

Why Excessive Consumption Limits Creativity

Read and Record ([link](#))



*When a creative artist is fatigued, it is often from too much **inflow**, not too much **outflow**.”—Julia Cameron*

If most of us, myself included, were completely honest about our balance between **consumption** and creation, we’d see that it’s pretty out of whack. We *consume* far more than we create when it *should be* the *opposite*. Every day our consumption diet includes any of the following:

- Articles on Websites
- Emails
- Status updates
- Netflix/YouTube/Hulu
- Podcasts
- Online Shopping

If you actually took inventory of all the digital content that you consumed over the course of a week, you would actually be **horrified**.

Because my upcoming book is about creative habits, I spent quite a bit of time thinking about my own consumption habits and my areas of weakness. One of those areas of weakness is inflow. We may not realize it, but managing our inflow is one of the best opportunities to design our environments for **optimal** performance and creativity. Excessive consumption and inflow **inhibit** creativity, negatively **impacts** our ability to do *deep work*, and reduces our **cumulative** output. So let’s look at how and why this happens.

1.0 Excessive Consumption Causes Decision Fatigue

On average, we’re making over 300 decisions a day. A few months ago, I downloaded the dating app *Bumble*. After a few hours of playing with the app, I realized that every **swipe** was a decision. That was just the beginning of the decision fatigue that results from excessive consumption. And that made me think about all the other decisions that are made through our consumption habits.

- Every time you click on, read, or comment on an article, you *make* a decision.
- Every time you like, reply to, or write a Facebook status update, you *make* a decision.
- Every time you read, reply to, or write an email, you *make* a decision.
- Every time you browse and buy something online, you *make* a decision.
- Every time you scroll through the queue on Netflix, you *make* a decision.

This is in addition to the other 300 decisions we’re making each day. The same **willpower** that could have been directed towards creation gets completely **depleted** by our consumption habits if we’re not careful about them.

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2.0 Excessive Consumption is Harmful to Our Attention Spans

If you've ever sat in a *Starbucks* and watched a group of teenagers, you'll see the definition of short attention spans. They'll spend over an hour attempting to take the perfect selfie. This is between multiple status updates and check-ins to whatever social network they're **addicted to**.

But where this becomes really **apparent** is in Cal Newport's research around the concept of Deep Work. According to Cal, if your attention is constantly shifting to **stimuli** that are novel, when it comes time to do deep work, your ability to do deep work is going to suffer. It's the cognitive equivalent of being an athlete who smokes.

3.0 Excessive consumption results in multitasking and attention residue

It might seem harmless to take a quick glance at your inbox ever ten minutes or so. Indeed, many justify this behavior as better than the old practice of leaving an inbox open on the screen at all times.... That quick check introduces a new target for your attention. Even worse, by seeing messages you cannot deal with at the moment (which is almost always the case), you'll be forced to turn back to the primary task with a secondary task left unfinished.—Cal Newport

Just imagine how much harder it is to **sustain** attention for something like reading a book when you've spent your whole day jumping from one website to another, scrolling through articles and not doing much actual reading. You end up being **mediocre** at a bunch of things as opposed to being excellent at one thing.

4.0 Excessive Consumption could be Bad for Our Mental Health

Every email you receive, every notification, and every "like" you get on a post releases a shot of **dopamine**, thereby making the products and services that we use on a daily basis addictive as hell. The sense of **fulfillment** and satisfaction derived from this doesn't last very long. As a result, we **crave** these dopamine hits all day long.

But what's more disturbing is what it's doing to our mental health. Simon Sinek's research on this predicts that in young people we're going to see a much greater likelihood of depression, social anxiety, and the inability to communicate effectively because their faces are buried in screens getting their dopamine **fix** from the moment they wake up until the moment they go to sleep.

According to Kelly McGonigal's work and her book *The Upside of Stress*, people who use social media excessively experience a decreased sense of satisfaction with their lives. No matter what you accomplish, achieve, or do, somebody is always up to something far more **epic** than you are if you live your life through the lens of your Facebook news feed.

As I've said before, you should treat the information you consume like the food you eat. And if you over-ate the way you over-consume, you wouldn't be alive very long.

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5.0 Reduce Your Inflow

There are some really basic ways that anybody can reduce their inflow that won't be **disruptive** to their lives or their work.

- **A Separate Email Address for newsletters, notifications, etc:** As someone who spends the day **scouring** the web for insanely interesting people to interview on the *Unmistakable Creative*, I need to have a **decent** level of inflow. This is why I have two email addresses. One is for communication that's essential. The other is for newsletters and things that I sign up for on the web. Cal Newport goes as far as to have separate email addresses for multiple purposes, which is another approach.
- **Facebook Newsfeed Obliterator:** This is exactly what it sounds like. It's a Chrome extension that removes the newsfeed from Facebook. About once a week, I re-enable Safari on my phone and see what everybody else is up to. But on a day-to-day basis, I have no idea, and I can focus all my efforts on what I'm there to do, which is (to) manage the community around *Unmistakable Creative*.
- **Go Analog:** I believe there's tremendous power to being **analog** in an increasingly **digital** world. Some of the best designers in the world don't turn on their computers for days. Nearly every post I write is written by hand first. When you're a writer, using pen and paper gives you a chance to truly hear the sound of your own voice.

When you limit the inflow, you increase the energy that can be directed towards your outflow. You *create* more than you *consume*.