Implications of Absent-minded Scrolling as a Potential Form of Source-Error Confabulation

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Essay Proposal

Absent-minded scrolling is likened to a sort of extended mind-wandering (Christoff, 2016; Irving, 2016) due to their common aspects of lacking strong task-related attentional cues and lack of top-down attentional constraints. I aim to show that absent-minded scrolling as extended mind-wandering is a form of maladaptive source-error confabulation, and discuss its implications towards the internalization of increasingly polarising content.

Firstly, I refer to Dayer's (2024) paper to draw distinctions between absent-minded scrolling and doomscrolling in that the latter necessitates a resultant state of emotional distress and general anxiety at the end of the session whereas absent-minded scrolling is usually just a neutral-valanced coping mechanism to deal with low arousal and proneness to boredom (Lukoff, 2018; Ottaviani, 2015). Distinctions in their dynamics, affect, mood and content also distinguish the two often conflated ideas (Dayer A., 2024).

Then, I use arguments from Clark and Chalmers' (1998) definition as well as Heersmink et al.'s (2015) ideas of first and second wave extended cognition to expose absent-minded scrolling as a kind of extended mind-wandering, including studies from Bruineberg and Fabry (2021/2022) on the same. Thus, I suggest that it can be reasonably inferred that extended mind-wandering through incessant gadget-use implies the reliability of the source and trust in the information gathered as one trusts a bio-organ, based on the definition of the extended mind.

The crux of my argument lies in juxtaposing this subconsciously internalised information derived from extended mind-wandering with a specific form of confabulation, viz. source-error or source-monitoring error (SE/SME), presumed to be caused by lesions to the frontal and medial-temporal lobes of the brain (Johnson and Raye, 1998) using evidence from Baddeley's memory model.

I conclude that absent-minded scrolling tricks the brain into believing that the beliefs / ideas perceived externally, are actually endogenously generated thoughts. Lastly, I discuss the implications of

such type of false endogenous attribution on the implicit internalisation of radicalised / polarised content one is exposed to in online short form content.