

Access to the Internet makes us less willing to say we know things

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Credit: George Hodan/Public Domain

People are less willing to rely on their knowledge and say they know something when they have access to the Internet, suggesting that our connection to the web is affecting how we think.

Professor Evan F. Risko, of the Department of Psychology at the University of Waterloo, led a recent study where the team asked about

100 [participants](#) a series of general-knowledge questions, such as naming the capital of France. Participants indicated if they knew the answer or not. For half of the study, participants had access to the Internet. They had to look up the answer when they responded that they did not know the answer. In the other half of the study, participants did not have access to the Internet.

The team found that the people who had access to the web were about 5 per cent more likely to say that they did not know the answer to the question. Furthermore, in some contexts, the people with access to the Internet reported feeling as though they knew less compared to the people without access.

"With the ubiquity of the Internet, we are almost constantly connected to large amounts of information. And when that data is within reach, people seem less likely to rely on their own knowledge," said Professor Risko, Canada Research Chair in Embodied and Embedded Cognition.

In interpreting the results, the researchers speculated that access to the Internet might make it less acceptable to say you know something but are incorrect. It is also possible that participants were more likely to say they didn't know an answer when they had access to the web because online searching offers an opportunity to confirm their answer or resolve their curiosity, and the process of finding out is rewarding.

"Our results suggest that access to the Internet affects the decisions we make about what we know and don't know," said Risko. "We hope this research contributes to our growing understanding of how easy access to massive amounts of information can influence our thinking and behaviour."

David McLean and Amanda Ferguson, research assistants, are co-authors of the study, which appears in the journal, *Consciousness and Cognition*.

Professor Risko plans to further the research in this area by investigating the factors that lead to individuals' reduced willingness to respond when they have access to the [web](#).

More information: *Consciousness and Cognition*,
[www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ... ii/S1053810015300234](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../ii/S1053810015300234)

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