



Digital detox

Description

According to the Ofcom annual report on the communications market published this week, digital detox refers to a period of time when a person makes a conscious decision not to go online or use connected devices. It is also an opportunity to focus on offline activities such as exercising, socialising with friends and family, doing housework or homework, or simply relaxing (4). The report says that it's a term used in the media, so is presumably not meant to be precise.

Digital detox is one of the headline investigations in this, as usual, comprehensive review of UK consumer behaviour in relation to tv, telecommunications, post, and of course online content.

About one third of Internet users surveyed had tried taking a break from online activity a detox period of a few hours to several days. The report says that the positives of the experience far outweighed the negatives (41). The pluses included feeling more productive, liberated, enjoying life more and feeling less distracted. Smaller numbers reported negative experiences such as feeling lost and anxious.

Detoxification

The meaning of detox has drifted over the years. It refers to toxins which are of course poisons. To be *intoxicated* is to be under the influence of a poison and rendered insensible and disordered. Alcohol and other social drugs are the usual cause.



To *detoxify* is to remove a poison. Its

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abbreviation to *detox* covers tactics to remove supposed poisons and impurities from the body, as in drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and alternative medical practices and dieting. Presumably people take â??poisonsâ?• inadvertently, or for the pleasures they bring, and then canâ??t break out of physiological and psychological dependence and addiction.

So â??to detoxâ?• has come to mean getting out of any condition of dependency or addiction.

â??Digital detox,â?• usually put in scare quotes, is an analogy. Itâ??s a vaguely humorous overstatement, or perhaps betrays soft core anti-technological Ludditism.

Perhaps it is a complement. As the report indicates, the community puts extremely high value on the Internet, smart phone access, and online information and services. It is ok to align this stuff with toxins as its potency protects it against any kind of insult.

Metonymification

Implying that online practices are like imbibing toxins is a bit like a prize winning sportsperson or an entrepreneurial genius confident enough to belittle their own accomplishments, or itâ??s like companies branding their technologies, systems and organisations as if childrenâ??s toys: Google, Twitter, GifGaf, YikYak.

In linguistic terms itâ??s also an example of *metonymy*, naming something by one of its minor aspects: â??Number 10â?• for the centre of government, â??plasticâ?• for a credit card, â??set of wheelsâ?• for a car, â??poisonâ?• for alcohol.

Perhaps the toxification of digital technologies is a backhanded way of recapturing what many of us like to think of as *nature*. Thursday night's BBC news report turned the Ofcom headline into a camping trip, showing people sitting outside their tents apparently coming to terms with life away from the Internet. Getting back to nature features as a perennial theme, a yearning, and a source of perpetual frustration, seemingly brought into relief, if not created, by sophisticated technologies.

Also see [A nation addicted to smartphones](#) and [Nature versus smartphones](#).

Reference

- Ofcom. 2016. *The Communications Market Report*. London: Ofcom. [Online](#).

Category

1. Nature

Tags

1. addiction
2. digital detox
3. habit
4. Internet

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