



# The Digital Divide: Arguments for and Against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking

*Mark Bauerlein*

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## **The Digital Divide: Arguments for and Against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking** Mark Bauerlein

This definitive work on the perils and promise of the social-media revolution collects writings by today's best thinkers and cultural commentators, with an all-new introduction by Bauerlein.

Twitter, Facebook, e-publishing, blogs, distance-learning and other social media raise some of the most divisive cultural questions of our time. Some see the technological breakthroughs we live with as hopeful and democratic new steps in education, information gathering, and human progress. But others are deeply concerned by the eroding of civility online, declining reading habits, withering attention spans, and the treacherous effects of 24/7 peer pressure on our young.

With *The Dumbest Generation*, Mark Bauerlein emerged as the foremost voice against the development of an overwhelming digital social culture. But *The Digital Divide* doesn't take sides. Framing the discussion so that leading voices from across the spectrum, supporters and detractors alike, have the opportunity to weigh in on the profound issues raised by the new media - from questions of reading skills and attention span, to cyber-bullying and the digital playground - Bauerlein's new book takes the debate to a higher ground.

The book includes essays by Steven Johnson, Nicholas Carr, Don Tapscott, Douglas Rushkoff, Maggie Jackson, Clay Shirky, Todd Gitlin, and many more. Though these pieces have been previously published, the organization of *The Digital Divide* gives them freshness and new relevancy, making them part of a single document readers can use to truly get a handle on online privacy, the perils of a plugged-in childhood, and other technology-related hot topics.

Rather than dividing the book into "pro" and "con" sections, the essays are arranged by subject - "The Brain, the Senses," "Learning in and out of the Classroom," "Social and Personal Life," "The Millennials," "The Fate of Culture," and "The Human (and Political) Impact." Bauerlein incorporates a short headnote and a capsule bio about each contributor, as well as relevant contextual information about the source of the selection.

Bauerlein also provides a new introduction that traces the development of the debate, from the initial Digital Age zeal, to a wave of skepticism, and to a third stage of reflection that wavers between criticism and endorsement.

Enthusiasm for the Digital Age has cooled with the passage of time and the piling up of real-life examples that prove the risks of an online-focused culture. However, there is still much debate, comprising thousands of commentaries and hundreds of books, about how these technologies are rewriting our futures. Now, with this timely and definitive volume, readers can finally cut through the clamor, read the the very best writings from each side of *The Digital Divide*, and make more informed decisions about the presence and place of technology in their lives.

## **The Digital Divide: Arguments for and Against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking Details**

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# From Reader Review *The Digital Divide: Arguments for and Against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking* for online ebook

## Jake says

*The Digital Divide* is a concise introduction to a few of the major debates concerning the role that technology plays in shaping various aspects of our lives including everything from how we communicate to the biological structure of our brains. If you are interested in a more in depth review of specific arguments then you might want to look elsewhere. My main problem with the collection is that it is trying to do way too much. Each chapter is a selection from a different author's work and at times the whole thing feels more like a series of short advertisements for each one. For a more well researched (but still highly accessible) book on technology in society, check out *The Shallows* by Nicholas Carr.

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## Melanie says

While the arguments for and against our increasingly digital lives aren't new, having them in the same compendium provokes some reflection. As a collection - essays, chapters, excerpts, columns - there is also the benefit of different authors writing at different times. My favorite is the claim in one piece that people will not use their cell phones to buy content. Hah!

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## Stephen says

For those who often think about the way the internet has transformed every aspect of our society -- our daily social interactions, the ways we shop and work, etc -- *The Digital Divide* presents an anthology of writing on that very subject ranging from the 1990s until 2011. These pieces include excerpts from books (*Digital Natives* or *The Cult of the Amateur*, for instance) as well as previously published articles. Nicholas Carr's "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" appears in that category. The material curated here is chosen to represent different aspects of the argument about digital technology and society. A piece on how our immersion in the world of digital device multitasking rewires our brain to make us more efficient is followed by an article commenting on the negative aspects of a brain in perpetual overdrive: chronic, low-grade stress and general inefficiency from the constant breaks in attention. Many parts of the book are dated, but remain valuable nonetheless. For instance, articles penned in the 1990s lamenting how the invasion of the Internet by the common market had made it much more sterile and boring are interesting in the picture they paint of the young network, then a plaything of researchers and techies. (The author of that piece, Douglas Rushkoff, remains a "It's popular and now it sucks" kind of fellow, snarling about the growth of e-commerce while simultaneously praising Yahoo and Blogger for allowing people to produce content and communicate with one another. This is especially amusing when he maintains -- in the same article - -that the internet can't be institutionalized...it has its own mind and people, like, do what they want with it, man. (Things like...buying and selling?) Other points are more enduring, like the the plasticity of the brain. By far the most interesting article in the book for me was a piece on Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, originally published in *Reason* magazine; in that interview, Wales reveals how inspired he was by the writings of F.A. Hayek, particularly

on emergent order.

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### **Joy H. says**

Added 1/24/15.

A good book to skim (through the parts which interest me), even if I haven't got the stamina to read the whole thing. Better yet, perhaps an audio version would help as well.

See Jim's review at: <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

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### **Leanne says**

Many of the essays in this book seem to come from the perspective of an older person puzzling over "kids these days". I find myself arguing with the authors in my mind. Why is it obvious that we should use new educational technologies to better teach the same curriculum as before? Why is it clear that offline ways of interacting are superior and "better for you"? Or conversely, that online communication methods are inherently better? Most of this book is made up of age stereotypes, with a few dubious studies thrown in (which grossly overreach in their conclusions). It's not very interesting and doesn't really help us answer the important questions. A troubling lack of imagination applied to an interesting topic.

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### **Amy Stilgenbauer says**

It's hard for me to review this book because I came at it expecting something different than what I got. I should know better than to judge based on title, but I was expecting a book dealing with economic disparity and our media culture. Instead, I got a fairly basic (to me as someone with a masters in this subject) collection of older literature focused on the different effects of media on the brain and culture. It is not uninteresting and those without much knowledge of the subject may get a lot out of it, but it wasn't for me. Also I think a great deal of it must be taken as historical context at this point. It's sad to consider things written in 2006 outdated, but that's how things are on a field like this.

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### **Shaun says**

An interesting collection of essays on digital and social media. As I was reading, I had the sense that this book was written by people a bit older than me, primarily for the benefit of people a bit older than them, arguing that people a bit younger than me will change the world for the better.

Despite the title, the book is weighted heavily toward the "pro" side, and these essays also tend to be more convincing; Lee Siegel's "con" article, toward the end of the book, is extraordinarily condescending, with Siegel willfully misreading both the language and substance of his opponents' viewpoints in a cranky misfire of a hit piece. There are other problems, though; some of the essays and excerpts are more than ten years old, which is a problem when considering the present and future of a rapidly-evolving system. More than a few reference Friendster as an ongoing concern. Nevertheless, there are some fascinating insights from several

able writers, notably Douglas Rushkoff and Tim O'Reilly. The final two essays in the collection, by William Deresiewicz (which includes a measure of pro and con) and Clay Shirky are thoroughly intriguing and allow the volume to wrap up on a few very thought-provoking notes.

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## **Jim says**

I'm giving it 4 stars because when it came out it was definitely worth it. Now many of the articles are somewhat dated. That made a couple pretty boring, although some of that could just be me. I do read this sort of thing for work & most of these articles are from 2000 - 2008, old for the digital age.

Some were interesting due to their historic value. The discussion on MySpace vs Facebook, how each exemplified Web 2.0 & what they appealed to wasn't as laughable as you might think. MySpace allowed the glitzy home page while Facebook pushed communication. Although the author of the article didn't know it at the time, his point that communication was king won out.

Starting off with a great introduction, the first article is about the divide in education. Students now are cyber natives while they're being taught with old school methods by cyber immigrants. Think of immigrants from another country & the language they speak. Some never pick up the native language, but the kids do quickly. They think & learn differently. Our educational system isn't addressing it well or fast enough. Some are. Example given is a new CADD program, but it had a steep learning curve. Most users were 20 - 30 year old males. The answer was a video game tutorial, a first person shooter.

<http://www.games2train.com/site/html/...>

It worked very well.

This parallels my own experience with learning to touch type. I never could until I found "Word Invaders", a "Space Invaders" knock off. It taught keys for a while & then ran tests of a flying saucer bombing a city with the letters. I had to type them to stop them. I learned to touch type in a very short amount of time.

A lot of good points about how the Internet is changing the way we think. For instance, more immediacy, payoff, & choices which means we don't reflect nor stick to our choices nearly as much. Why read an entire article when a handful of synopsis are available? Have a problem with a vendor's website? Go to a competitor. Research, google the top few hits without significantly changing the search parameters, thus getting only one aspect.

Other research has shown that people that read alphabetic languages use different parts of their brains than do those who read pictographs like the Chinese languages. How we read online is changing how we read entirely. Can you still read an entire article? Many find they have trouble focusing. One even said while they had read War and Peace a decade earlier, they couldn't today, even though they had a degree in English Lit. Their concentration wasn't what it used to be. They read & think differently than they used to.

The takes on Wikipedia were great. Who would have thought that it could be so accurate? Since these articles, more studies have been done & found that it is indeed as accurate as the old encyclopedias & is even better in many ways, although there are caveats, but this doesn't make me sneer at the opinions of the nay-sayers. They have a point about the democratization of news sources - more isn't always better. Vigilante journalism isn't held to any standards nor is it easily kept under control. That can be a very bad thing when it smears innocents as well as a great thing when it outs tyrants.

It was long & might be best done in snippets or even read. Here's the Table of Contents:

Introduction by Mark Bauerlein

The brain, the senses

Digital natives, digital immigrants / Marc Prensky

The internet / Steven Johnson

Learning to think in a digital world / Maryanne Wolf

Learning theory, video games, and popular culture / James Gee

Usability of websites for teenagers / Jakob Nielsen

Is google making us stupid? / Nicholas Carr

Your brain is evolving right now / Gary Small and Gigi Vorgan

Social life, personal life, school

Identity crisis / Sherry Turkle

They call me cyberboy / Douglas Rushkoff

The eight net gen norms / Don Tapscott

Love online / Henry Jenkins

We can't ignore the influence of digital technologies / Cathy Davidson

Virtual friendship and the new narcissism / Christine Rosen

Activists / John Palfrey and Urs Gasser

The fate of culture

Nomadcity / Todd Gitlin

What is web 2.0? / Tim O'Reilly

Web squared : web 2.0 five years on / Tim O'Reilly and John Battelle

Web 2.0 / Andrew Keen

Wikipedia and beyond / Katherine Mangu-Ward

Judgment : of Molly's gaze and Taylor's watch : why more is less in a split-screen

World / Maggie Jackson

A dream come true / Lee Siegel

The end of solitude / William Deresiewicz

Means / Clay Shirky.

Well worth reading.

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## **Ian Forsyth says**

Some good essays, many obvious or boring ones, some are heavily drenched in the slime jargon of marketing.

Good essays include:

Introduction

Is Google Making Us Stupid?

They Call Me Cyberboy

Wikipedia and Beyond

Web 2.0

The End of Solitude

Means

Quotes:

Others have questioned what readers think when they encounter 4,383 comments to a news story and believe that post 4,384 really matters. Is this democratic participation or fruitless vanity?

In the month of April 2003, Americans spent zero minutes on Facebook. In April 2009, they logged 13,872,640,000 minutes.

In Sept 2008, 13-17yr olds with a cellphone averaged 1,742 texts per month. A few months later: 2,272. Mid 2009: passed the 2,500 marker. Oct 2010: 3,339

When the 2009 US National Texting Championship goes to a 15yr old Iowan who honed her craft by averaging 14,000 texts per month, one might laugh or nod in dismay.

Sergey Brin and Larry Page speak frequently of their desire to turn their search engine into an AI, a HAL-like machine that might be connected directly to our brains [first instance of universal access to a "god"?]

Brin: Certainly if you had all the world's information directly attached to yr brain, or an artificial brain that was smarter than your brain, you'd be better off. Page: Google is really trying to build AI and to do it on a large scale.

The last thing companies want to encourage is leisurely reading or slow, concentrated thought. It's in their economic interest to drive us to distraction.

Socrates was so intent on protecting citizens from the seductive opinions of artists and writers that he outlawed them from his imaginary republic.

If Lionel Trilling was right, if the property that grounded the self, in Romanticism, was sincerity, and in modernism it was authenticity, then in postmodernism it is visibility [and in posthumanism it is immortality, multimortality, mutliplicity, multi-virtual-personality interface]

A teen sends 3,000 texts in a month. 100 a day, one every ten waking minutes. She's never alone for more than 10 minutes. Which means she's never alone.

Protestant self-examination becomes Freudian analysis, and the culture hero, once a profit of God and then a poet of Nature, is now a novelist of the self--a Dostoyevsky, a Joyce, a Proust.

It has been said that consumer society wants to condition us to feel bored, since boredom creates a market for stimulation.

The internet is as powerful a machine for the production of loneliness as television is for the manufacture of boredom.

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## **Antonio Gallo says**

Chi non ha un profilo su un social network? Chi usa lo smartphone solo come telefono cellulare ?Chi accende il personal computer, fisso, portatile o tablet che sia, solo per motivi professionali o di studio? Se avessi un pubblico davanti a me, nessuno alzerebbe un dito per rispondere positivamente al mio quesito e anch'io farei altrettanto! Tutti siamo armati di un mezzo che ci catapulta in un mondo che da reale è diventato virtuale, anzi no, un universo che è tanto sociale che spesso si tramuta in qualcosa di patologico.

Basta guardarsi attorno in qualsiasi ambito, locali pubblici, mezzi di trasporto e per strada per realizzare che la gente ha perso l'abitudine di parlare, tutti intenti ad armeggiare con lo smartphone.

Pare che non si possa vivere senza un costante contatto con il mondo virtuale, qualsiasi esso sia e sempre a discapito delle buone chiacchierate tra amici e dei rapporti personali, con il rischio di cadere vittima della sindrome di Hikikomori, termine giapponese dalle parole hiku "tirare" e komoru "ritirarsi" e la cui traduzione letterale è "stare in disparte, isolarsi" recentemente associato anche all'abuso di internet.

Ma questa patologia del Sol Levante non è l'unica, c'è anche il FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out), ovvero la paura di essere emarginati ed al quale sono legati molti utenti dei social network che non vogliono perdersi nulla dei profili dei propri amici, veri o virtuali che siano e temono di essere tagliati fuori da tutto quanto fa



tendenza. Purtroppo c'è anche spazio, tanto cyber spazio per chi vuol farsi veramente male, il Dark Net, una grossa fetta di mondo virtuale, dagli esperti stimata 500 volte più grande rispetto al web, dove è possibile muoversi liberamente nell'illecito, dove pedofili e terroristi trovano un ambiente fertile, che si tramuta in una sorta di mercato nero per trafficanti d'armi e di droga.

Ma come è possibile tutto questo? Uno dei modi più seguiti è quello di accedere alla Dark Net per mezzo di Tor, un software che fa rimbalzare il traffico dati tramite vari sistemi crittografici e che garantisce l'anonimato degli utenti rendendo invisibile l'indirizzo IP del computer.

Sicuramente è inquietante sapere che nel ventunesimo secolo sia possibile muoversi così liberamente in siti altamente pericolosi soprattutto per i giovani, senza che si possa bloccare il traffico da parte degli organi competenti. Il mondo della tripla W ha aperto un universo sconfinato, che comunque bisogna saper dosare con saggezza ed intelligenza per non correre il rischio di cadere nelle maglie di quella che si presenta come una nuova dipendenza e che può avere forti ripercussioni sull'autostima di utenti di qualsiasi età.

Scorrete i file degli scaffali dei libri su GoodReads alla voce "social networking" e vi renderete conto di quanti libri in tutte le lingue si occupano di questo argomento. Il mondo è diventato davvero un "social network" in tutti i suoi aspetti umani, sociali, politici, culturali, religiosi ... Puoi sapere tutto di tutti in maniera immediata se non addirittura prima che gli eventi accadano. In effetti le chat, gli sms, i tweet, le connessioni creano i fatti anticipandoli in "bits & bytes", in una vera e propria ragnatela nella quale chi segue resta imbrigliato senza comprendere bene cosa stia accadendo.

Nel giro di poche ore sono assicurati mutamenti e contraddizioni. La verità non verrà mai acquisita, la post-verità prenderà il suo posto, diventando un "post", la fotografia di un momento destinato ad allungarsi e diluirsi senza fine nel tempo e nello spazio. Ho letto questo libro uscito solo qualche anno fa e mi sono reso conto che molte delle cose che dice sono già obsolete. Tutto è destinato a cambiare perchè ogni cosa è "social", vale a dire mutabile, volatile, liquida. Se e quando tutto questo cambierà non è facile a dirsi. Soprattutto difficile dire come questa "socialità" evolverà ... Chi vivrà, vedrà ...

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## **Jay says**

A historical overview of thought on how the internet, social media, and texting have changed society. While I believed the title referred to haves and have-nots of social media, it actually relates to the generations prior to the internet and the newest generations born in the digital realm. This theme doesn't really carry over throughout the book -- it is much more an overview of the internet age. This is a collection of articles from various book and magazine sources over the past 15 years, mostly between 2004-9. Given the subject of the book, you'd hope that a lot of ink would be used to discuss Facebook, but the bulk of articles pre-date the rise of Facebook, rendering a lot of the content quaint. If you're a reader of Wired or Fast Company, books like "Subliminal" or "The Power of Habit", or if you follow the TED Talk videos, this is quite repetitive. I can see the value for digital-age students who do not have knowledge of the recent past in this regard -- the book appears to be put together for the author's college class. Unfortunately, I found no new ideas or "business value" in this book.

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## **SHUiZMZ says**

This book is not the newest piece of writing on the subject-matter, but the collection of essays proved to be

extremely fascinating. Highly relevant in this day and age, as well. Highly recommended. A good variety of tech savvy luminaries.

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## **Boni Aditya says**

The book is quite impressive, I have read the book on my way to the airport and while waiting in the airport for many hours. The book is a collection of articles from accomplished author and researcher most of them have written multiple books about the subject and the author/editor has done their best to pick the best works of the authors.

The articles are extremely well written, I was quite impressed with the depth and breadth with which these articles are written. The book has definitely added value, i.e. I have learned some mind blowing stuff that will definitely change the way I look at the world and operate in it. For example, I learned from one of the articles that the tools you use actually shape your thoughts. With a better tool at your disposal you start thinking according to the tool! Some of the articles are amazing, but others seemed quite obvious, since I am digital native and knew most of the contents. Thus some articles seemed really boring. One of the articles talks about politics and the internet. The first section of the book added the most value for me followed by the third and then by the second parts, respectively. I loved the article which talks about Socrates' fear, about the written word, that some who could decode the word might consider themselves as possessing the knowledge, i.e. confused equating decoding knowledge as the ability to use that knowledge. This had a phenomenal impact upon me, actionable knowledge as opposed to conversion from text in the book into text in your mind. The same has been done for thousands of years for the Indian Text of knowledge, the Vedas, the Epics, the puranas etc... which were passed on through the word of mouth, and writing was considered inferior. The same was true for Sanskrit, which was considered the language of the gods as opposed to normal local dialects. I was amazed at the knowledge that is passed on through this book. Some of which is not useful to me but others are extremely impactful. The first article talks about the necessity to make education and learning more sticky rather than making it dull.

The talk about Wikipedia and its authors' thoughts was also a huge booster. There are many areas of the book that will act as eye openers. This belongs to a specific genre of Internet Sociology, I wasn't aware of that when I have begun.

Here is a list of books that have been mentioned in this text (I might have missed a few)

Everything bad is good for you Steven Johnson

The ghost map

Mind wide open

Proust and the squid

Social linguistics and literacies

What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy

Designing web usability

Eye tracking web usability

Nicholas Carr's - The Shallows - what the internet is doing to our brains

The big switch rewiring the world from Edison to Google

Techniques and civilization  
Computer power and human reason

The principles of scientific management - Taylor

The memory Bible  
I brain

The longevity Bible  
The naked lady who stood on her head  
The memory prescription

Sherry Terkel  
The second self  
Life on the screen  
Alone together

Douglas rushkoff  
Media virus  
Coercion

Macro wkinomics  
Wkinomics  
Growing up digital  
Grown up digital

Henry jenkins  
Convergence culture  
Fans bloggers and gamers

Revolution and the world  
The future of think

Preaching Eugenics  
My Fundamentalist Education

Access denied - the practice and politics of internet filtering

Born digital

Tod gitlin  
The chosen people's  
The intellectuals and the flag  
Media unlimited  
60s years of hope days of rage

The search - how Google and it's rivals....

The cult of the amateur

Digital vertigo

Distracted the erosion of attention and the coming dark age

Maggie Jackson

Seagull

Falling upwards - essays in the defence of imagination

Not remotely controlled

Against the machine

Here comes everybody

Cognitive surplus

The beauty myth

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## **Lady Jane says**

The Digital Divide is a fascinating collection of essays that analyze, celebrate, and lament the digital world in the dawn of Web 2.0. Even though some of the essays were written over ten years ago and talk about entities that are no longer relevant (Friendster, for example), it is the themes in the essays that resonate and make them timeless.

### **Digital Natives vs. Digital Immigrants**

The book starts off with an introduction of the terms "digital natives" versus "digital immigrants." Folks like me who were born after 1980 are considered the digital natives because we were born into and grew up surrounded by electronics (video games and computers) at home and at school. Everyone else born before that are the digital immigrants." Even those who have adapted still have the "accent"-- which you can see when they print out emails instead of reading them on the computer, or have to call someone on the actual phone.

Marc Prensky says, "Kids born into any new culture learn the new language easily, and forcefully resist using the old. Smart adult immigrants accept that they don't know about their new world and take advantage of their kids to help them learn and integrate. Not-so-smart (or not-so-flexible) immigrants spend most of their time complaining about how good things were in their old country." Just as it is in geographical immigration, digital immigration has its issues and varieties of immigrants, some more pleasant and adaptable than others. It reminded me of how I've heard many older folk complain about the way we do things—we text instead of call, we email instead of visit, we prefer IMing amongst colleagues instead of walking all the way to the person's office. Parents blame gadgets as they complain that kids don't communicate with them often, all while forgetting that gadgets actually allow kids to stay in touch more often. For instance, in decades past married kids wouldn't visit or call their parents more than once a month, and today we are in constant touch thanks to cell phone application and social media.

Whether it's texting, video games Good Reads, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, the world of technology just keeps expanding in its digital imperialism. One of the themes in this book is that the digital age is changing how we learn and interact with others. Since the dawn of civilization, these changes have taken place with

every new discovery—fire, the hammer, the clock, the printing press, television, the computer, the Internet—and humans have adapted every time. “The process of adapting to new intellectual technologies is reflected in the changing metaphors we use to explain ourselves to ourselves. When the mechanical clock arrived, people began thinking of their brains as operating ‘like clockwork.’ Today, in the age of software, we have come to think of them as operating ‘like computers,’” observes Nicholas Carr. This reminds me of the popular “brain in a vat” metaphor frequently recurring in cyberpunk fiction. “But the changes, neuroscience tells us, go much deeper than metaphor. Thanks to our brains plasticity, the adaptation occurs also at a biological level,” explains Carr.

## **The Eight Net Gen Norms**

One of my favorite essays in the collection is “The Eight Net Gen Norms” by Don Tapscott, in which he analyzes digital trends and workplace preferences of our generation, which he refers to as “Net Gen.”

"When my generation first graduated from college, we were grateful for that first job. We hung on to it like a life preserver. But times have changed. Kids see no reason to commit, at least not to the first job. High performers are on their fifth job by the time they are twenty-seven and their average tenure at a job is 2.6 years. They revel in the freedom...

"...The Internet has given them the freedom to choose what to buy, where to work, when to do things like buy a book or talk to friends, and even who they want to be....

"...They prefer flexible hours and compensation that is based on their performance and market value—not based on face time in the office. And they're not afraid to leave a great job if they find another one that offers more money, more challenging work, the chance to travel, or just a change.

"Typical Net Gen shoppers know what they are going to buy before they leave the house. They're already checked out all the choices online, and they are well informed and confident in their decisions—83 percent say they usually know what they want before they go to buy a product. With the proliferation of media, sales channels, product types, and brands, Net Geners use digital technologies to cut through the clutter and find the product that suits their needs.

"The search for freedom is transforming education as well. At their fingertips they have access to much of the world's knowledge. Learning for them should take place where and when they want it. So attending a lecture at a specific time and place, given by a mediocre professor in a room where they are passive recipients, seems oddly old-fashioned, if not completely inappropriate. The same is true for politics. They have grown up with a choice."

I thought this was a most eloquent and accurate description of my generation, at least as it applies to me, my tastes and experiences.

## **Skepticism**

Not all essays in *The Digital Divide* are odes to the Internet and technology. There are quite a few which range from skeptical to outright denunciation. The most outspoken critic is Lee Siegel who disapproves of the way that anyone with anything (or nothing) to say can now say it thanks to the ubiquity and convenience of the “publish” button. Clay Shirky explores the meaning of this by giving readers a short history of the printing press—from the pre-Gutenberg days when it cost excruciating labor and lots of money to hire a scribe to write something by hand, to today when all a writer needs to do is click “publish” to publicize his or her thoughts to millions. Though publishers and the printing press are still in business, “they no longer form

the barrier between private and public writing.” Shirky examines that the reason many people are skeptical of mass self-publishing is because of the old idea that publishing is a serious business. The truth is, the only reason people took it so seriously was because it used to be costly and risky. Without risk and cost quality might suffer, but on the other hand, it opens doors to experimentation and new forms of art.

## **Never Alone**

Which brings me to William Deresiewicz and his essay titled “The End Of Solitude.” His work is an eloquent historical analysis of what solitude and friendship have meant in different time periods. “The great contemporary terror is anonymity. If Lionel Trilling was right, if the property that grounded the self in Romanticism was sincerity, and in modernism it was authenticity, then in postmodernism it is visibility....That is what the contemporary self wants. It wants to be recognized, wants to be connected. It wants to be visible. If not to the millions, on Survivor or Oprah, then to the hundreds, on Twitter or Facebook. This is the quality that validates us; this is how become real to ourselves—by being seen by others.” He argues that though we are never alone more than 10 minutes at a time anymore because we are constantly connected through our gadgets via a myriad social networks. However, he questions the meaning of modern friendship—after all, what does friendship mean to a person with 500 “friends” on Facebook?

## **Conclusion**

I give The Digital Divide five stars because it presents some of the best opinions from each side of debate. Whether you are on one side, or the other, or on a bit of both, this book will give you insight and help you to make more informed decisions about the place of technology in your life.

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## **Greg Linster says**

This book is a collection of essays and commentaries on digital technology. If you're anything like me, I imagine you've come across at least some of the essays and commentaries in this book before (e.g., Nicholas Carr's essay "Is Google Making Us Stupid"). I did, however, come across a few new pieces that were quite good, namely Christine Rosen's "Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism", Katherine Mangu-Ward's "Wikipedia and Beyond", and William Deresiewicz's "The End of Solitude".

After reading this book, I still feel a sense of digital ambivalence. Like most things, digital technology is a wonderful thing in the right doses.

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