

People are reading more text than ever but recalling less, according to study

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The study *Is Google Making Us Stupid? The Impact of the Internet on Reading Behaviour*, by Dr Val Hooper, an associate professor in Victoria's School of Information Management and Master's student Channa Herath, explored the online and offline reading behaviour of individuals.

In general, online reading was found to have a negative impact on people's cognition. Concentration, comprehension, absorption and recall

rates when engaging with online material were all much lower.

"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," says Dr Hooper. "People almost expect to be interrupted when they're on their computers."

Skim reading and scanning was the most common online reading behaviour of respondents, and as a result people were getting through more material.

"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."

The three main reasons for reading that were mentioned included information seeking, commitments either for work or study, and pleasure, with people preferring to read books, magazines or e-readers for pleasure.

"The research indicates that we still read in a linear, print-based fashion. However, the structure of much of what we are reading is inappropriate for the way in which we're receiving information now. We need to learn how to read and write 'digitally', as well as how to effectively interpret and retain information we read online.

"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.

"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."

Provided by Victoria University

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