

Digital Abstinence

Within the last decade there has been an increase in the availability of screen based digital resources. It seems the benefits these devices offer clearly outweigh the initial hardware costs associated in attaining them. While processing speed and screen size increase we see mobile devices becoming a primary computing resource. The combination of desktop quality internet and email that is combined with a camera, text messaging and a stable cellular connection is powerful device for me to abstain from.

The constant exposure to digital resources has become a prominent component in shaping my current lifestyle. I would consider myself someone who is aware of the transition towards dependency. Initial qualitative analysis would suggest that I am someone who is casually dependent on digital resources. During this exercise I found quite the opposite. Although I would not say I am dependent, I do see a path pointing in that direction. It is clearly driven by the conveniences these resources offer. I like to relate digital dependency to that of using a calculator while doing homework problems. Throughout school I usually was able to enjoy the speed and convenience associated with my trusty Ti-30X scientific calculator. Most recently a number of professors have restricted the use of them for exams, leaving me fumbling around while solving simple problems. The dependency resulted in hours of re-training myself to perform simple math by hand. What's more interesting is that I did not dig up an old algebra book or find some elementary school notes on long division. Instead, I logged into the internet

to patch the missing elements in my memory. The use of digital resource to fill in the blanks in math was efficient but may have channeled my attention so effectively that other topics were overlooked. What is even more peculiar, is how quickly I turned to another digital resource in order to fix problems that were caused by digital use in the first place. This kind reciprocal behavior, where reliance on one type of digital media supports the use of another, is commonplace.

Avoidance is a tricky scenario, a tough act to follow, especially since so many digital resources are deeply embedded within my daily activities. I scheduled my abstinence session from 3 to 3p.m. across a Saturday and Sunday. This was the time for which I knew I could disconnect from digital resources while still be productive. I choose the first option towards abstinence. This allowed for some digital content but restricts recent formats like texting, GPS and web browsing. I felt this option was more attainable since regular television and phone calls were still be available. Although I was alive through the 1990's, I did not remember experiencing any lack or entertainment or a deprived sense of stimulation. Maybe it was because I knew how to go out and party or maybe having a digital resources at my fingertips all the time has created complacency. Upon completion of the 24 hour interval I encountered many scenarios where the use of digital resources had to be physically avoided and replaced by another activity. Not only was I triggered from commercials on television or motivated to check messages, I found a sense of stillness within my apartment without the digital connection all together.

Saturday night was enhanced with a carry-out pizza order. The motivation was derived from a coupon and a matching advertisement I saw on TV. What's interesting was my initial

instinct to use G.P.S. in order to find Round Table pizza's info. Knowing this was restricted I felt uncertain about actually being able to place the order. In this particular case I was lucky the store address was on the coupon. Imagine if I didn't have the address and didn't know the area well. Without the internet or phone I would have had to find a nonexistent phone book or even ask another person for directions. On the other hand, talking to another person without the use of any digital resource may have generated some desperately needed networking skills. For some reason the act of introducing myself and holding a conversation seemed to require a lot of motivation. While ravaging through my greasy pizza I thought about which method I would choose to contact my friend for his move tomorrow. He probably already texted my phone but I figured I would put in a call. He picked up the phone with a slightly annoyed tone, almost as if the call was taking too much of his energy. After explanation he confirmed the text while continuing to badger me about my abstinence how I was home on a Saturday night. Sunday morning started with a few solid cups of coffee. I couldn't shrug the trigger to check the most recent additions to my email inbox. To confirm the plans with my friend I had to place another phone call. I left a voicemail, leaving me wondering if it would go unchecked. I was skeptical about a response. Unlike text messaging, the voicemail didn't give any kind of delivery confirmation. Although using the phone seemed very formidable the communication method seemed somewhat overkill for such an informal question. I thought to myself how quickly text messaging, as a digital form of communication, became an acceptable and almost preferred format for social and business communication.

This exercise proved itself useful, in not only understanding how deeply connected I am but in motivating the use of digital alternatives. I can relate to these devices as a way of passing time or feeling in tune and updated. If you look around at any given time you will see people's faces buried within their cellphone screens who are always seemingly busy. Almost to avoid any interaction with the people standing around them. Taking further stock of this, you find that much of the busyness is not related to productivity. It's as if the phone is another extension of our body and its growth justified by how it gives us the ability to multitask. This growth is reinforced by the constant cycle of notifications, email checking and status updates. Whether this is an internal addiction or just an unenviable step in our evolution, I find myself lending more time in support of it. This can be demonstrated in the immediate desire I have to view recent emails the moment I wake up. Also a way of passing time between TV programs. There are up sides to digital resources. The internet adds an interactive element to television since what is being viewed can easily be found online. The richness of the digital content online almost certainly overlaps the content found on standard television.

Further analysis shows that society supports the evolution of digital resources through reinforcing the need to stay digitally connected. The hardware is already embedded within our cars, homes and watches and is ready to keep us on track and connected. Unfortunately, the convenience these devices promise may not always pan out in an effective use of time. In fact, they can introduce a unique new set of distractions to our lives. For example, I may have spent fifteen minutes customizing my online pizza order while a phone call would have taken no more than five. Alternatively, I could have just ordered my pizza in person and explored the shopping center while it was made. I may have met someone new or found out about places that I didn't

know existed. If I took the digital approach I may have received a fully customized pizza but at the cost of missing out on what the environment around me during the purchase itself. This leads to the idea that our lifestyle is constructed through the use of digital devices versus our actions. More types of communication rely on digital resources. This ends up playing a greater role in controlling our daily activities thus controlling what we are exposed to, who we meet and how we get there. Constant email checking and the need to maintain our online status can be attributed to this digital technology. I find myself checking email with hopes of finding something new and satisfying. This variable reinforcement continues to drive my instinctual motivation to turn to digital resources before considering anything else.

The weekend spent, as if I were in the year 1992, allowed me to realize which components of life could be improved without the use of digital devices. Although there was a sense of loneliness and a feeling of apprehension at first, I think there are benefits associated with the removal process. Whether it be simple math problems, making a phone call instead of text messaging or walking around to meet new people the time spent away from digital resources can still promote effective communication and a productive lifestyle.

