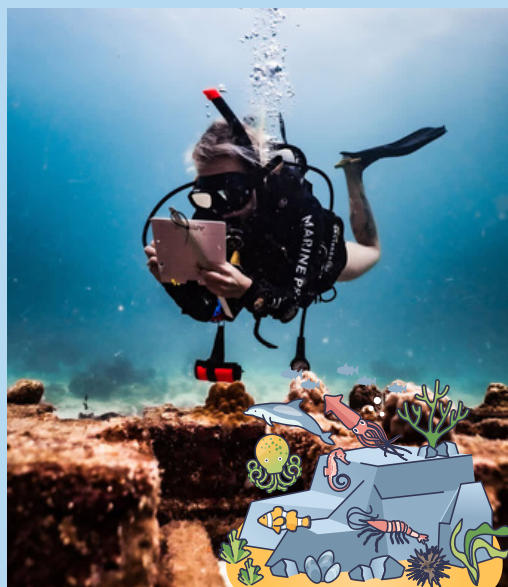


Newsletter on European education

BY CORNERSTONE EU

WELCOME TO THE ERA OF BRAINROT



Me in paradise last year



Me right now writing this newsletter

Happy December everyone! The month of deep self reflection, hanging out with family, and eating a lot of **vegetables to prevent vitamin deficit.**

This time last year I was doing my dive master course and writing my master's thesis in Thailand. I don't want all my columns to just be complaining about the Finnish weather (which is not looking so good right now, btw, **very grey and the snow has melted**) but I miss the sun and my ocean adventures.

In addition to missing the sun, I'm sure we've all been missing our cognitive abilities and concentration. **As December is the time of reflection before the whole 'new year new me' thing in January,** it's a good time to stop and think if the media we consume can be harmful to our brain.

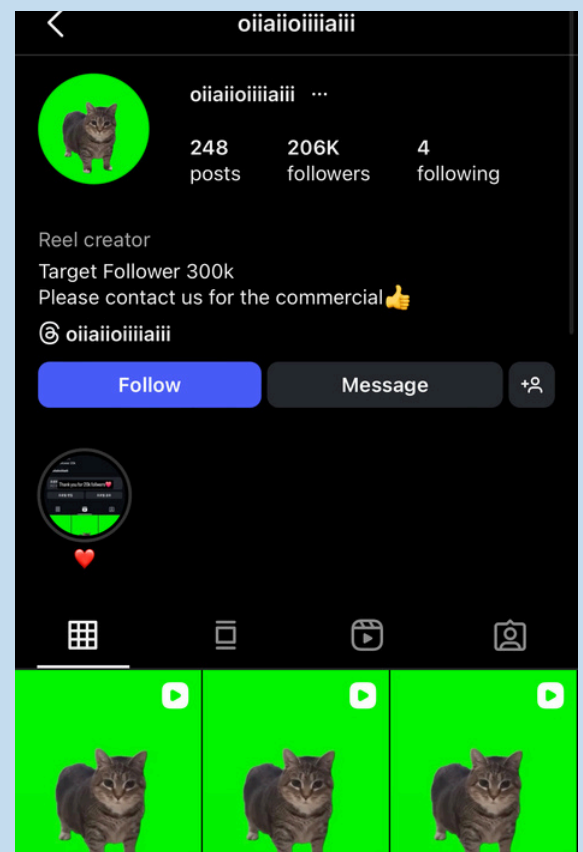
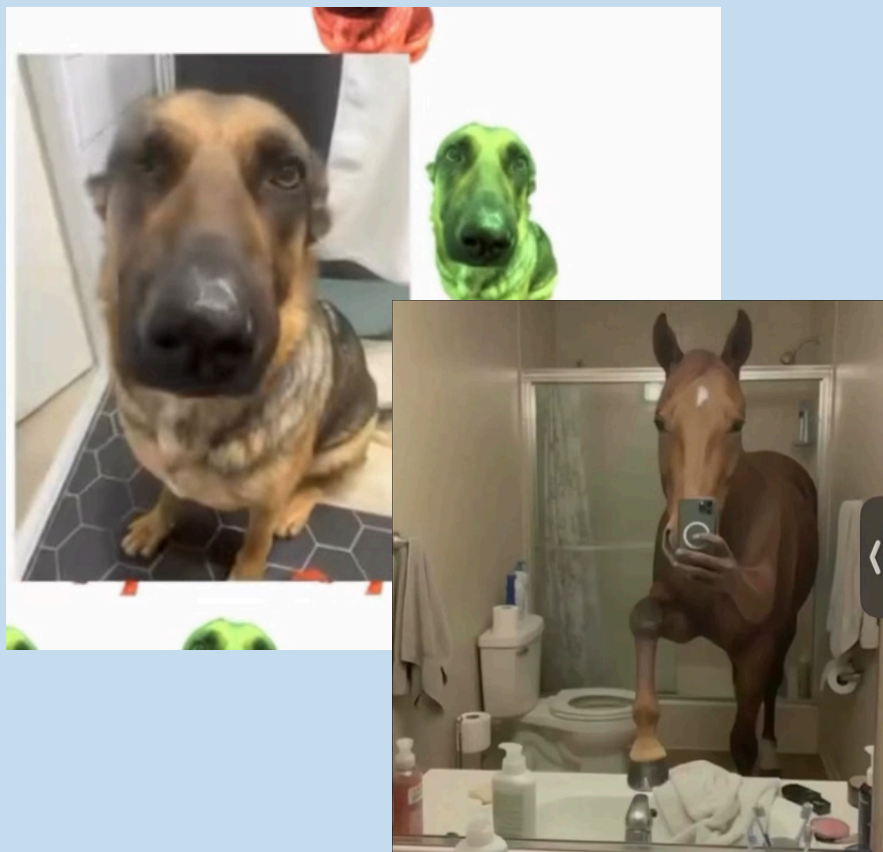
Social media can be a wonderful tool to keep in touch with people, network and use your creativity, but it can also provide ultimate *what am I doing with my life* experience after undefined time of thumb movements and not moving your eyes.

As promised last week, this week we'll be talking about brain rot, giving some examples of what it is and considering **if looking at some AI generated cyborg animals can really affect your cognition and learning.**



BRAIN ROT

A **perceived loss of intelligence or critical thinking skills**, esp. (in later use) as attributed to the **overconsumption of unchallenging or inane content or material**. Now also: content or material that is perceived to have this effect. (Oxford dictionary word of the year 2024).



So basically: brain rot can refer to either the low effort, usually absurd, weird kind of in-your-face content you're consuming or to the state of mind you're in after a long exposure to it. Typical brain rot content is found on Instagram or Tiktok, or other platforms with short video format (my definition).

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Era of brain rot

Do you sometimes find yourself watching a picture of a rotating broccoli with a trendy sound with millions of likes while you're supposed to study or work? Me too, I'm a victim of addictive brain rot. But it's funny and I don't know why. And I'm contributing to the spread brainrot like the disease it is. Welcome to the era of brainrot, wishes the New York Times deep dive on the topic eerily.

As mentioned in last week's newsletter, a recent medical publication found that **even an hour of social media a day leads to children performing notably worse in tests related to numbers and literacy and worsen overall cognitive abilities.** And the content they are consuming is usually low-effort, absurd and addictive. In the US (of course) many school districts have sued big social media companies for causing mental health related issues on children and teenagers, and I would say a loss of cognitive abilities can be one significant cause.

We can even see it in our every-day life: after doomscrolling (another fun, self-explanatory word) for even half an hour I notice myself forgetting what I was supposed to do before, and depending on the content I've consumed I sometimes literally feel like I'm actively losing brain cells, and going outside to touch grass is the only thing that helps. **Maybe my generation still has some resistance left, since we didn't always live media this way, but it's troubling to think how brain rot is affecting children's brain that are still developing.**

Early adolescence is a crucial phase also for developing critical thinking skills, which are vulnerable when screen-based, reward-driven consumption replaces cognitively rich activities such as reading, having conversations or reflection.

I would love for someone to do some research on **who benefits from this type of content, who is running the most popular accounts and why this content resonates so deeply with our humanity it spreads like wildfire** (whenever someone mentions 6 or 7 this is what I think about).

HOW CAN WE AFFECT OUR SCREEN TIME AND CONTENT WE CONSUME?

I guess to some extent you can manipulate your algorithm (*not more than it manipulates you though*) to show you content with higher quality. However, brain rot is supposed to be addictive and non-conscious, since the media platforms usually want to keep the user engaged and I guess experiencing the real world can be nice too.

*So here are some other tips I can give you guys from from the high horse of **someone who has survived a whole month without social media**:*

1. Do like **breathing excercises** (I love breathwork sessions on YouTube, they work way better than just meditation for me),
2. Log off and **go outside** for a walk or a run,
3. Call your mom or grandma and ask what's their **favorite memory** of childhood or teenage years and how they are in general,
4. Do your job (when you have trouble starting something try to just count 1,2,3 and action, no overthinking),
5. Have your phone on an airplane mode for the night and don't open it as long as humanly possible in the morning,
6. **Read some books** and reflect on what you read
- (7. When you start reading an article online, make sure to finish it and not just skip between many without stopping, helps me concentrate)

Use it or lose it

Brain plasticity works like a muscle: it develops when you use it and degenerates when you don't

(read this in some article comments but makes sense right?)

UK aims to secure agreement to rejoin Erasmus student exchange scheme, The Guardian

Many university students consider their Erasmus exchange to be one of the most influential experiences of their young adulthood. When the UK stopped the exchange program during Brexit, many students had their dreams of studying in the country crushed. Therefore, this is great news for both British and EU students considering going abroad!

Lack of Guidelines and Expertise Prove Challenging for AI Use in Schools

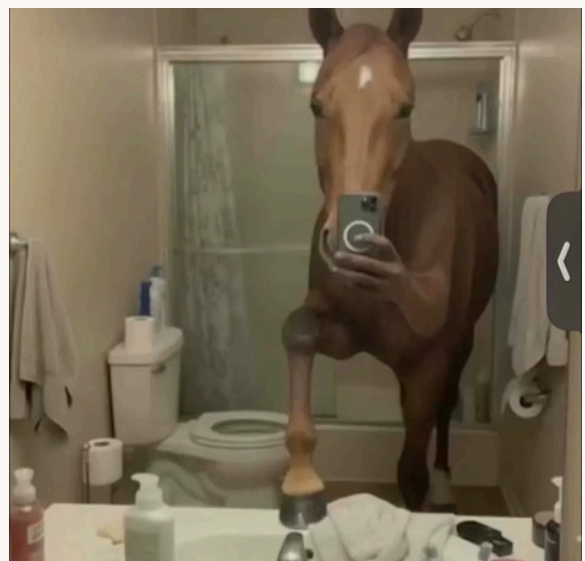
A NEW REPORT BY THE MILKEN INSTITUTE PUSHES FOR MORE AI INTEGRATION IN THE CLASSROOM – BUT ARGUES THE EFFORT HAS TO GO BEYOND TEACHERS, AND EXPERTS SHOULD BE CONSULTED AS WELL

A teacher interviewed in the article roots for AI literacy classes for children. Expertise and regulations are missing in the area.

We need policies, balance and digital wellbeing

I KNOW I'M ALWAYS TALKING ABOUT AI WHEN I'M INTRODUCING THE LATEST NEWS IN EDUCATION. THE TRUTH IS, THAT'S PRETTY MUCH MOST NEWS OUT THERE RIGHT NOW

Financial Times article *Students embrace AI as schools tread carefully* states that even though the students have started using AI in their work, the schools still haven't implemented it in the curriculum and are lagging behind. Worries that AI affects the cognitive abilities are impacting the mismatch, but is exactly the reason we should be talking about how to implement it into education in a controlled and balanced way.



LINKS TO ALL CITED SOURCES CAN BE FOUND ON A DOCUMENT LINKED BELOW