

## Missing the Point – Is the current model of the human brain obsolete?

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Concert frenzy. (Shutterstock)

As you may have heard, mega pop star Taylor Swift has been on a record-breaking tour of stadium and other very large venues. As it turns out, some of her fans attending these concerts, mostly young women, are reporting what is called “post-concert amnesia.” It’s no joke. They know they were at the concerts, but can’t remember Ms. Swift’s performance.

According to [Professor Robert Shulman](#), Acting Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Chicago’s Rush University Medical Center, post-concert amnesia is “*a normal phenomenon that when one is excited, and has a lot of sensations coming in and they’re sort of hyper-focused on one thing, you know, that they may not be able to process in memory.*” For some people, the hours long excitement and stimuli of Taylor’s concerts actually interferes, physiologically, with how the experience is processed in short-term and then eventually stored, or not, in long-term memory. You’ve had, in other words, an irretrievable memory storage error – and you can kiss the price of your concert ticket goodbye.

Long story short, in layman's terms, these concert goers are suffering from "sensory overload," broadly defined to include sights and sounds as well as all manner of things we've come to worry about. Even something as common as rush hour traffic can create stress that affects the clarity of our thinking. It makes you wonder, doesn't it, how stressing out about this and that can affect your memory the way the excitement of an electrifying concert can disturb brain function.



*Superstar Taylor Swift in action. (Shutterstock)*

Now I can understand how staring at Ms. Swift for a couple of hours could be distracting. But then I think it's only one example of a much, much more significant problem. Consider the following...

Does anyone out there really believe that the conscious and subconscious storage capacity of your brain is unlimited? Of course not. But then if it's limited, at what point does it max out? And what happens to you when it does?

Our brains – the current model that we're now using – were developed over millions of years by our species and its predecessors through the painstakingly slow process of evolution. Unfortunately, our lives are becoming increasingly information and stimulation intensive – at a pace that far exceeds the ability of our brains to adapt. Think about that for a moment. Our current brains were perfected ions ago when levels of stimuli and incoming information were orders of magnitude less – and had been relatively constant over millions of years until recently. And by "recently," I mean literally within my own lifetime.

I was born, in a much smaller, simpler country, before the Internet, before computers and the modern age of electronics. Well before large flatscreen TVs. Before smart phones, the powerful mini-computer communication devices we carry with us everywhere, even on our wrists. And before twenty-four-hour cable news with crawlers and inserts giving us even more news other than what we're watching. Before new car dashboards with live 360-degree video of the surrounding roadway and full-size screens with navigation maps and other apps that work while you're driving.

The brains we have now, while very impressive technologically speaking, are the models our species has had for millennia. Structurally, my personal brain is the same one I was born with and hasn't changed since then, despite a quantum-fold increase in the spectrum and amount of information I need to process just driving to work. Friends, we're seriously in need of an upgrade.

How does my brain feel about all this noise against the background of our current culture? Like an old flip phone when 5G was introduced and 3G service discontinued, with memory that was measured in terms of mega- instead of gigabytes. In a world with new apps that my brain's operating system struggles to run.

What have we done about it? Unable to keep up biologically, we've created artificial intelligence that is "Taylor-made," to coin a term, for our time and the overwhelming onslaught of information and stimuli our organic bio-electronic brains can't process.

So, you think it's not affecting you, this problem of sensory overload? Maybe not, but then it could be that you're ignoring or at least mischaracterizing the symptoms you're experiencing. Whatever your age and vocation, do you, for example, have the increasingly persistent feeling that you have too many things to do? Is that really what's happening or is it just that our culture is insisting that your brain take on more than it can handle. Multi-tasking is a real thing if you're a computer, but not so much if you're a human.

Are you finding it hard to concentrate while writing your weekly op/ed with CNN running on the flatscreen in the corner of your office? (Uh oh. That's me I'm talking about.) Distracting, isn't it? It's a cruel joke that the same minds that created the technology for all this media coming at us probably didn't watch it themselves while they were busy creating AI.

Ever drive somewhere and not remember the trip? Obviously, your brain was on some sort of autopilot, distracted by who knows what array of crises, radio blaring the latest Taylor Swift hit while you talk on your cell phone or to other people in your car. There's a reason people like the idea of auto-driving technology. It makes driving one less thing to worry about.

Do you find yourselves increasingly dependent upon making lists or notes because you can't rely upon your short-term memory? Or do you sometimes find yourself thinking about something, but then forgetting it before you can write it down? Is it that your brain cells and synapses are aging? Sure. Or that most of us are not getting enough sleep? No doubt about it. Or could some of these short-term memory issues be a symptom of our outdated biological brains maxing out?

Why do so many political groupies believe Donald Trump's lies? Because he's a one trick pony who, regardless of his limited intellectual capabilities, narcissism and other psychological issues, is a gifted liar. Simply put, Trump's technique consists of little more than profuse, high profile lying, often in the face of obvious contradictions. But then, enabled as it has been by the media and Internet, his misinformation overwhelms the routine process by which the brain differentiates between truth and fiction. Our old school brains struggle to understand what's real and what's not, lacking the time and speed to properly process the unprecedented volume of information hurdling at us.

Are we aging or just finding ourselves increasingly in a world alien to the one that in which the current model of our brains evolved?

There are many [articles](#) out there that compare the brain to computers in terms of speed, storage, creativity and other attributes. They talk about the biological structure of the intelligence we have versus the design and power of what we have created. It's all interesting, but is it relevant to the practical considerations of our lives? All I know is that, as a matter of fact, our brains seem to be having difficulty "dealing."

The artificial intelligence that we're creating is our competitor and not necessarily our friend. What we really need is artificial enhancements that are complementary to our natural brains and don't threaten our existence.

Pretty far out stuff, isn't it?

-Les Cohen

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