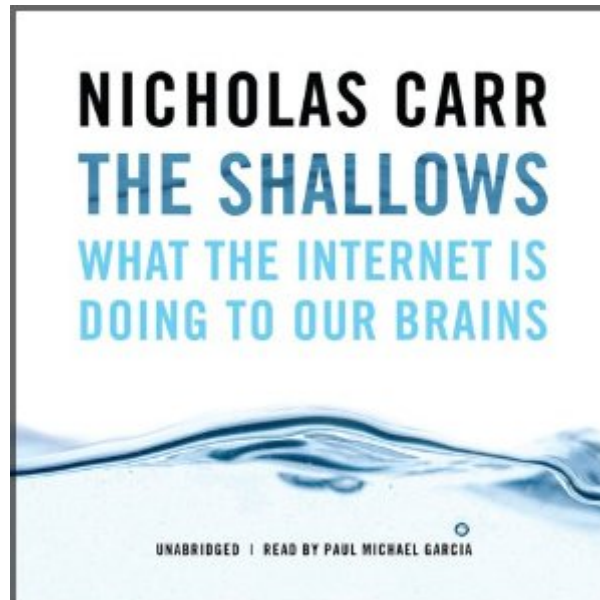


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The Shallows: What The Internet Is Doing To Our Brains



Synopsis

The best-selling author of *The Big Switch* returns with an explosive look at technology's effect on the mind. "Is Google making us stupid?" When Nicholas Carr posed that question in an *Atlantic Monthly* cover story, he tapped into a well of anxiety about how the Internet is changing us. He also crystallized one of the most important debates of our time: as we enjoy the Internet's bounties, are we sacrificing our ability to read and think deeply? Now, Carr expands his argument into the most compelling exploration yet published of the Internet's intellectual and cultural consequences. Weaving insights from philosophy, neuroscience, and history into a rich narrative, *The Shallows* explains how the Internet is rerouting our neural pathways, replacing the subtle mind of the book reader with the distracted mind of the screen watcher. A gripping story of human transformation played out against a backdrop of technological upheaval, *The Shallows* will forever alter the way we think about media and our minds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this short but informative, thought-provoking book, Nicholas Carr presents an argument I've long felt to be true on a humanist level, but supports it with considerable scientific research. In fact, he speaks as a longtime computer enthusiast, one who's come to question what he once wholeheartedly embraced ... and even now, he takes care to distinguish between the beneficial & detrimental aspects of the Internet. The argument in question? - Greater access to knowledge is not the same as greater knowledge. - An ever-increasing plethora of facts & data is not the same as

wisdom.- Breadth of knowledge is not the same as depth of knowledge.- Multitasking is not the same as complexity. The studies that Carr presents are troubling, to say the least. From what has been gleaned to date, it's clear that the brain retains a certain amount of plasticity throughout life -- that is, it can be reshaped, and the way that we think can be reshaped, for good or for ill. Thus, if the brain is trained to respond to & take pleasure in the faster pace of the digital world, it is reshaped to favor that approach to experiencing the world as a whole. More, it comes to crave that experience, as the body increasingly craves more of anything it's trained to respond to pleasurably & positively. The more you use a drug, the more you need to sustain even the basic rush. And where does that leave the mind shaped by deep reading? The mind that immerses itself in the universe of a book, rather than simply looking for a few key phrases & paragraphs? The mind that develops through slow, quiet contemplation, mulling over ideas in their entirety, and growing as a result?

The Internet has made the information- universes of all of us much larger. At the same time it has altered the way we read, and the way we pay attention. The major thesis of this work is that it has made us shallower creatures. In Carr's words, " We want to be interrupted, because each interruption brings us a valuable piece of information... And so we ask the Internet to keep interrupting us, in ever more and different ways. We willingly accept the loss of concentration and focus, the division of our attention and the fragmentation of our thoughts, in return for the wealth of compelling or at least diverting information we receive. Tuning out is not an option many of us would consider. (p. 133-4)" This means in effect that our powers of concentration and contemplation, if not diminished all at once, are nonetheless put less to use. It means that we do not really take in much of what we read and see, but rather let it pass by as something new comes to attract and distract us. It too means according to Carr transformations in actual brain- structure. And he uses the results of cognitive brain studies to point out how excessive use of the Internet reshapes our brain- structure. Carr argues that with the advent of reading humanity developed a different kind of neural structure. Reading which was an extension of story- telling enabled us to begin to speak to ourselves, to contemplate reality in deeper ways. The bookman mind is a deeper mind than the electronic - mind , despite MacLuhan's contrary take. Still one might argue that we need not be the slaves of the predominant technology. It all depends upon the will, decision, determination of the individual. The horde may decide to operate in a certain way, but one has the power to shut the machine off.

When I first came across this book I noticed that a lot of my friends on social media were expressing

disgust or boredom with the thesis of "Is the Internet frying our brain?" After all, who but a curmudgeon would claim that the most vital and transformative technology of our time might have a dark side? Especially at a time when leading edge educators are working furiously to bring their field up to date by incorporating the best of the latest technology in a way that improves education. Against this background Carr's book seems reminiscent of those poor backward folks who opposed the printing press. As the brilliant and funny curmudgeon Neil Postman once said about himself, Carr is indeed playing the role of the Luddite in some ways. Still, neither Postman nor Carr were trying to dismantle the Internet or just shriek an alarm with their work. They are trying to help us understand something important. With that in mind, let's take a more careful look at this book. *The Shallows* is a thoroughly and broadly researched and beautifully written polemic which I found to represent two different things. First, it is a media analysis and culture critique. Second it is a pessimistic theory about the overall effect of web media on our thinking ability over time. The first aspect will be a delight for those interested in the evolution of human cognition, those fascinated with media effects per se, the traditionally minded book scholars, and assorted geezers. It is a very satisfying cultural media critique very much in the spirit of Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman even though it lacks McLuhan's showmanship or Postman's remarkable ever-present humor.

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