly as we think of the mythical (nonexistent?) Dr Pepper? ~~Perehancee~~.

I believe it was Kant who said “Experience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play.” Mario exhibits experience by crushing tarts all day, but he exhibits theory by stating “Lets-a go! Keep it up, baby!”

When Mario leaves his place of safety to stomp a tart, he knows that he may Die. And yet, for a man who can purchase lives with money, a life becomes a mere store of value. A tax that can be paid for, much as a rich man feels any law with a fine is a price. We think of Mario as a hero, but he is simply a one percenter of a more privileged variety. The lifekind. ~~Perehancee~~.

## II. The Linguistic Anomaly

According to Oxford University Press, the first recorded use of the term brain rot traces back to the 183 book *Walden* by Henry David

*Thoreau*. In that book, Thoreau reflected on materialism and argued that a tendency to prefer trivial ideas could weaken the mind, a harbinger for how the term would come to be used to describe the effects of disordered use of digital content. Thoreau was criticizing what he saw as a decline in intellectual standards, comparing it to the 1840s “potato rot” in Europe.



*Figure 1. Potato rot in Europe*

## III. Tung Tung Tung Sahur

Tung Tung Tung Sahur (properly *Tung Tung Tung Tung Tung Tung Tung Tung Sahur*) is an Indonesian Brainrot character published on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, 2025. Tung Tung Tung Sahur is an anthropomorphic wooden kentongan drum who wields a baseball bat as a weapon.

According to the sound, if you are called for Suhur (also spelt as “*Sahur*”, in which Suhur is an early breakfast in Ramadan) and do not respond/eat during Suhur, then “*Tung Tung Tung Sahur*” will come for you.



Figure 2. *Tung Tung Tung Sahur*

The character is often cited as the strongest character in the entire universe. This aura comes from the powerful bat it wields and its supernatural abilities (appearing as a scary anomaly). Along with simply hitting its opponents with its weapon, it is also famously known for being able to transform into a more powerful form – a giant wooden gorilla. Thanks to this transformation ability, it is very hard for opponents to win against him.

#### IV. Tralalero Tralala

Tralalero Tralala, sometimes spelled *Tralalelo Tralala*, is the first and one of the most popular Italian brainrot characters.

He has the appearance of a blue shark, with its elongated side fins that create legs. On his three feet, he wears blue Nike shoes. He appears in a beach setting, with sea waves and seagulls in the background. The original video with Tralalero Tralala also includes a repeated explosion effect.

Despite being a shark, Tralalero Tralala is rarely seen using his jaws — he instead often stands up on his back legs and starts punching the opponent with boxing gloves (since the videos are AI generated, logic of movement doesn't have to apply, and body parts are often added or removed from characters during the battle).

Generally, Tralalero Tralala appears weak compared to some other popular/powerful characters, due to his lack of powerful attributes

and more focus on cool than strength. However, due to his popularity, he has been given special powers such as being able to jump very high and super strong kicks, and thus he often wins in matchups that would seem unfavorable. He can attack other characters with his red boxing gloves.

Since its release, Tralalero Tralala has become immensely popular, being the second most popular Italian Brainrot character and causing the trend to become mainstream. He sits among the fan-favourites of the Italian Brainrot universe and is often seen as the main character.

As the meme spread rapidly in early 2025, it sparked some controversy among viewers due to containing blasphemy against Christianity and Islam in its voiceover. Some have also labeled the entire audio as vulgar and offensive. This in effect caused backlash against brands such as KFC for using the meme in promotional material, being accused of Islamophobia.



Figure 3. *Tralalero Tralala*

#### V. Six Seven (6-7)

6-7 (pronounced "six seven"; also written as 67, 6 7, and 6, 7) is an Internet meme and slang term that emerged in 2025 on TikTok and Instagram Reels. It has no fixed meaning.

The phrase originated from the song "Doot Doot (6 7)" by Skrilla, which became popular in video edits featuring professional basketball players, especially LaMelo Ball, who is listed at 6 ft 7 in (2.01 meters) tall. The meme was further popularized through Overtime Elite player Taylen "TK" Kinney's repeated use of the

meme. In March 2025, a boy named Maverick Trevillian became known as the "67 Kid" after a viral video showed him yelling the term at a basketball game while performing an excited hand gesture.

Multiple news outlets have linked the meme to the wider "brain rot" phenomenon—digital media deemed to be poor quality. Some commentators also see it as evidence of Generation Alpha's growing presence in Internet culture.



*Figure 4. 6-7 carved in pumpkin*

The slang originated from the drill rap song "Doot Doot (6 7)", in which American rapper Skrilla raps, "... I know he dyin' (oh my, oh my God) 6-7, I just bopped right on the highway (Bip, bip)" as the beat drops.

The meaning of the number in the song remains ambiguous: some have connected it to 67th Street in Skrilla's hometown of Philadelphia, or to 67th Street in Chicago. Linguist and African-American English expert Taylor Jones has speculated that it may refer to "10-67", the police radio code used to notify of a death. This aligns with the previous lines' descriptions of gun violence and his interpretation that the line depicts the narrator playing innocent during a traffic stop. Skrilla himself has stated, "I never put an actual meaning on it and I still would not want to."

Multiple news outlets, such as Business Insider, have attributed the meme to the wider phenomenon of "brain rot" — the spread of digital media considered to be poor quality. Many viewed the meme as a sign of increasing involvement of Generation Alpha in Internet culture.

## VI. Conclusion

Brain rot is caused by excessive technology use. That might mean binge-watching videos on YouTube, scrolling social media, or switching back and forth among various browser tabs. On top of that, you might be simultaneously surfing the Internet, texting, and checking your email. The end result: You're overstimulating your brain. And when you're digitally inundating yourself with too much information, you're at risk of brain rot.

Scrolling through social media platforms spikes the neurochemical dopamine, which produces feelings of satisfaction and pleasure. The more you do it, the more you want to do it. Your brain associates scrolling with a feeling of gratification, even when you're aware of its negative consequences. In this way, scrolling can become a behavioral addiction.

On the surface, spending a lot of time on your smartphone or in front of a computer may seem harmless. Over the long term, however, brain rot behavior can damage your well-being mentally and emotionally.

Activities like doomscrolling affect the brain's reward system. That's because humans tend to prioritize and remember negative information more than positive. So landing on another distressing piece of news prompts the search for more disheartening information.

## VII. References

Mario, the Idea vs, Mario, the Man (TheLast95, 2023):

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