

The period spanning more or less the past two decades has seen various, multiple technological distinctions. A number of them are quite striking while others, even though they have had a significant impact, have been inconspicuous. Others are somewhere in between the two sides.

An example of this is the “like” button. It cannot be described as a technological hallmark that would stick in one’s mind, neither is it easily forgettable considering its massive use. The ‘like’ button made its first appearance back in 2007 in the social feed aggregator, FriendFeed, and it was only a matter of time before it made a permanent appearance on every social media platform from then on. Now, it’s a common feature on almost all social media networks.

The “like” feature is responsible for creating an immense number of notifications delivered to social media users. In turn, these notifications generated have gone a long way in assisting with the collection of useful information such as our preferences and our habits. This has been an important strategy in keeping us users hooked to social media platforms.

It comes as no surprise that the narrative among some people is that of opposing the use of social media while being skeptical about its position in society. There are those who are pushing back against the platforms with the fear that they are causing more harm than good. A continuous flow of research has been enlightening people to the adverse effects related to using social media and smartphones.

Cal Newport gathered 1,600 volunteers and conducted his own experiment from which he published a book. The volunteers followed his instructions during a month-long technological recess and provided him with reliable and important information. The outcome of this research is termed as digital minimalism: a method to withdraw from the onslaught of digital diversions and finding a more fulfilling and edifying way to live life.

Nowadays, the devices which were initially intended for making telephone calls and listening to portable music have transformed into harmful and addictive tools.

Respected author, Andrew Sullivan, in 2016 wrote an article for New York magazine in which he made a description with about 7,000 words on how the consistent “attack” of news, images and online chatter finally “damaged” him. What Sullivan went through is familiar and can be well associated with many people of this generation. The consistent need to take out your smartphone and scroll through your texts, emails or any feed one has subscribed to. The queer boring sensation of a moment when one is not using digital media. But we were not always like this, so what happened?

We need to internalize, that the main purpose of technology was not to be used how it is being used right now. When Steve Jobs debuted the first iPhone back in 2007, he literally introduced the device as “the best iPod ever”. It was not only a nice way to listen to music but also a cool way to make phone calls. According to Andy Grignon, an Apple Engineer on the first iPhone project, Steve Jobs was an advocate for the idea that the iPhone should not become a platform for third-party apps and gaming.

With regards to Facebook, for most college students back in 2004, Snood was a more popular alternative than the former which is now a renowned, social media giant. Back then, Facebook was still new and was considered a novelty. It was viewed as a means for someone to just connect with their friend or a friend of a friend. On the other hand, the computer strategy game Snood was a more popular time-waster.

Therefore, the first time people joined Facebook and purchased smart-phones, they did so not intending to waste hours a day just glaring onto a screen. This predictably harmful and addictive face of technology has come to us slowly and surprisingly and this “grand scheme” is all arranged by social media engineers. An episode of the HBO talk show Real Time back in 2017 had Bill Maher referring to the “social media tycoons” as being the new massively selling tobacco and products designed to be as addictive as possible.

There’s plenty of information which has been written on the strategies these social media companies employ to keep us hooked to their websites and applications. For instance, exploiting the human need to feel socially accepted. A highlighting development was the introduction of the “thumbs up” button in 2009. This was a variation of the like button utilized by ‘FriendFeed’. From then on, whenever someone posted anything, there was an opportunity for a more intimate and interactive experience.

Later, there was the development of the primitive urge of acceptance. People started logging in to check if their posts had been liked or not all stemming from the need to be 'liked'. How many people from my culture would like what I shared? This need later developed the embracing of the notification sound as a tone that accompanied responses.

Less can be more is the philosophy for digital minimalism.

We must develop a good defense system if we are to prevent ourselves from falling into the traps of the bright minds at Silicon Valley. These are people who work hard and are keen on taking any opportunity to take advantage of our weak points. This is the reason for the proposal of the lifestyle philosophy of "digital minimalism" by the author, Cal Newport.

There is already a large number of people promoting the basic idea of switching off notifications, among other fast fixes, as a defense mechanism but Newport doesn't rely on these trivial adjustments to bring about significant change in the future. The author of one such article promoting the quick fixes wrote about how he disabled the notifications of his 112 applications. However, this begs for the question, does one really need that many apps in the first place?

Digital minimalism is based on the withstanding philosophy that better living can come from less. The name is intentionally similar to the minimalist lifestyle advocated by authors like Marie Kondo, who bring forward the idea of only allowing things into your life that bring joy. Newport is implementing this notion to the apps and digital media, proposing that you ask: Is this website, service or application really supporting what I value in a way that nothing else can?

Moreover, digital minimalism urges you to optimize the value of the technology, application or website but minimize its cost on your time, energy or money. For instance, if Twitter is a supporter of your profession, you can arrange regulations for yourself that dictate on how you can log in, utilize its services and log out of it as quickly as possible.

Among the 1,600 people who signed up for the author's experiment on digital minimalism, there was one Tyler. He had previously signed up for social media for socializing with friends, networking, and entertainment. However, after learning about digital minimalism, he

realized that the time he put it into these technologies weren't worth the value of his energy and time.

Since then, he has deleted his social media accounts and is happy with the new change brought into his life thanks to digital minimalism. He's able to read more books, exercise more regularly, is learning to play musical instruments and joint more volunteering projects. In addition to this, he has more time to spend with his relatives and close friends and claims to be focused while he is working. Tyler knows people who claim that they cannot quit using social media platforms but his response to them is that he sees no need to continue using it.

The principles of digital minimalism are founded on a couple of economic hallmarks and the wisdom of the Amish.

The foundations of digital minimalism are: clutter is costly, optimization is important and intentionality is satisfying.

The first principal, clutter is costly, corresponds to the New Economics famously advocated by Henry David Thorough in his book titled 'Walden'. Fundamentally, New Economics uses life costs when making calculations of the real worth of something. Thorough would remind you that the price you pay to purchase the car is only but its initial cost. One must factor in the cost of maintaining the car and fixing it in case of break-down. Also the time, energy and stress it takes to earn money for the car's upkeep and security.

You might conclude that the car costs more than the healthy activity that is taking a stroll to town. The same philosophy should be implemented on every digital media allowed in one's life. One should question themselves on what they're really getting from it, and what the time, effort and stress costs are. Are there no alternative means to perform the same task in a different way?

The second principle is associated with yet another economic hallmark known as "The Law of Diminishing Returns". This law basically states that a person cannot simply keep adding items and expect consistent improvements. For instance, in a car manufacturing industry, when the company initially starts recruiting and employing workers, the manufacturing process will increase in speed and output will also increase.

However, after a certain number of people recruited, the services will go past their peak and after this point output will stop improving. On the contrary, there will be strain caused at the assembly line and the efficiency will reduce.

Let's switch the situation from the manufacturing of cars to receiving news and information. If you add two social media applications as a means of getting your daily news, there will be a massive improvement as compared to your previous situation. But if you keep adding apps and media platforms, you will be cramming from so many different sources and it will turn into a never-ending distraction to you. You should improve and optimize your tools instead of constantly adding sources in order not to miss anything.

For example, instead of relying on social media platforms to get your news, you can add an app that strictly deals with just news. A good newspaper application for example. This application will help you to directly get what you need without having to waste your time on other distractions that have nothing to do with the worldwide news. Also getting an application that does not deal in ads is a good way to avoid encountering with advertisements.

The third and last principle relates to the "Amish way of life". Amish is often misunderstood to be that which anti-technology. However, this is a very basic and simple way to describe what it really stands for. The Amish should not be labeled as "rejectors of technology". Their relationship with technology is far deeper than this. They do not turn down any technology simply by just seeing it. They test and question it first to check if it is in accordance with their principles of family and community.

If it is, they would use it and take advantage of it efficiently. If otherwise, they would ban it. It would be wise to apply the same approach to every tool you use. Does it align with your values, principles, and philosophies or are you better off without it?

Going through a digital declutter commences with a thirty-day recess, followed by a critical reintroduction of certain tools.

If the fundamentals and principles of digital minimalism are favorable to employ in your life, you ought to start with a thirty-day cleansing period. This should not be looked at a “detox period” as a detox implies that the cleansing is temporary and that one will return to their usual bad habits. It’s more about quitting the bad habits you have been doing and taking the time off to figure out a new way to move forward.

Having this mind, one should withdraw from the unnecessary technologies that they do not absolutely need to work and function on a daily basis. At first, it can be somewhat depressing realizing just how addicted you were to the apps you were misusing. Moving on, most of the people who were part of the 1,600 who took part in Newport’s experiment reported that they felt no longer rely on their smartphone. In fact, they had forgotten about it and the reflexive habit of picking up the phone and opening up an application.

One should not mistake convenience for necessity when deciding what applications to keep and those to let go. You could think that by deleting Facebook, you are deliberately harming your relationships. On the contrary, it could actually strengthen the relationship by prompting you to call the other person, set up meetings between the two of you and talking more often with each other.

Another very important thing to do within this period is to look within. To dig deep and really understand yourself, who you are, what you believe in and what you want to achieve in life. Figure out what is important to you and the things you value in life without the influence of the internet. The importance of this lies within the next step which is finding something that can fill up the void left behind by the absence of the social media platforms and new technology.

After these thirty days, the period coming next is very a crucial reintroduction process which involves you asking yourself three vital questions. The first question is: “Does this technology support what I value and treasure deeply?” If the answer is yes, move on to the second question. The second question is: “Is it the best way to support this value?”

For instance, Instagram could be a good way to keep in touch with your close friends, family, and relatives. It passes the first question demanding you question the role of the app in your life. On the other hand, Skyping your loved ones every weekend could be a better alternative than constantly looking at their pictures. Therefore it fails the second question. As a matter of

fact, most find that social media does not pass the second test when it comes to the topic of interacting with your loved ones.

On the case where something passes the first two tests, it is time for the final important question: “How can I utilize this tool in a way that optimizes its advantages and minimizes the harm it causes?”

A digital minimalist does not simply utilize or not use something. For example, if they use Twitter, you could find that they do not have the application installed on their phone. Neither do they use it entirely on their phone. Instead, they use it rarely. About once or twice a week, in an internet cafe and even then they would be following a few meaningful people with whom they could not find a different way to connect.

In order to avoid the symptoms of loneliness, one should practice leaving the phone at home and walking more often.

Life hacks and quick fixes are not suitable for sustainable long-term changes. They could promote and assist you in developing a new habit but once you reach a roadblock or encounter a problem, it could easily turn into a case of you claiming that the fix did not stick for long enough. It allows for such an easy escape and abandonment of the “fix”. As the saying goes “easy come-easy go”.

Digital minimalism understands this problem and as a response, it proposes various recommended practices that are in accordance with the lifestyle and are proven to have a meaningful and rewarding value that is missing from a lot of digital-based activities. The first recommendation would be solitude – a precious commodity that new technology frequently takes away from us.

If you were born before the mid-80s then it is likely that you have a clear memory of life without the smartphone. On the other hand, people born after 1995 basically grew up with and around smartphones and the new digital technologies. They probably spend about nine hours of their time a day using these devices.

Jean Twenge, a world-renowned generational researcher, noticed a shocking rise in psychological health issues with this group, dubbed the “iGen,” with a higher percentage of depression, eating disorders, homesickness, suicide, and, above all, anxiety.

All in all, this “iGen” generation are basically suffering from solitude deprivation. A want of time away from screens and outside sources, which is quite important for humans to process emotions, reflect on their personal relationships and what is of importance in their lives and allowing their brains some time to rest and find some calming clarity.

The upside to this is that solitude is not something that is difficult to find. It can be found anywhere from a crowded train station, crowded cafe, silent forest or noisy hall, as long as you are free with your thoughts and just your thoughts alone.

Therefore, the next time you decide to go outside, leave your phone alone. If you ever experienced a time before smartphones, you know that this is not a scary, harmful, crazy or dangerous thing as it may seem in today's society. However, if you are worried about an emergency, you can carry it as long as you put it in a compartment that won't tempt you to use it where it is not readily accessible.

Many great thinkers in history have enthusiastically praised long walks and it is a classic means for accessing solitude. Its greatest advocate was probably Thoreau. However, there are more champions who include; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Arthur Rimbaud, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. They all considered walking an important source of acquiring their ideas. Most importantly is that it is done without earbuds, headphones or a screen.

Utilize schedules for your texting and calling times instead of just acting out of compulsion in order to feel less alone.

Throughout the evolutionary process, we have spent thousands and thousands of years developing a complex brain and mind for which one purpose is processing an even more complex social life. It is therefore not only pointless but also unwise to think that the desire of this intricate mind can be satisfied with a number of hashtags, emojis, likes, and interactions.

With accordance to the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, the more time spent on social media, then the more likely one is to feel isolated and lonely. This finding should come as no shocking thing. The following digital minimalism practice should hence be to stop clicking the “like” button.

In fact, save yourself from making superficial comments such as “really dope”, “wow, amazing” “super cool” on the social media platforms. Do not fool yourself that these comments are a meaningful and effective substitute for real-life face-to-face conversations and connections. They are not a worthy alternative to meaningful human interactions. Better yet, you have the option of staying silent and reserving such comments to when you meet or talk to your friends. We are actually built, as humans, to find this more satisfying.

If it is in your concern about how your friends will react to this social media, you can simply explain to them your situation and why you decided to take it up. They could even be inspired and decide to join you. Keep in mind that visiting a friend and bringing them some snacks, food or pastries is so much better than sending 10,000 likes their way. This is because nothing can beat that real-life interaction.

Less social media could mean a better social life. This is owed to the fact that the less time you spend on social media then the more you are prone to actually go out and meet people.

With regards to texts, electronic mails and messaging, a phone call goes a long way than any of these means. Phone calls have a more personal feel as it incorporates voice and requires a certain level of presence of mind from both sides. This makes it more intimate than basic texting and is more rewarding than any number of emojis.

This is not to completely disregard the value of sending texts, as they can be very useful in an emergency if you are running late for a meeting and need to send a short piece of information fast, or in the case where you may need a simple one-step verification. However, it is not the best means as a genuine means of communication. As a matter of fact, it can raise your loneliness levels.

There’s a Silicon Valley executive who came with a simple but effective practice than you can employ. This is by setting regular conversation hours. For himself, he set up the time at 5:30 pm on weekdays when anyone can call him to discuss anything. This also proves to be

an efficient way to discourage long back and forth texting throughout the span of a day. And if you text him, he would respond with something along the lines of “call me at 5:30 pm and let us discuss this”.

This can extend further than just with phone calls. For instance, you can set your period to 11 AM on the weekend at your favorite cafe or coffee bistro. Definitely, we can all agree on the fact that real life interactions are way better than interactions through a screen. It would be wise to promote real-life interactions.

Embrace hard and virtuous hobbies, as well as schedule low-value activities for more meaningful leisure.

Never ever underestimate the value of leisure time. As the renowned philosopher Aristotle said that in order to have a quality of life, one ought to make time available for deep contemplation and though not in order to achieve anything but for the sake of it. Moreover, as Aristotle academician Kieran Setiya explains, activities that give one a source of inward joy are vital for one’s life to be satisfying.

The author describes these activities of deep thought and contemplation as “high quality| leisure while those of being absent-minded and staring into screens using social media as “low-quality” leisure. One should attempt to increase their time spent on high-quality leisure as well as consciously reduce the time spent on the low-quality ones.

The author made the observation that hobbies and activities that require difficult input and are somewhat challenging to do are the most rewarding. These are the high-quality activities he mentions. At first, it may seem trying, but even the influential British writer Arthur Bennett claims that these strenuous activities provide more satisfaction once undertaken.

Gary Rogowski explains out in his book “Craftsman” that engaging with real-life three-dimensional objects is key for good leisure time. Applying one’s skills in the real world and working to create real projects and goals is way more rewarding than just clicking and scrolling with one’s finger. In this case, technology can be very helpful.

For instance, one can easily find tutorials on Youtube for real life, real-world activities such as building your bed or working on a wooden door just to name a few examples. The catalog is vast.

One could also set leisure-time goals, like learning a dance choreography within a specific period of time. This is key to help in avoiding one to be distracted and keeping the momentum on the high-quality activity going. It also helps to resist the temptation of engaging in low-quality leisure. The most important thing is not to completely abandon even those low-quality leisure but rather to schedule and set the appropriate time for their accommodation in your life.

Completely abandoning your old behavioral patterns could easily backfire and lead to a relapse. However, if you set a schedule focusing mainly on the high-quality activities while still accommodating the low-quality leisure, it could eventually lead you to see the difference in the quality of both activities and the digital distractions would eventually not be a source of worry.

Attention resistance advice incorporates downgrading your phone and using single-purpose devices.

Digital minimalism may seem like a queer and hopeless idea especially to those already addicted to their phones and social media accounts. For those who may not know, it is actually just one part of a rising global movement known as the Attention Resistance.

The movement received its name from the “attention economy” – an industry that most tech companies nowadays are involved in. Nowadays social media companies like Facebook earn their money in a similar manner to tabloid newspapers back in the 1800s. This is achieved by gathering the audience of a large number of people, their audience, and selling their attention to advertisers who post their products and services.

The more people they can gather, and the longer they can get attention, the money they are likely to make. These days, getting attention is even more valuable than oil, with companies like Google and Facebook valued at 800 billion and 500 billion respectively.

The need by people to resist selling their attention and retaining their autonomy comes from the fact that attention is valued at such a high price. This leads to people working for attention economy companies to work at their best to exploit human vulnerabilities and doing whatever it takes to keep you distracted. Dumbing down your phone is one of the strategies of attention resistance. For example, using a flip phone made in the mid-2000s.

Making your computers a single-purpose device is another strategy. This resembles the earliest versions of the Macs and PCs and can be achieved by using popular blocking software 'Freedom'. This method may seem unwise and as if one is reducing the power of their computer but running multiple programs on a computer or just one has nothing to do with its power. In fact, it could prove to be the contrary as you are utilizing the computer to run a single program more efficiently.

While utilizing the principles and tools of digital minimalism and attention resistance, you can maintain your autonomy and resist the exploitation of the bright minds of Silicon Valley.

Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World by Cal Newport Book Review.

Digital minimalism refers to a philosophy or way of life that is an active attempt to resisting the harm caused by today's large digital media landscape. Through research, studies and information gathered, it can be seen that businesses in the attention are purposefully making their products and services more addictive and that increased exposure to these utilities can prove to be harmful to your health.

It is important that we contemplate our relationships with these technologies and how to use them. By employing the principles and fundamentals of digital minimalism, we should take back our attention into our own hands and strive to live a more successful and satisfying life.

Employ the three principles of digital minimalism and screen all your applications if their presence is adding or reaping value from your life.

Not having a constant presence in social media will definitely improve the quality of your life. Social media also does have its benefits if used properly, therefore, one should really screen

what they are really about the impact they can in his or her life. It's about time we take our attention and our lives back into our own hands.

<https://goodbooksummary.com/digital-minimalism-by-cal-newport-book-summary/>