Adapting to Survive the Internet

Over the last few years many prominent writers and thinkers have publicly argued that Google and the Internet, in general, negatively affect our attention span and are a detriment to our intelligence. In his article “Is Google Making Us Stupid,” Nicholas Carr explores the negative impacts of the Internet by posing his titular question. The problem with Carr’s discussion is that the question that he poses is limiting. In fact, the question is not whether Google or the Internet is making us more or less intelligent; instead, the question that we should focus on is: how is the Internet shaping a new approach to interpreting information?

Traditionally, information has been consumed through texts (i.e. written discourse). However, as the Internet has become the primary means of information consumption, we have to change our definition of texts. They are no longer written words in a book or a pencil meeting paper; instead, information is YouTube videos, blogs, Tweets and complex social networks, advertisements, and interactive multi-media articles. Because information has fundamentally changed, the way that we use and consume information has changed too.

Today, technology is created to make life more efficient and instant. Being in the “411” and keeping up in the social world is a shared goal among people, and in order to keep up with new information given out by technology, humans have to adapt to its rapid expansion. Essentially, the Internet works with the brain in the same way an external hard drive serves a computer. People use their brains—or RAM—to focus on the ability to solve problems and comprehend situations, but Google or the Internet act as a database or external hard drive for all the world’s information. Our brains have rewired themselves to keep up with the constant stream of data and information with which we interface on a daily basis.

The reason our brains can rewire themselves in order to keep up with the changes in technology is because of our evolutionary ability to adapt to survive. Unlike other species of the Earth—giraffes with elongated necks or cheetahs with physical camouflage—the primary traits of human evolution are a more advanced intellect and the ability to reason. This combination has yielded the potential for conscientious adaptation. The only difference in this case is that we are not adapting to survive a physical crisis but an intellectual change. Each collective adaptation advanced human civilization, and without changing the way that we recorded and accessed information, the human race would not be able to further itself. This next step in human progress is the result of utilizing our limited capacity for memory or knowledge by generating an external system, thus allowing us to draw upon a vast reservoir of knowledge that is constantly at our disposal. Essentially, Carr is correct. Our brain is changing. But those changes are necessary to advance as a civilization.