



## Script: Effect of Internet on Our Brains

So you are reading an article online when you get an instant message with a link to a funny photo, which of course you have to share, and now you're reading your Facebook news wall which sends you to a video of a panda bear attacking a kid and now you're on Wikipedia reading everything you can about the violent behavior of panda bears. And this is what three minutes on the Internet can be like. We live like this all the time and it has to have some kind of effect on us.

"The net is making us more superficial as thinkers"

That is Nicholas Carr, the author of *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. To understand this whole thing better we need to go back in time, to say like, the prehistoric age.

"You wanted to know everything that was going on around you, because the more you knew about your surroundings, the less likely you were to get attacked by a predator. And there is even evidence that our brains release some dopamine – a pleasure producing neurotransmitter chemical – to reward us for finding out new information."

So getting distracted felt good and helped us stay alive. The problem is that now-a-days predators aren't much of an issue. But we still have the same brains, and also there's the internet. Which is:

"It's an incredibly information-rich environment that the net creates for us and that's why we use it so much. I mean the sounds, pictures, words, text. And what this tends to do is promote a sort of compulsive behavior which we're constantly checking our smart phone, constantly glancing at our email in-box. We're kind of living in the perpetual state of distraction and interruption."

And this is dangerous because:

"That mode of thinking **drowns out** the more contemplative, calmer **modes of** thinking."

And that focused calm thinking is actually how we learn. It's a process called memory consolidation.

"And that means the transfer of information from short term working memory to our long-term memory. And it's through moving information from your working memory to your long-term memory that you create connections between that information and everything else you know."

So you've got this awesome life-changing piece of information in your short-term memory, but then you hear that email ding and *poof*, there it goes. That email takes its place and you never get a chance to learn anything. And it's all because of one distraction.

"So attention is the key, and if we lose control of our attention, or are constantly dividing our attention, then we don't really enjoy that consolidation process."

But I can hear it now. Someone out there is saying, "Uh, what does learning matter if all of the information in the world is just a Google search away?" Well...

"Um, that is kind of short-changing our intellects. If that's the way you are using your mind – just kind of searching very quickly and finding information and then forgetting it very quickly – you're never building knowledge. You're simply... you're kind of thinking like a computer."

Which means that our very humanity is at stake. And it would be a shame if we all got assimilated because, well, humanity is pretty neat.

"I really believe that if you look at the great monuments of culture, they come from people who are able to pay attention, who control their mind. And that's what allows us to think in the highest terms: think conceptually, think critically, think in some very creative ways."

And it's this type of thinking that's at risk being eroded one cute cat video at a time. Don't get us wrong. The Internet is good for lots of things and it should be celebrated but the best thing we can do for our minds is to find some time everyday to unplug, calm down and focus on one thing at a time. Your email and those cats will be here when you get back.