

Managing tech "over-use" & keeping your senses sharp

Post by "Julia" of May 17, 2024 at 9:13 AM

On Healthy Smartphone Use

I use a watch, wall calendar, pocket-sized day planner, a paper journal and a calculator. The haptic interaction helps; and studies have consistently shown that handwriting (as opposed to typing) helps in processing/retaining information. However, I'm just not going to also carry a GPS, torch, camera, ... with me everywhere I go. For things to remain sane and sound, I use my smartphone like this:

- any and all notifications off by default
- selectively re-enable certain, specific notifications
- always buy a model with notification LED - this prevents the compulsion of checking the screen all the time (if it were important, it would blink - like good old answering machines)
- habituated myself to place it with the screen facing down, such that I don't see even the LED unless *I myself* decide to pick it up (eg to use it, to leave the house, charge it, ...)
- no email on phone (I read mail once a day, max. If that is too slow, people ought to call me)
- no social media (just 1-to-1 messaging)
- F-Droid app store to replace most commonly used apps, with ones that are ad-free, and not as intrusive as others, because they don't rely on user-interaction to sell ads
- I use special apps to access online video (→ Newpipe) and streaming music (→ InnerTune), because they allow me to hide comments, don't have ads, and don't recommend more content (but allow me to save what I specifically searched for and let me access my playlists)
- automatic silent mode (do not disturb) at night (only repeat callers and especially marked contacts can get through)
- segregate certain apps into the Work profile
- only install what's really needed; eg: I don't have banking on my phone. I do that at home, in my office. No news apps, either.
- Don't save bookmarks, auto-delete tabs after closing the browser, ...
- If having a compulsive-use issue, DetoxDroid (available through F-Droid) can help curb and extinguish bad habits

There are some companies which sell phones with modified Android versions pre-installed, usually advertised for added privacy or security, but in my opinion they also help in positively changing how one uses technology, because certain function are off by default, et cetera. (Effectively, I use something virtually identical to those, except I went through the technical hassle of re-installing and modifying it all myself; that takes time, and I might not want to do it again, in which case I'd also buy one of the pre-installed modified ones.)

If using cloud services (for synchronised contacts, calendars, backup functions, ...), those are also offered by companies other than Big Tech, including those which sell pre-modified phones. (It is worth remembering the Big Tech services are free of charge, because we ourselves are the product. They don't sell services to us, they sell us as a service to 3rd parties (who pay for our data and ads, which in turn implies the more we interact with the service, the more of our life they absorb, the more ad revenue they get - this is why it is all designed to be so addictive and absorbing)).

Caveat: With such modified phones, a few apps might not work; especially banking-related ones. Google and the banks artificially (as in: without having genuine legal reasons) prevent this on a technical basis. That said, compatibility was never a problem for me personally, and I did use two banking apps in the past.