The Dangers of the Internet – Transcript

The benefits of the Internet are obvious and all around us. In a **European-wide poll**, people put the Internet at the top of their list of daily essentials – ahead of the bath, the car and the television. But the risks and dangers are less obvious and more subterranean. There are at least four.

WE'RE ADDICTED

In the UK, two in five of us recognise we're spending too long on the internet but admit we can't stop. Three in five of us check the internet the first thing in the morning, and the last thing at night and put this habit ahead of interpersonal communication. Two in five women say that one of the greatest challenges of relationships has become how to prove more interesting than the partner's smartphone.

Nine out of ten people would rather be surfing the web rather than reading a book. Internet pornography has proved particularly compelling: 60% of US adult males admit to using it at least once a month. 9% of males classify themselves as spending between 10 and 20 hours a week on porn.

We are not neurologically designed to withstand the temptations on offer online and this suits a great many internet companies just fine.

TWO - WE KNOW TOO MUCH BUT UNDERSTAND TOO LITTLE

The amount of **information at our fingertips** is unimaginably large. Every single minute of the day Facebook users share 2.5 million pieces of content. Twitter users Tweet 300,000 times. YouTube users upload 72 hours of video 200 million emails are sent. Apple users download 50,000 apps.

Between the dawn of civilization and 2003, 5 exabytes of data was created. That much information is now created every 2 days. There is so much data that we keep having to come up with new words to describe it. The latest term is the **yottabyte**. This much data is **overwhelming and asphyxiating.**

To <u>manoeuvre</u>, we have to rely on search engines. Google makes 2.5 billion searches per day. But we forget that these search engines are mechanical and <u>highly coloured in their interpretations.</u>

For a start, they constantly direct our attention to their products, their sponsors, and their <u>affiliates</u>. A lot of the information is <u>nonsense</u>: during the <u>riots</u> in London in 2011, the three most shared stories on Twitter were that the London Eye was on Fire, the Army was on the streets, and that a tiger had escaped from London zoo. Because the Internet is often a source of reliable information, we exaggerate its accuracy, its importance and wisdom.

(THREE) PRIVACY IS UNDER THREAT

Thousands of 'cookies' track wherever we go. Our mobile phones log data about our movements every five seconds, <u>even when they are ostensibly "off".</u>

The head of the French police force proposed it's now almost impossible to commit a murder and remain undetected. We're constantly leaving <u>so-called "digital breadcrumbs"</u> on our online travels. Every year, in the UK, we leave up to £5,000 worth of data online which is then sold to marketing companies and <u>harvested, filtered and cross-referenced to provide detailed insight into our lives.</u>

Facebook will know you're gay before your mother does. 70% of us admit to fearing how much we have already shared. one in seven teenagers in the US has sent a compromising image over the internet and had a sexual chat with a real-life stranger.

A majority of European internet users are under the impression that a security service has <u>snooped</u> into their conversations and activities.

(FOUR) ONLINE CRIME IS OUT OF CONTROL

Over the last twenty years, <u>crime has abated</u> in many countries. <u>Since it peaked in the UK</u> in 1995, it has fallen by 60%. But Internet crime is exploding.

The UK Government estimates 50,000 people in the UK are actively involved in downloading and sharing images of child abuse. Online abuse and <u>hate-speech</u> are endemic. On Twitter, 10,000 uses of <u>racist slur terms</u> occur a day. And 2000 Tweets are sent containing the word '<u>rape</u>'. 69% of young people in the UK have experienced <u>cyber-bullying</u>. The police are <u>overwhelmed</u>. The Head of the UK's National Crime Agency recently said they would only ever be able to focus on less than 1% of child porn users.

We need to start to take active measures to educate our children in the dangers of this tool to reconnect with the natural world, to talk to one another face-to-face, to stop downloading images of naked people, to get bored and <u>take regular digital Sabbaths</u>.

We need to learn to control ourselves not because the internet is so bad, but precisely because it's so very very nice - <u>in ways that turn out to be deeply detrimental to our ability to flourish and function.</u>

We can accept that it is not a good thing to let a fifteen year old boy have unmonitored access to the internet in his bedroom. Not because we think he is <u>wicked</u>. But because we are generous. We understand that asking for self-control in those circumstances is too <u>demanding</u>. A similar argument applies if you happen to be twenty six - or forty six.

The internet has <u>an unparalleled power</u> to get in the way of almost every other other important and precious thing around - starting with the rest of your life.