FOUR TIPS FOR A HEALTHY INFORMATION DIFT

Clay Johnson is a blogger and the author of *The Information Diet:* A Case for Conscious Consumption. In his opinion, a healthy information diet is one that is limited to a couple hours spent online or engaging with media a day. His own personal diet consists of six hours a day in total. In those six hours, he does all kinds of digital activities that require his attention, but that don't involve human interaction. If an activity involves a URL, a mouse, or a remote control, it has to take place within the six-hour time frame. He doesn't include accidental exposure, such as advertisements or music in grocery stores.

Of those six hours, he spends about two hours on entertainment and four hours on work-related research and communication. On weekends, he spends the full six hours on whatever he wants. The only condition is that he only gets six hours and not a minute more. By limiting his digital intake to six hours a day, he's forced to do other stuff, like going for a walk or cooking a good dinner. He claims that this trick has been a hugely beneficial, not only to his productivity, but also to his marriage and his overall health.

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Johnson also believes that, in the same way junk food leads to health problems, junk information kills our productivity and efficiency and makes us ignorant. On his blog, InfoVegan, he shares a bunch of tips for a healthy information diet. I collected some of his most important tips and added a few of my own:

Keep Track of Your Consumption

Time yourself and start monitoring what kind of information you're taking in. It's a bit like a food diet, where you keep track of what you eat every day, except you're examining your digital media intake instead of your calories. Get yourself a notebook and write down what you're taking in (such as movies, television, social media). When you're doing something on your computer or your smartphone, use a tool like rescuetime.com; it runs secretly in the background and keeps track of how much time spent on apps and websites. It'll give you a pretty accurate overview of how much time you spend on your devices and what you spend that time doing. In the beginning, you'll be surprised to learn just how much precious time you've wasted on useless apps such as Twitter and Facebook.

Create a Healthy Information Meal Plan

As with a normal meal, you can plan your information meals beforehand. Create a good mix between news (New York Times, Google News, Huffington Post ... whatever reliable news source you choose), nonfiction (anything of your interest, not just stuff you look at for work or school), social networks (keep this part to a minimum, as social media are usually only useful to help you kill some time), and enrichment (a part of your daily consumption, and this part is often forgotten or neglected, and should consist of podcasts, TED talks, documentaries).

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Set Up Your System

There are a number of handy desktop tools out there to help keep you productive and focused. Some of them are apps that work on your smartphone, which is a notorious attention-killer! Here's a short list of what you can do to help you stay more focused while online:

- Adbleck: Seriously, get an ad blocker. It's a browser extension that blocks advertisements on major websites. It works for Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox.
- Facebook Notification Settings: Uncheck the box next to "Send me important updates and summary e-mails instead of individual notification e-mail." Next, visit the notification settings on Facebook and uncheck every box. You can also choose to disable the ads in your Facebook timeline.
- Twitter Settings: Uncheck every box on the Twitter Settings page.
- Put your phone on "do not disturb" mode: On iPhones it's the little half-moon icon in your control center. If you're an Android user, you might want to check your phone's settings for available options. Now you won't be disturbed by any unnecessary notifications.
- Ferest: This is a great app that my friends use when they are studying. Basically, you plant a tree whenever you want to focus. You choose for how long you want to leave your phone alone, and the tree will grow for the amount of time you selected. The tree dies if you leave the app. If you keep building your forest, every single tree represents a time span during which you were focused on something else (or at least not playing with your phone).

Put down your phone sometimes and focus on what's important in life!

Keep the Balance

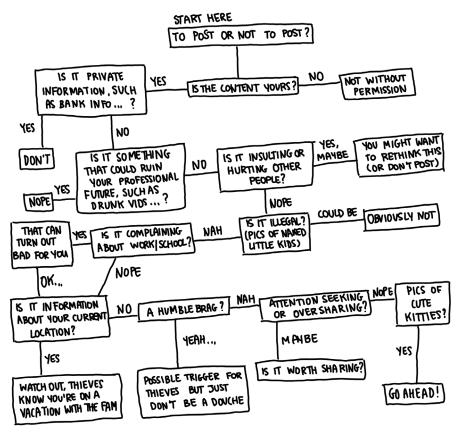
Adapting to a new diet is always hard in the beginning, but being persistent pays off. Sooner or later you'll learn what's important enough to attract your attention and to hold it. Mindlessly scrolling

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through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter feeds are not going to help you fall asleep. Reading a book, writing a poem, or working out will. Of course, technology helps us a lot in our daily lives—at school and at work. Just remember to maintain a healthy balance between what's important and what's useless in the media you consume and you will feel more productive and focused on a daily basis.

TO POST OR NOT TO POST



STAYING TRUE TO YOUR (VIRTUAL) SELF

Perhaps the real question to ask is, "Why do we fake being happy on social media and how do we stop ourselves from doing it?" This is one of the biggest questions I struggled with as a teen. My generation grew up with the rise of smartphones and social media apps. Whenever we post online, we're usually giving our network an update about our (private and professional) lives. It's basically the same thing as going for drinks with friends, but like, a whole lot of friends you don't really know in a huge, crowded club.

I think almost everyone feels a sense of being let down when our latest picture doesn't get as many likes as we'd hoped. How many of us have posted a selfie, desperately waiting for that one person to see it and he doesn't? How many of us have been jealous, at least once, of our friend's bikini pic from the beach last summer? Social media is a whole different world, where we say and post things we probably wouldn't say or do in real life. On social media, we can pretend to have whatever and be whoever the f*** we want.

We fake a lot of things online, and it's time to face the fact that it's kinda ridiculous. We compare ourselves to fake images and try to shush our insecurities by creating fake pictures ourselves. That's our way of telling our social media followers that our life is great, that we're doing fine, and that we're just great always! But who are we kidding, actually, other than ourselves? Here's some classic things we like to embellish on social media:

•Our Leeks. We know our best angles and the cutest filters, and that's how we can pretend to look almost perfect. But honestly, we don't look anything like ourselves anymore. We have become truly skilled in the art of faking the perfect selfie, and it usually takes a lot—finding the right lighting that makes our features pop, looking for the perfect angle, and holding a weird pose that is kinda breaking our backs. Yup, 50 likes guaranteed!

THING YOU DON'T SEE ON SOCIAL MEDIA BUT ARE SUPER NORMAL:



THINGS YOU DO SEE ON SOCIALS BUT DON'T HAPPEN EVERYDAY:

• Our relationships. You know, all the cutie patootie pics of couples on vacation? Or their anniversary celebration? Or their picnic together? Or their canoe trip? We all know that one couple that just has to post everything on social media, hashtagging #couplegoals #forever. I bet they are fighting every day, but feel the need to make sure everyone thinks their relationship is all that.

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- Partying and going to concerts. Let's be honest, how many videos of friends attending a concert or festival have you actually watched? Most of them are poor quality and just plain deafening. The reason why our friends post them is to make sure that everyone knows they were at the concert or party. The content doesn't matter in the least.
- Feed. I hardly ever take any food pics, because I've usually finished half my dish by the time I remember to take a picture. Unless taking pictures of food is your job, no one really cares about your #foodporn Instagram pic. First of all: the viewers can't taste it, so that's a bummer. And second: it probably doesn't look half as good in the pictures as it does in real life.
- Traveling. Astonishing sunsets, beautiful local markets, beaches, and mountains. We've seen it all in your stories. But where are the delayed-flight selfies? The picture of you putting on aloe vera after being severely sunburned? Or that time you got food poisoning? I'm kidding about the last one (am I?), but instead of showing the reality of traveling, we prefer the picture-perfect moment on the Golden Gate Bridge in the golden hour, with an amazeballs filter to top it off.
- Our attitude. We pretend to be a lot cooler, more assertive, and confident than we really are. To be honest, it's pretty easy to create an online persona that has almost zero in common with the person you really are. Our lives are messy, and we all suffer setbacks and ride emotional roller coasters. But at all costs, we'll stay cool on our social network sites.

I have to admit, I'm guilty of all this, too. So for the sake of everyone, myself included, we should give some serious thought to how we can change the way we present ourselves on social media. Our obsession with flaunting our lives is both the cause and the effect of the brag culture we've created and are now stuck in. Social media tend to be some kind of popularity contest. (Who has the most likes? Who has the best pics? Who has the best body?) Whether we mean to or not, whether we like it or not, we all judge others by their online presence and are judged by them in return.

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But there's hope! So many people on social media are absolutely *not* what they claim to be. They seem to have a lot of friends, awesome dinners, and the best parties, but does that mean they're necessarily happier than us? Probably not, and that's exactly why you shouldn't believe everything you see on your social media feed. Don't attach too much value or meaning to it, and don't compare yourself to everything you see while scrolling. Everyone, literally everyone, has their bad moments or days.

Social media is not real life, but we already knew that. The tricky part is this: although we all know that social media are one big charade, we still keep taking those pics and posting those statuses. Why is that? Because social media are everywhere, and thus we live in a world where oversharing has become the norm. At the same time, we live in a society that seems to think beauty is more important than skills. And sadly, we get most of our self-esteem from the confirmation of our friends and peers nowadays, instead of finding it within ourselves.

We like to think we're super social and connected, but in reality, we are lonelier than ever. Damn, what can we actually do to turn this around?

Now that you understand how it happens and, most important, why it happens, you can try to tackle the problem at its roots. If you don't want to give up social media (yet), that's perfectly fine. I'm the last person to tell you you should. But you might want to consider trying the following:

- Live consciously. Be aware of the fact that you automatically grab your phone when your date gets up to go to the bathroom. Why do you do that? Because you feel awkward just sitting there by yourself, and you don't know what to do with your hands. Look around! Pay more attention to the things that are happening around you.
- Put your phone away when you're having dinner. Next time you visit a restaurant, play the phone stacking game: everyone who is at the dinner has to put her phone down on the table, on top of everybody else's phones, creating a tall stack. The first person to touch her phone has to pay the bill.

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- Ditch the perfectionism. Do you generally walk down the street with a filter over your eyes? No, and neither do I. Don't waste your time creating the perfect picture that doesn't even look like the real you. You're only fooling yourself.
- Build more genuine and face-to-face relationships. Try leaving your phone at home for one full day. You'll be so much more aware of your surroundings. Smile, greet people you pass on the street. Connect with people in real life.

Remember that self-esteem comes from the inside, not from the approval of others with a simple like or love button.