

Surfing the Web with a Cave-Man Brain, or Art Appreciation 40,000 BCE

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Paleoanthropologists and paleogeneticists tell us that our species *Homo Sapiens* emerged pretty much as we appear today, sometime before 100,000 years ago in East Africa. In that time, most of the evolving we have done is sociological rather than biological. In other-world's, if we took a modern man from 95,000 years ago, gave him a bath, a haircut, and put him in a suit, he would be indistinguishable from any other man in America. He would probably not be so overweight, but as a rule, he would blend in. This is why I believe that the things that were important 100,000 years ago are still important to us today. The needs and desires of our ancestors are still very much alive today. Despite our belief in our advanced intelligence, we are still operating off very old software: a brain of a cave man.

Some social scientists have described the Caveman Principle as the outcome whenever a modern human has to choose between modern technologies or their primitive desires. The desires, they claim, win every time. They clearly have a point. What was once considered proof of prowess and power, the kill was visible evidence. No one cares about the one that got away. Could this be why modern humans often insist on printing emails? To have that physical item, that proof in our hands. It's as if having the information on a computer screen is not real. We demand proof. Remember the 1990's claim that soon we would all be working in paperless offices where files would be kept electronically? Never happened, never will. Our caveman brains demand proof. Not an image that disappeared when the power was switched off, or that we could not show to our friends to both impress and attract them (imagine showing up on your anniversary with a photo of flowers or the chemical list of the ingredients in Chocolate).

Our ancestors preferred face-to-face contact. They wanted to see, to smell, and to touch the other person. This was the basis of social bonding for thousands of years. People are far more real in person. In an electronic community, where faceless "friends" can argue, fight, and demean one another is simple when you are not face-to-face with the other person. We need that social intimacy to size each other up. So much communication takes place visually, unspoken, that simply cannot happen on an online social networking site.

As social mammals, we feel a deep need to watch each other up close. This allows us to read the roughly 65% of communication that is non-verbal. Their body posture, stance, movement, facial expressions tell us a great deal about what is going on. This is not possible with the faceless chat room. By close social connection, we make that common bond that allows us to convey information, seek support, or gain acceptance; something we strive for regardless of what we may say to the contrary. Before the development of language, body posture, facial expression, and movement passed on to others a great deal of information including emotions like anger, jealousy, and fear. Our caveman brain is still wired to for this, yet this is impossible in the online world.

Being there with others, making the physical connection, being present is still a critical part of who we are as a species. Friends still prefer the real connection to online social websites, still prefer watching movies together, rather than alone. All of this seems to fly in the face of modern technology, and especially modern advertising.

In the age of the Internet, social media, tweets, messengers and alerts, we are more separate and alone than ever. We still prefer to see things, experience things, as our ancestors did- face-to-face. It may have been crucial for survival in the forests and jungles to rely on what we can see for ourselves, what we can experience first-hand. Let us remember that we are all descended from predators who hunted, chased, stalked, and captured prey long before settled agriculture developed grain crops. But without huge teeth or sharp claws, we were

forced to be wary. We became watchers. Today we still enjoy watching others and even sit for hours in front of a TV, endlessly watching other humans, and we seem to enjoy this far more if we are watching this media with others.

At the same time that our ancestors watched for opportunities to prey on other species, we were not at the top of the food chain. Perhaps this is why we get very nervous when we feel others watching us. We get nervous if others watch us, even those we know. After being watched approximately about ten seconds, most of us will become irate and may act hostile toward those watching us, especially if that person is a stranger. For this reason, video chatting software such as Skype or Face Time was so slow to become popular. Even today, with years of positive marketing by social media companies with attractive celebrities video conferencing is slowly catching on, and the vast majority of us still prefer to do our on-line socializing by text, despite our need for human contact.

The competition between the Internet and the interpersonal continues; staring at a monitor or spending time face-to-face. At the end of the day, few of us will choose to spend time with a computer rather than with others, family or friends. Live theater will always exist despite television, concerts despite music media, and tourism despite the Internet and virtual reality goggles.

Today, our Cave-Man Brain tries its best to adapt to both worlds, the real and the virtual, but given a choice, like our cave-man ancestors, we will choose interpersonal, face-to-face contact nearly every time. So what are we to make of the seeming popularity of social media, social networking, and chat rooms? If we consider that those of our ancestors who managed to attract and maintain large social networks could rely on others for resources, advice, help, and protection, all necessary for survival.

While the Internet was created for the rapid passing of secure data among scientists, it has evolved into an entertainment colossus. This should come as no surprise, as the paintings found on cave walls in many parts of Europe and Asia from over 40,000 years ago illustrate that we entertained ourselves after the hunt with stories and shared accounts of the events of the day. After the hunt, our ancestors probably entertained others with accounts of the hunt. Socially, this shared experience is crucial to establish connections, for bonding with others, and for establishing the storyteller's place in the group.

The creation of art not only entertained, it informed, and as a result, played an important part in the neurological development of our brain, which seems to process most information symbolically. Our language is highly symbolic, and in fact, our earliest written languages were highly symbolic, and today science and mathematics rely of symbolism to convey often-complex ideas. Piaget, a noted child development researcher, found that children develop symbolic language and function to master the ability to picture, remember, understand, and replicate objects in their minds that are not immediately in front of them. In other words, children can create mental images of objects and store them in their minds for later use. Just like the cave paintings of 40,000 years ago. And although you can view these wall paintings on the Internet, they are far more impressive in person.

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