Kesha Williams

Professor Schultz

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“Is Google Making Us Stupid?”

In the article, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” Nicholas Carr explains that many individuals, including himself, are experiencing the issue of inhibited reading and interpretation of information due to the extended use of the internet. The article starts off by explaining how useful the internet is for a writer and gives examples of the other miscellaneous uses it has but in turn explains how it is able to chip away at an individual’s thought processes. With the author’s comprehensive use of logos and ethos, it can be concluded that the article, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” effectively argues and proves his claim.

The article starts off by pulling quotes from Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. In this scene the super computer HAL pleads with Dave Bowman, an astronaut that was nearly killed by the super computer. As Bowman is disconnecting the memory circuits to HAL’s “brain,” HAL says, “Dave, my mind is going. I can feel it. I can feel it.” Afterwards, the author states, “I can feel it too.” By using this scene, he pulls in audiences with this unexpected reference to a famous movie in the effort to give a feel of familiarity to the issue at hand and reinforces it by stating that he has a similar feeling despite being under different circumstances.

The author then explains his problem more in depth. He can tell that his ways of thinking are changing but his issues are most prominent when he is reading. He makes this concept easy for the reader to understand by providing examples of how much reading is too much for him and how long he is able to concentrate. Soon after, he touches upon the topic of the internet. In a way, he applauds how versatile and extensive the internet is and claims that it is a “godsend” to him as a writer. He understands that since the internet is becoming a universal medium, it is a conduit for most of the information that flows through his eyes and ears and into his mind. However, it is as Marshall McLuhan, a media theorist, says: “media are not just passive channels of information. They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought.” While keeping this in mind, the author verifies this statement explaining how the internet is chipping away at his capacity for concentration and contemplation, and stating that his mind has changed and now expects to take in information in a swiftly moving stream of particles, just as it would through the net.

From this paragraph, a claim of value can be found. The reasoning behind why someone would care about this issue is expressed at various points in the text. Seeing as how the internet has intertwined itself into everyday life, it is a given that this issue can affect anybody. With something endangering the welfare of one’s essential reading and comprehension ability, it would be in his or her best interest to be aware of this potential danger.

In the effort to further support his claim, he refers to some acquaintances for their take on this issue. Just like the author, they feel that the more that they use the web, the more difficult it gets to stay focused on long pieces of writing. The author also refers to a pair of bloggers that he follows that are experiencing similar issues. Scott Karp is a blogger that writes about online media. He expresses how his drive for reading literature as faltered considerably due to the use of the internet. In the curiosity of why this is so, Scott speculates that maybe it’s not because the way that he reads has changed, but simply the way that he thinks has changed. The other reference the author uses is named Bruce Friedman. He is a blogger that regularly blogs about the use of computers and medicine. Also in agreement with the author, Bruce states that, “I now have almost totally lost the ability to read and absorb a longish article on the web or in print.”

This is another example of claims of value. The answer to the question of “who else cares about this issue” is pretty straight forward. These two bloggers expressed their qualms about the issue and thus became part of the number affected. In addition to this, the author uses ethos to support his views. Each of these individuals have extensive literary backgrounds and through that, it give the article an air of authenticity. The audience would see this and would begin trust the credibility of the article and its contents.

Further along in the article, the author refers to a recently published study of online research habits that was conducted by scholars from University College London. Through the use of this research data, the author was further able to support his claim. The research data stated: “It is clear that users are not reading online in the traditional sense; indeed there are signs that new forms of “reading” are emerging as users “power browse” horizontally through titles, contents pages and abstracts going for quick wins. It almost seems that they go online to avoid reading in a traditional sense.” The use of this research data is a powerful means of persuasion. The audience would view this evidence, and in turn, the thought of the internet changing the way their minds work would solidify.

Mary-anne Wolf, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University and the author of *Proust and the squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, states that, “we are not only what we read, we are how we read.” She goes on to say that a reading style that puts “efficiency” and “immediacy” above all else is a style that is promoted by the net. Wolf goes on to say that unlike speech, reading is not an instinctive skill of human beings. People have to teach their minds to translate symbolic characters into the language we understand. By placing this information toward the end of the article, it shows that the author kept in mind that the audience was waiting for some form of an explanation for this issue instead of speculation. This final form of ethos has supported the author’s claim as the article starts coming to a close.

At the end of the article, the author uses an example of a man named Friedrich Nietzsche. This individual was an avid writer but unfortunately, his vision was failing. Being that it was 1882, Friedrich bought a typewriter in an effort to continue his passion, and for a while, it helped him. One of Friedrich’s friends noticed that his works have had a subtle change. His already terse prose had become even tighter. The author uses this example to show that even people before the internet were experiencing similar issues. This also supports Wolf’s claim that the media or other technologies we use in learning or practicing reading play an important role in shaping the neural circuits inside the brain.

As I read through the article, the meaning of it really hit me. Just as the author explains that our way of thinking is being changed, I feel like I am a prime example for this issue. Because my mind wandered, I had to reread many times before I understood everything completely. It is just like Claire Handscombe, an avid reader, says. “It’s like your eyes are passing over the words but you’re not taking in what they say” (Rosenwald). However, my case would be slightly different due to the author and me being from two totally different generations. From what the author writes, I can assume that he is an older man that grew up using library books in order to conduct research, opposed to the newer generation’s way of using the internet. A time hasn’t gone by that I haven’t seen a child with a phone or tablet and surprisingly this use isn’t limited to their homes. According to Children’s Literature, “Some schools are using digital readers and e-books for conducting research” (Ward). Through knowing this, I feel like this entire article is more so aimed at an older audience that are experiencing this change, instead of individuals that grew up using these technologies for reading and writing. In spite of this, I feel like the author argued and supported his claim well. The examples he provided from other individuals as well as the research done by scholars from University College London were a good way to provide some understanding of the issue. It was also interesting to read what Mary-anne Wolf said about how our minds work. In a way, I knew that reading wasn’t an instinctive skill, but it was nice to see that I wasn’t wrong. As for the example of Friedrich Nietzsche, I found it to be a good way to show that this issue isn’t limited to this day and time. This problem has been going on for a very long time but I don’t think that there really is a solution for it. Seeing how this is a problem of how we read, we can blame the internet all we want but it is not a realistic solution to cut somebody off from it. I believe that we will continue to read this way because the internet will grasp onto everything we do with a never ending embrace.

Works Cited

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