Smartphones and social media. How can we achieve deep work?

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to address how smartphones and social media have taken over our lives and how we can change that. I begin by first mentioning how the smartphone has taken control of our lives and why we are reluctant to change. By describing the ways in which the smartphone and social media have taken over our lives, I reckon that the repetitiveness seen within social media can easily be changed, depending on how much effort we choose to put in.

As a result of being reliant on the smartphone, I detail about the effects of social media, both negative and positive, to show the realities behind social media. I mention how social media is hacking our brains with their platforms and how we are stuck in time. I present the idea of deep work and how, when utilized properly, it showcases a type of human behavior that, although challenging to achieve, is rewarding.

Lastly, I suggest how deep work can be achieved and the benefits associated with deep work. Deep work is hard to achieve, so I outline what exactly deep work is and how it can be achieved. By mentioning how deep work can be achieved, I encourage everyone to try and accomplish deep work because of all the positives associated with it. By mentioning the ways to achieve deep work, I hope that people will try to achieve it to improve their lifestyle and self-esteem.

The Smartphone and its control

If we looked at everyone in a room, chances are that everyone would have a smartphone on them, whether in their pocket or their hand. We always want to be with our phones and want to use them to capture every moment. A study was done by Kristen Duke, Adrian Ward, Ayelet Hneezy, and Maarten Bos involved having two groups, one which would place their phones face down in front of them and another which would leave their phones in another room. They wanted to see whether just having a smartphone nearby can affect one's cognitive abilities. The results went as expected. The people with their phones in another room did considerably better than those with their phones face down in front of them. We can maximize the success of our work if we plan to be without our phones for some time, but we remain afraid to do so. Are smartphones destroying a generation?

This generation, compared to the past generation, is obviously different. However, the most significant difference is that the current generation has grown up with smartphones that continue to evolve while the past generation grew up without smartphones. Author Jean M. Twenge calls the generation born between 1995 and 2012 the IGen because people born in this generation are growing up with smartphones and do not know what life was like before the internet. People have changed the way they communicate because of smartphones. These days, most adolescents tend to spend most of, if not all, their time in their rooms because they can still communicate with their friends even if it is not direct face to face but screen to screen. Smartphones affect teenagers' mental health because now many people, even complete strangers, can see the details of an individual's life that they previously would not have been able to see. Teen depression and suicide have skyrocketed since 2011, when smartphones started to become the next big thing.

The smartphone has become a natural adaptation in our lives, replacing many of the tools and technology of the past. Although there are benefits to smartphones, there are also reasons to be cautious of our use of smartphones. The first reason to be cautious is that there are multiple people involved with each task and the second reason is that we have to keep adapting to the updates that keep happening with the smartphone, which leads to us changing our lifestyles. We have a conflict of interest with the smartphone because of how much we rely on it and how much it has taken over our lives. If we were to take a smartphone out of the hand of the nearest teenager to us and see what happens, the teenager would likely go berserk until they got their phone back. The panic that people feel without their smartphones will be astronomical because they do not know a life without technology. Social media is the biggest beneficiary of smartphones. However, it is not how much we use social media that affects our happiness but instead how we use social media when using it.

The effects of social media

I do not think it is out of the question that social media has destroyed a generation. The IGen does not know how to live a life without phones, leading to us keeping relying on our phones. Many people assume that the smartphone is the one behind the wrong decisions, but for many, the way that they use social media is the real problem. Many young people are faced with anxiety as a result of social media and cyberbullying. If you look at the people saying smartphones are ruining this generation, they are mostly older individuals who grew up without smartphones. Smartphones have actually helped this generation in more ways than not. Smartphones have allowed people to stay connected with each other when they cannot physically be with one another. Smartphones are perfect during the time we are in currently because no one wants to be around anyone during the Covid pandemic, so smartphones have made it easier to stay connected with one another from the comfort of your own home. Now, this is not to say that social media is not a problem; people just make social media out to be more of a problem than it is because of stigmas and perceived notions. While smartphones may not be the best thing, they are far from the reason as to why people say this generation is being destroyed.

Social media both connects us with our community but also keeps us less connected. The main idea behind these social media platforms is to create a network of friends while also building a sense of community. Although people can be following many people and have many followers on Instagram, how many of these people do they know and would actually talk face to face with. Many people view social media as detrimental to society because it can be harmful and isolating. One thing that must change is that we cannot rely on the internet to tell us about the world. Because we cannot rely on the internet to tell us about what is going on in the world, we must start to limit our time on social media and instead focus on building relationships in real life.

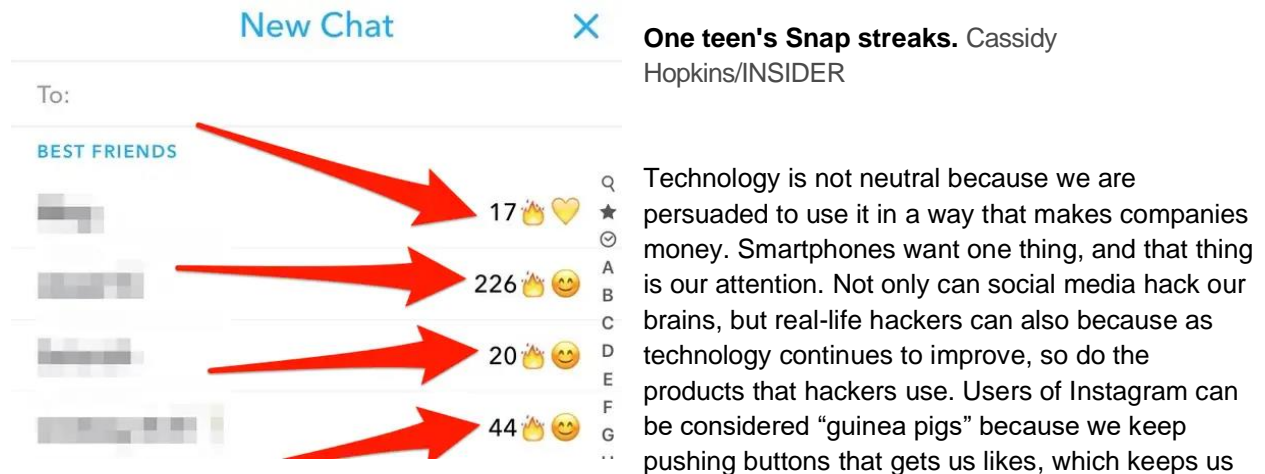The Best Tools to Track and Analyze Your Social Media
 Marketing Campaigns.

Social media continues to go through changes with updates to their systems rapidly. The term sociometer, coined by psychologist Mark Leary, tells us, moment by moment, how we are doing in the eyes of others. When talking with friends in person, if you continuously display anger in your conversations, your friends will get tired of it. However, when you do it in front of an audience on social media, the outrage that occurs can boost your status. Social media has the ability to turn politically enraged people into people who compete to make the most inflammatory posts, which they can show across the country based on their public sociometer. One thing that has flattened the hierarchy of credibility regarding social media is the news feeds algorithm of ordering how we see the content. Social media not only keeps us glued to our phones but also keeps us stuck in the moment. The reverse chronological design is the organizing principle for every major social media platform. When using social media platforms, we see the most recent posts before seeing prior posts after we have scrolled down before being alerted that there are new posts and starting this process over again.

Social media and brain hacking

If we were to survey one thousand college students, I would estimate that above 95% of them have some form of social media. With the way that technology keeps improving, social media will continue to take over our lives. Social media and brain hacking go hand in hand. Everyone has become so addicted to their phones that no one can be without them for even five minutes. The Smartphone has become a natural adaptation in our lives, replacing many of the tools and technology of the past. We should be cautious of smartphones because there are multiple people involved with each task with the availability involved when it comes to the Smartphone.

Silicon Valley is getting us hooked by engineering our phones so that we become addicted. Our phones are like slot machines because we feel like we have won something every time we get an alert. The app Snapchat has hijacked our brains with streaks, which show how many days in a row you and a friend have sent a message back and forth. People have become so accustomed to keeping their streaks that they will sometimes give their passwords to someone else just so that they can keep their streaks alive.

One teen's Snap streaks. Cassidy Hopkins/INSIDER

Technology is not neutral because we are persuaded to use it in a way that makes companies money. Smartphones want one thing, and that thing is our attention. Not only can social media hack our brains, but real-life hackers can also because as technology continues to improve, so do the products that hackers use. Users of Instagram can be considered "guinea pigs" because we keep pushing buttons that gets us likes, which keeps us wanting more. Users of social media sites do not have to pay a single cent to use these platforms. We use them for free because we will keep coming back to what is being portrayed. Individuals have become so accustomed to using social media that even if they do not get an alert, they will look at their accounts because they do not want to miss out on anything. Silicon Valley is the cause of blame for this brain hacking. The world we live in now is the one built by the smartphone because everything relies on technology. High-powered individuals such as Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg are among many high-powered individuals who care more about things that do not matter than fixing the community they have destroyed. Not everyone will see their industry as being the villain as some people say that more people get more good out of social media than bad. The problem is that the creators of these platforms do not seem to care about how their users are affected as long as they are making money. This forces me to ask the question of is it worth it to use social media? To figure out a solution, we must rely on Deep Work.

Cal Newport mentions the attention resistance and mentions how as a society, we often tend to welcome the benefit of an innovation, but we struggle to reach its potential. These big social media conglomerates like Facebook want its use to be simplified rather than getting the optimized version of the platform after sifting through the possibilities. Newport also brings about the question of deleting social media and how it can improve your lifestyle. However, the key to this is not just deleting your social media accounts, the first step is to delete the app from your smartphone, so you do not rely on it to get through your day. Online distractions have such an impact on the working world. Social media platforms can do well if we can remove the bad aspects and use the platforms properly. Newport also mentions the "any-benefit approach" and the "craftsman" approach. The "any-benefit approach" uses a network tool if you can identify a benefit to using it, or something can happen if you do not use it. The "Craftsman approach" requires the user to figure out whether the benefits have actual value.

Quitting social media can allow us to feel a sense of freedom because we are no longer concerned with the number of likes, views, and comments we receive on our posts. Quitting social media eases our tension as we no longer hunch over our phones, and there is a weight off our shoulders. Although quitting social media is a significant change, one single change will not drastically alter your life but can be a significant first step in changing it. Social media often sees the good that happens in our lives and not the bad. Getting rid of social media is also a big ego boost because you do not care about what others think of you. Although social media can be good for networking because it can expand your network to people in different geographical areas, the negatives associated with social media outweigh the good.

Negative effects of Multitasking and smartphones with deep work

Many people assume that multitasking has a positive effect on performance. Multitasking is when you are doing two or more tasks at once. With the advancements in technology, we can multitask more because of the ease of doing so, and multitasking is considered a desirable trait because it allows us to accomplish more in a shorter amount of time. People fail to realize that while they may think they are multitasking, they are only doing one task at a time because they keep switching back from one task to the other. Multitasking can hurt our productivity because it reduces our comprehension, attention, and performance. Studies have shown that there are detrimental effects that occur when multitasking instead of focusing on a singular thing at a time.

Focusing on a single task is much more effective than multitasking. Our brains are not as good at multitasking as we may think, and we must realize that because it hinders our ability to perform deep work. Multitasking impairs our executive function because of goal shifting and rule activation. Goal shifting is when we choose to do one thing instead of another because one may be more accessible, and rule activation is when we change from doing something that will help one task to do something that will help another. Multitasking impairs our cognitive ability because we tend to overestimate our ability and often lack the necessary skills to be successful while multitasking. We must break the multitasking habit because doing so will allow us to increase our productivity and efficiency.
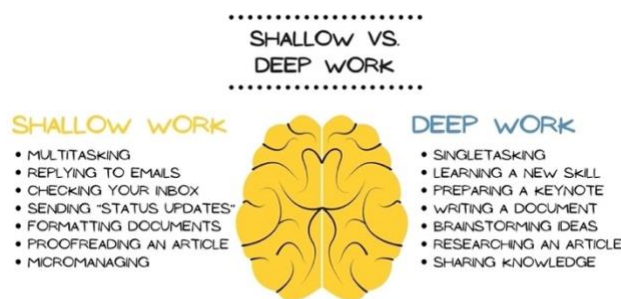
Deep Work

Before we look at what exactly deep work is, we must first look at shallow work. In Cal Newport's book, Deep Work, he describes shallow work as work performed while distracted in one way or another, leading to no new value or skill being produced. Shallow work relies on how active a worker is and has become the new normal in most workplaces, as fewer and fewer people can focus entirely for a nine-to-five workday shift. Shallow work with social media would best be described as going back to social media because you want to take a break from your current task. Many people prefer to do shallow work as it is easier and requires less focus and attention to detail. They fail to realize that the less focus they have, the worse the work they are doing will be.

However, there are reasons why shallow work occurs, and these include loss of attention, consistent distraction, and poor attitude by employees, to name a few. Knowing the effects of shallow work, it would be wise to assume that moving away from shallow work would benefit all parties involved.

Deep Work: Professional Activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate.

Deep work is the opposite of shallow work. Deep work is the central theme of Newport's book. It encourages individuals to work towards their goals while also enduring that their production can provide credibility to the company and satisfaction to the employee. There is more to deep work than what appears on the surface. Deep work is pivotal to getting every ounce of value out of our intellectual capacity. Deep work is what is needed to stand out in an intellectually and demanding field. Newport mentions three individuals that we should look at when it comes to the success of deep work. The first person is Carl Jung, whose lectures and counseling practice led him to become one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century. He mentions Woody Allen, who wrote and directed over forty films that received twenty-three Academy Award nominations. He did this without owning a computer or electronic device. Allen formulated his work on a German Olympia SM3 manual typewriter free from any electronic distraction and in a deep work setting. The third individual mentioned by Newport is Bill Gates, who would participate in "think weeks" where he would isolate himself from the world and do nothing besides reading and think about big thoughts; the true definition of being in a distraction-free environment.

The benefits of deep work are astronomical. With the rise of technology and social media, people are forgetting about deep work and are hurting their production in the process. Working in a distraction-free setting can allow you to accomplish things in a faster manner. If it took you an entire day to finish something in the past because you were distracted, it would take a much shorter time to accomplish your task if you were not distracted and with that task finished, you could get a head start on the next task.

Looking to Distractions? Boost Team Focus with Deep Work

Companies continue to rely on shallow work, and for what reason? Are they afraid of change? Or are they too lazy to make a change for the better? Companies are embracing the open office concept. An open office concept favors a communal work environment where there are shared workspaces instead of isolated offices. This type of concept is designed to create better communication, culture, and trust but fails to consider the effects it has on production. The open office concept is terrible, in my opinion, because it is more distracting, along with making people feel pressured to work longer because of their lack of privacy and the fact that everyone can see how much or how little they have accomplished. There are four reasons why companies prefer shallow work over deep work. According to Newport, they are short-term gains are easier to accomplish, the repetitive and task-oriented type of work being done gives a false impression of being productive, the distraction of the internet is dismissed because companies allow the adverse effects to go unseen, and the metric black hole.

The Metric Black Hole allows a shift towards the distraction that is encountered in the professional world. This is related to the Principle of Least Resistance and how humans will tend towards the most manageable behaviors at the moment rather than do something challenging. Deep work should be a priority in the business world because if you go deep, you will see much success. The question we should all be asking is how we can accomplish deep work?

How to achieve Deep Work

While many people wish not to do deep work, they eventually face the reality of doing deep work but do not understand how to. When thinking about how to achieve deep work, we should look towards "The Great Restructuring" related to deep work giving value to someone and making them relevant in the current economy rather than being irrelevant. Every day we are faced with many distractions, and the main result of that is because of our smartphones. While smartphones are generally seen as distractions, there are ways to utilize them to achieve deep work. High-skilled workers are individuals who can work with intelligent machines to produce their work. We can all agree that it is faster to type something rather than write it, so if we must use our smartphones for work, we should correctly use them and not in a distracting manner.
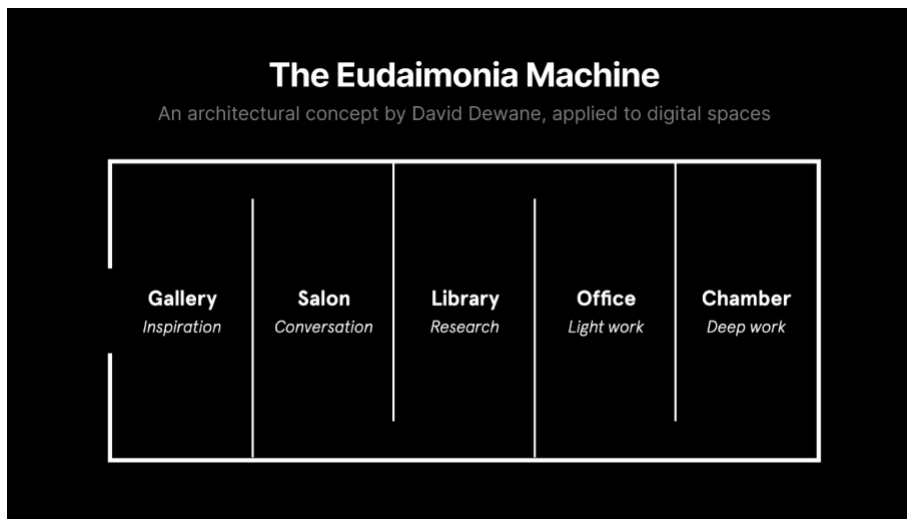
Newport mentions a neurological argument, a psychological argument, and a philosophical argument about why we should perform deep work. Concerning the neurological argument for deep work, deep work is associated with more meaning, so it makes sense that if we used our brains to their fullest potential, we would generate meaning because if we are not, we will feel like we have not reached our highest potential. Regarding a psychological argument for deep work, deep work leads to flow. Flow can be described as being in the zone, which is when we become fully immersed and find enjoyment in doing something. When talking about a philosophical argument for deep work, we must think of deep work as a craft because there is nothing more intrinsic about the manual trades when it comes to this argument. The most crucial part of understanding the philosophical argument for deep work is that any pursuit that supports a high skill level can also create a sense of devoutness.

Perhaps the most important thing when preparing to achieve deep work is to ritualize. We must ritualize where we will work and for how long, how we will work once we start to work, how we will support our work, and how we will get rid of our distractions. Our biggest distraction is our smartphone, so we must first place it in another room because even if it is off but in front of us, we will keep looking at it, which will take away from our concentration. Even if we just participate in challenging things, that is like deep work, as it is a skill that must be consistently exercised at a high level. To maximize our effectiveness when doing deep work, we must take breaks from our focus and not breaks from our distractions. We should not be doing our work between watching tv or doing something on our phones, but we should instead be watching tv or doing something on our phones in between working. Deep work should be intense because it should stretch the limits of one's cognitive capability. Cal Newport suggests that we should utilize memorization techniques because it forces someone to concentrate, which is crucial for performing deep work.

Cal Newport also gives us four philosophies to use to schedule deep work. These are the Monastic Philosophy, the Bimodal philosophy, the Rhythmic philosophy, and the Journalistic Philosophy. The Monastic philosophy is for professionals who can disconnect from the world. This philosophy would fit an individual like Neal Stephenson, who does not answer e-emails and does not bother to be reckoned with, especially when working. The Bimodal philosophy requires deep work segment of time. This philosophy would match an individual like Carl Jung, who would go to his house in the woods to write while connecting with nature rather than other humans. The Rhythmic philosophy is meant to build a deep work

routine into people's lives. This philosophy would fit someone like Jerry Seinfeld because Seinfeld could remain a working comedian with his busy tour schedule. The Journalistic philosophy is best suited for those that can do deep work in an instant. According to Newport, Walter Issacson is an excellent example of this philosophy as he can shift into writing mode immediately. The human mind wants to do everything except work.

Newport introduces us to the Eudaimonia Machine, an example of the intersection between the conceptual and the concrete. It means in a state where you are achieving your full human potential. The Eudaimonia Machine was designed by David Dewane and included five chambers.

The Eudaimonia Machine
An architectural concept by David Dewane, applied to digital spaces

| Gallery | Salon | Library | Office | Chamber |
| *Inspiration* | *Conversation* | *Research* | *Light work* | *Deep work* |

These chambers are Gallery, Salon, Library, Office, and Deep Work Chambers. You must pass through one room to get to the next. The Gallery is composed of examples of previous deep work products and inspires those who seek deep work. The next room is the Salon which is intended to initiate a conversation through the theme of a Wi-Fi lounge. After the Salon is the Library which contains all of your past work and can aid in helping with what you need for your next project. Following the Library is the Office Space, the backbone for accomplishing shallow work and whatever needs to be done before entering the deep work chambers. The Deep Work chambers are designed for total focus and uninterrupted workflow where you can create what deep work will allow you to create. The Eudaimonia machine has yet to become a reality, but its concept best illustrates the highest chance for success.

Conclusion

We have both lost and gained an immense amount of knowledge because of the smartphone. I have been lucky enough that I have had first-hand experience with the benefits of deep work. I used to rely on social media for everything, whether trying to distract myself from real-world situations or going on social media because I was bored. I decided to stop relying so much on my smartphone and figure out ways to occupy myself without it. I thought, what better way to get rid of using my smartphone than by going out and doing what I love to do, golf. I golf about five times a week, and each time I do, I do not bring my phone because I need to be able to have self-control and not use my phone during other activities. I

stopped using social media all the time and have not only seen my happiness go up, but I am also able to see more of what is going in the world because I am not glued to my phone.

This is not to say that smartphones and social media are bad things. I think the point of this is to show that while smartphones and social media can be addictive, which makes people think it is terrible, the reality is that your use of social media decides whether it is good or bad. As social media continues to roll out new updates to its products, more and more people will start to utilize these platforms more than they currently do. We must not let the smartphone take over, and we must take back the world where humans provide value and not technology.

As the world continues to grow into a technology-based world, humans must take a stand and not let what they worked so hard to build get taken away by some media conglomerates. Yes, it may be in our best interest to continue to adapt to the changes in technology so we can remain connected with the world, but we must not let technology take over our lives. It may not be easy to do this, but you will accomplish it without a problem if you do deep work.

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