

New Brain Disorder Born Out of the Digital Age

It's hard to remember what life was like before we had the internet at our fingertips, smartphones in our pockets, and a laptop on every desk. Today, our brains are racing to adapt to the digital age. Cognitive neuroscientists say all that time we now spend in front of screens has changed the way we read and comprehend. Internet browsing has shortened both our attention spans and our patience. And it's doing a number on our memories.

In one recent study, researchers asked people a series of trivia questions. Half the group was allowed to use Google, the other half was not. Then, in the second half of the study, all participants were given a new round of easier questions and told they could choose whether or not to use Google to answer them. Sounds pretty standard, right? But those who used the internet in the first round really struggled to answer any questions in the second round while relying solely on their own knowledge and memories. One-third of them didn't even try, reaching for Google immediately.

"Whereas before we might have tried to recall something on our own, now we don't bother," says lead author Dr. Benjamin Storm. "As more information becomes available via smartphones and other devices, we become progressively more reliant on it in our daily lives."

Of course, the internet has done a lot of good for the world. But considering these revelations, it's worth highlighting one of the more recent disorders that experts blame on our digital obsession.

Nomophobia

Some people are afraid of spiders. Others, heights. Or maybe you're unreasonably fearful of clowns. The list of phobias is long, and researchers recently added one more: In 2012, the world learned of "No-Mobile Phobia" or "nomophobia" — the feeling of panic one has upon being separated from one's phone or tablet. In one U.K. survey, 73 percent of respondents felt panic when they misplaced their phone. And for another 14 percent, that panic spiraled into pure desperation.

But the research into this new fear is so new, it's hard to say conclusively whether nomophobia is good or bad for our long-term health. "Maybe the nomophobic have higher quality relationships," Piercarlo Valdesolo speculates at Scientific American. "Maybe the nomophobic have greater life satisfaction. Maybe they have more successful professional lives. Or maybe I should admit this is wishful thinking and try to detach from my device for a while."

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AOW Response

Write a one-paragraph response to the article. This response is YOUR opinion, but it MUST respond to something stated in the article, and it MUST be based on facts and sound reasoning.

Ideas for how to respond: 1) **DISAGREE** with something (cell phones are in way damaging to us or our brains), 2) **AGREE** with something and provide additional reasoning (our brains are definitely shaped by using cell phones), 3) write a **DEFINITION** (maybe you have another way of explaining how cell phones influence us), or 4) **SHARE** a personal experience and how it shaped your thinking on the issue.

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