

Is the internet making us stupid?

Reading online could be making us dumber, a University of Victoria study has found.

The study of offline and online reading behaviour found spending hours glued to a computer screen had a negative impact on cognition, concentration, comprehension, absorption and recall rates.

People were reading more text than ever, but retaining less of it.

Victoria's School of Information Management's Dr Val Hooper said people today almost expected to be interrupted when using their computers.

"Multitasking when reading online was common, with activities such as reading emails, checking news, exploring hyperlinks and viewing video clips providing distractions, which could have something to do with it."

While readers were churning through more content online, they were much more likely to be skim reading and scanning than absorbing anything of substance.

"Many respondents said they had learnt to read faster and more selectively, which is positive, but also said they were more likely to remember material they had read offline. It was still common practice for many people to print out material they considered most important," Dr Hooper said.

The research revealed readers were motivated by three main reasons - seeking information, reading for work or study, and for pleasure.

People still read in a linear, print-based way but it was important for us to learn how to read and write "digitally" to best interpret the way much of today's information is structured.

"If you think about how we're training our children to read, they're being trained by those who were trained in the linear fashion. So it will take at least a generation for significant change to happen," Dr Hooper said.

"As educators I think it makes sense to look at getting messages across in ways in which readers expect to receive it now, rather than how it was given in the past. Long chunks of text aren't exactly going to appeal to today's students."

Source; http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=11292444