

Our toxic obsession with convenience

NICK KOSSOVAN

The stickiness of the internet and social media is mainly due to our obsession with convenience. The digital world offers an unimaginably massive and convoluted buffet of conveniences. 24-7-365 access to news and information, instant messaging, unlimited entertainment and online shopping is accessible through your hand-held device.

In all its forms, the internet capitalizes on the relationship between convenience and increased consumption.

Advertisers and marketers lost no time capitalizing on the golden opportunity to exploit the convenience of the internet, further fuelling our wasteful first-world consumerism. As a result, tech companies and apps now dominate our lives, making it easier than ever to order takeout, have products delivered to our doorsteps and swipe left in search of a soulmate.

As we become more addicted to the convenience of online shopping from the comfort of our homes, we're unintentionally causing harm to both our mental health and the environment.

Interestingly, the Sears Catalogue, founded in 1887, was like the Amazon of its time. Over a century ago, our forefathers could get almost anything by mail, which made sense as cars weren't around to make shopping and transporting purchases easy.

So why wasn't the convenience of shopping from a mail-order catalogue widely adopted?

I don't know. Was it six to eight weeks it took to receive your order? There's a lot of talk lately about loneliness and isolation. A.U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report released in April 2023 titled "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation" found that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, about half of U.S. adults reported experiencing measurable levels of loneliness.

Would it be a stretch to assume the rise in loneliness is a consequence of our taking advantage of the internet's many stay-at-home conveniences? Not so long ago, malls — and marketplaces and shopping districts before them — were community-like hubs, akin to town squares, where you met your friends, ran into neighbours and even made new acquaintances. You saw people, you connected.

Malls offer more than just a plethora of retail stores; they also provide social experiences that many of us are now abandoning in favour of online shopping, which is one of the most environmentally harmful ways to shop. Instead of visiting a store to try on a jacket and see how it fits, many people now order five jackets online and return four, adding to waste and environmental damage.

Ordering online has a significant negative environmental impact. That "must-have" avocado slicer you bought online will arrive in a box the size of a doghouse, packed with enough bubble wrap to protect a mini fridge.

Those over 50 can remember when shopping wasn't a daily, let alone an around-the-clock activity. People used to write something called a shopping list. Then, they went to the store or mall and gathered all the items on their list at once. Then, they took their purchases home, put everything in its place and felt the satisfaction of a job well done.

When you order online, robots and workers, who are often treated like robots, pack your Tim Hortons Original coffee blend and single-serve Keurig K-Cup pods into an oversized box and deliver it to your home, along with three other large boxes, each containing just one item that could have been purchased locally.

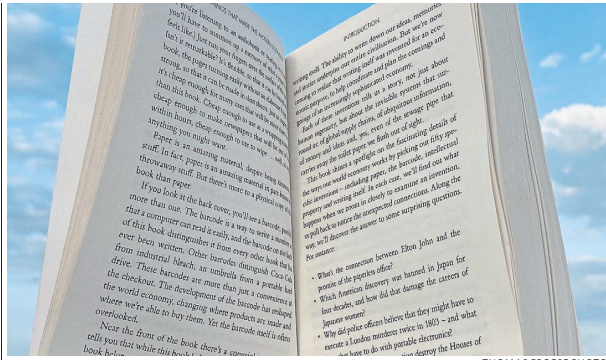
We then appease our environmental guilt by tossing all the excessive packaging into blue bins as if they were a gateway to plastic heaven. However, according to the Government of Canada website, only nine per cent of Canada's plastic waste is actually recycled; the rest ends up in landfills, waste-to-energy plants or polluting the environment, including the ocean.

Shopping online for stuff you likely don't need, knowing its negative impact on the environment, while crying about the environment is sheer hypocrisy.

No one wants to think about the child labour in Bangladesh who made the Nike hoodie they ordered off Amazon, the ship, air, rail and truck that transported it, or the landfill the hot dog toaster they bought on impulse — prompted by an ad you saw on Facebook — will eventually end up. We just want that T-shirt that says "Mindful."

Online shopping is wreaking havoc on our planet's environment. The kicker is we've sold ourselves the false narrative that online shopping is eco-friendly. Making a list, getting off the couch and getting it is much better for our environment — and has the added benefit of meeting people and maybe even finding your soulmate.

NICK KOSSOVAN WRITES ABOUT WHAT'S ON HIS MIND FROM TORONTO. COURTESY OF TROY MEDIA.



THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

Writing about the importance of building a culture of reading, Thomas Froese advises not to get distracted by the so-called "naughty" books. "Book bans can change like the weather," he writes.

Creative freedom has its place



THOMAS FROESE OPINION

My own view is that misbehaving books are like misbehaving kids — you can banish them to some corner away from others, but that might create a larger distraction.

It's on the radar because today finishes Banned Books Week in the U.S., that neighbour with cultural sway over us.

Two stories come to mind. The first involves a university student. In my creative writing class, she recently played her guitar and sang a self-composed song, "You have a voice too." I encourage students to reflect on some readings in any way they wish. Even so, the song a first over the years, was something.

This is because unabashed creativity isn't something you see every day. As the painter Picasso said, "Every child is an artist. The challenge is remaining one once you grow up."

It's well-meaning adults who beat it out of us. Our own fears, that our creative efforts won't measure up, also beat us down. It's only with care and love, really, that you might find your way back and even sing about it one day.

So creative freedom has its place.

As sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, we've been given freedom from the start — and imagination.

A story particularly can have distilled power. Words, whether they're seven or 70 or 700 years old, can cut to the heart. Unlike other art forms like, say, painting, writing is more hematological. Words go straight into the bloodstream like a transfusion, writer to reader.

But if there's creative writing, is there such a thing as destructive writing? What if one of your students learns to develop his voice, then writes "Mein Kampf" and starts a world war? That's blood poisoned. Look at the internet. Freedom, at least freedom at any cost, has issues.

Which brings us to the second story. It's about a terror threat once known in East Africa.

One expatriate family responded by looking into hiring an armed guard at their house. Then they decided no, they'd focus on daily life, not daily fear. So no armed guard, but other precautions including an emergency escape route.

"Remember, if Mom or Dad can't come, leave the house through the escape hatch, hide under the neighbour's storage tank, then up the hill past the banana trees to the dirt road, then all the way to those friends we've met."

Yes, the world has dangers. Some crazy book might even get you, or your child. But, like with that fami-

ly, in reality, such calamity will likely never arrive after all. So forget the arms. Take other precautions. Then get on with it, your reading life.

Read widely. Learn empathy. Grow in humility. Learn of your brokenness. And mine. Learn what makes humans so glorious. And lost. This is the larger issue. In our time of diminishing humanities and liberal arts, rebuilding a culture of reading helps us better understand the human condition. It brings you a measure of peace and wellness. Social science validates it.

And those naughty banned books? They're just a distraction. Book bans can change like the weather.

I've taught "To Kill a Mockingbird," banned for racism. I've gifted students "The Catcher in the Rye," banned for potty language and lusty thoughts. I've been awakened by "1984," banned for political agitation. I've marvelled at "Charlotte's Web" and similar books banned for talking animals. (Talking animals!)

My own life has been saved by it, the healing, the bibliotherapy, that can be in good storytelling, in potent literature. Oh, and that family formerly in East Africa? It's my family. So I understand fear. And danger.

But then I'm like Lucy from "Chronicles of Narnia," knowing love and intelligence and paradox, Lucy learning from talking animals (again, the talking animals), learning of the majestic lion, Aslan, the great king — that story's picture of the Almighty, somehow hidden and silent, somehow not.

"Is he safe?" little Lucy asks. "Safe?" Mr. Beaver says. "Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good."

FIND THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM.

LETTERS

LRT will die after election

Re: Hamilton LRT delays force city to consider road fixes that will only be 'torn up again' later, Sept. 24 Without sounding like "Captain Obvious" here, the answer is yes, go right ahead and do your road repairs as you see fit.

This LRT is never going to be built. The mayor can't get a straight answer from anyone as to what is happening with this supposed project.

There is no champion or driving force moving this forward. This can only mean one thing, and that is it's being left on the vine to die a natural death. If there was any enthusiasm for this project we would have a clear vision by now and would see positive movement daily.

My guess is Doug Ford is waiting for the spring election to take place, after which he pulls the plug again. This was a Liberal promise to the city of Hamilton which Ford inherited; obviously it's not a pet project of his and he sees little upside to its completion. The memo should come through shortly after the spring election.

My prediction is there will be a tunnel underneath the 401 before you see LRT in Hamilton. Frank Jalasevic, Hamilton

Infrastructure upgrades will come

I have to wonder if the people

who are against LRT have actually taken the time to see what's included in the project.

Years ago I saw a presentation on this and my recollection is that besides the benefits of reducing a reliance on vehicles, which, having been to many European cities, I believe in, it includes the replacement of our city's most significant core infrastructure along the entire route from McMaster to Eastgate Square, i.e. all of the aging main (and critical) sewer and water lines — failures that have recently (in Calgary and Montreal) cost Canadian cities and their individual taxpayers a fortune in the past year alone.

In addition, the project includes the installation of new infrastructure to support fibre optic and other technologies that will help bring this city into the future for decades to come. The fact that the cost will not be borne entirely by the taxpayers of Hamilton makes this an absolute no-brainer to me.

Please, stop the delay and get this going before we lose the opportunity of having more than \$3 billion of needed improvements done to this city of ours. Dave Hachey, Dundas

Ford's tunnel plans are all wet

Premier Doug Ford wants to build a tunnel under Highway 401.

I wonder how long it will take and how many of us will still be

driving when it is completed. Would it not be easier and cheaper to build an elevated roadway above the highway?

How many sunken roadways in Toronto flood when we get serious rain, and what is the likelihood that this tunnel roadway will become unusable in bad weather? Let us think carefully before we pull the trigger on this. Edward A. Collis, Burlington

Do not open the door for Jama

Re: NDP hasn't ruled out bringing Sarah Jama back into the party for next election, Sept. 25

The interest in reinstating Hamilton Centre MPP Sarah Jama to the NDP caucus is deeply troubling. Her divisive rhetoric and toxic leadership style undermined the unity we desperately need. If the NDP aspires to govern our province, it must stand for inclusivity, not reward behaviours that fuel division and distrust.

Ontario deserves leaders who build bridges. Allowing Jama back into the fold sends the wrong message about the kind of province we want to be. J. Salomon Williams, St. Catharines

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