The Internet: An Intellectual Environment

Technology has always attempted to make work more efficient. However, concerns exist regarding the effect of technology mentally. In his essay*, Is Google Making Us Stupid*, Nicholas Carr warns readers that computer oriented presentation of information online will cause people to think like machines and not human beings, and our intelligence will suffer. However, in order to gauge the internet’s effect on intelligence, a thoughtful definition of intelligence must be established. Carr references a study showing people skim articles instead of consuming entire sources. By discussing this phenomenon, Carr indicates he considers concentration central to thought. While his discussion involves aspects of cognition, his definition lacks thoroughness. He considers time spent contemplating as being pertinent to intellect, but he does not consider other aspects of intelligence. When we ask how interaction online impacts not only the time considering ideas but how we acquire, pursue, use, and share information, we learn that Carr’s conclusion is incomplete and leaves room for exploration.

The Internet holds copious information about a myriad of subjects, and services like Google make this data more accessible than ever. Google irreconcilably changed how we acquire information. Learning languages, discovering poetry, compounding math skills, and understanding financial strategies are all made possible through the web. Newspapers and magazines from all perspectives are offered, increasing diversity of ideas. In this way, free debate ensues and clarifies stronger positions. By seeking and developing understanding of interesting topics, the internet promotes intellectual activity.

Creativity and problem solving are championed online. Instead of reading a book and accepting a singular authority, choosing between many excellent search results requires one to critically consider the issue and develop their own opinion. And because not all results are infallible, people must ask themselves what makes a good source. This analysis of information exercises the mind in a way that a book simply can’t provide. Another wonderful way the internet encourages creativity and problem solving is online curriculums and college. If someone is unable to attend a traditional college for any number of reasons, the Internet allows them to study their passion, connect with like-minded peers, and receive instruction from professors on terms that they can handle. The novel solutions to difficult problems made possible by the internet further engage our intelligence.

Educational opportunity has been expanded by the Internet. Companies like Google provide free services like Google Drive and Google Classroom, designed to assist students and teachers in reaching their educational goals. These programs are especially noteworthy because they transcend privilege in that the lowest income child can access just as readily the resources as advantaged students. And unlike other services meant to benefit the disadvantaged, the quality of the product is evident because scores of wealthy students choose to use the same free resources. Because Google’s free services offer opportunities for intellectual growth without privilege, the greater public has a chance for increased educational success.

Ultimately, the internet is the greatest information network ever. It allows people to acquire, pursue, use, and share information faster and more efficiently than ever before. A thoughtful definition of intelligence deals with how we handle information. The Internet, like any innovation, is certainly imperfect. But because it allows us to imagine information in valuable, novel capacities, the Internet is the greatest stimulant of intellectual activity ever.