Stupid or Different?

How humans process information constantly evolves. Because of this adaptability, people always think of new ways to learn and satisfy their curiosity. These newfound learning methods cause a difference in how we process information. Each new era comes with innovation that some believe hinders human intelligence. An innovation of this era is Google. Nicholas Carr believes that Google causes a decrease in human intelligence. This is not true, because the change that Google causes in our thought processes is not explicitly negative. In his essay, “Does Google Make Us Stupid?” Carr makes two points which we find questionable, the first being his belief that time spent online is less valuable than that spent reading or in quiet contemplation, and second, his refusal to see the long term benefits of Google.

Carr’s idea that time spent on the internet is not valuable is the argument he attempts to make towards the end of his essay. He states, “If we lose those quiet spaces, or fill them up with ‘content’, we will sacrifice something important not only in ourselves but in our culture.” This notion of only useless content being available on the internet is ludicrous. Deep thinking is not achieved simply through reading off a page, but by analyzing information for a more complex meaning. This can be done through any medium, be it books or computers. We do not lose our culture or ourselves by expanding our knowledge through online sources; we simply expose ourselves to new ideas in order to construct an informed opinion. This exposure to a vast supply of new material changes our processing abilities and allows us to absorb huge amounts of information in a timely manner.

Nicholas Carr perceives the short-term effects of using Google as making us stupid, while we see people being able to process new information efficiently and on a large scale as a positive impact, benefitting and supplementing each individual’s knowledge. Carr acknowledges that Socrates was shortsighted, yet does not recognize his own failings in this aspect when he states, “Socrates wasn’t wrong—the new technology did often have the effects he feared—but he was shortsighted. He couldn’t foresee the many ways that writing and reading would serve to spread information, spur fresh ideas, and expand human knowledge (if not wisdom).” Both Carr and Socrates see new technology as a crutch for already existing learning capabilities, yet both do not see the long-term positive effects such as an increase in curiosity, broadening of perspective, and a slew of new ideas.

In summary, Nicholas Carr makes a valid point; we should not blindly follow each new technological advance without first considering its downfalls. However, his argument falls short in that he does not consider the value of information gained on the internet and does not acknowledge long-term benefits of having access to Google. While Google does change the way that we interact with others and gather information, this change is not decidedly negative. Additionally, our use of Google does not decrease our intelligence, but broadens our horizons. For these reasons, we conclude that Google makes us different from previous generations, but it does not make us stupid.