



Unmedia by TM O'Leary

Unmedia - One

It started with this entry in my offline “TXT” journal on my new Chromebox:

Out Of Touch (with world happenings)

So many things happen every day in the 24 hour news cycle. I pay attention to, and keep up with basically NONE of them. No social media, no cruising sites like CNN or The Guardian, no “recommended” stories on Google Chrome, nothing. I am 100% at peace with this, and just at peace in general for being blissfully unaware of the troubles of the world. It's been 10+ years of almost daily media consumption - as of May 2020, I stopped reading the news, as of September 2019, I closed all my social media accounts, and I will never look back.

People talk, and the people they are talking to generally know what they are talking about, but I am not “current”. I just say things like “who's that?”, “when did that happen?”, and of course - “that's crazy!”. I feel like my mind and psyche are “healing” from my removal from media matters. Kind of like not using the Internet (which I did for weeks on-end before (several times) since 2015), only now I have the best of both worlds by building cool stuff online, writing online, having scant (but meaningful) communication online (usually through e-mail), but none of the toxic byproduct of CONSUMING anything and everything online.

I should write an e-book about this. Maybe?

...but did it really start there? I suppose it kind of started in early-2015 when I was having nervous breakdowns all the time from a wide range of issues I was facing in my life. I had moved to St Louis in October, 2014 with the hopes of finishing the book that I was writing about my time at Job Corps, selling the book, and having a more free, more independent life in “the big city”. I managed to fill the (digital) pages with 100K words over the course of a year, but I was completely burnt out on the project, had no credentials with which to land a literary agent, had been through a gauntlet of different psychiatric medications (and psychiatrists) to help me with my mental health issues, but what I truly needed was a “time-out” from all the anxiety-inducing dread and fear I saw on a daily basis being fed to me through the WWW. I decided (over the course of a couple weeks) that I was going to take a hiatus from the Internet. I prepared for this by giving my MacBook, iPad, and smartphone to my sister (for safe keeping), activate a dumbphone for communication, and buy an old school typewriter to document whatever happened in my time away. I managed to keep my hiatus going for three weeks, and hammer out 75 pages of “thoughts, ideas, and concepts” in the meantime on the typewriter - but I came back to the Internet more defeated than ever, but at least it was a “calm defeat”.

Between 2015 and 2017, I took many hiatus' from the Internet. The longest stretching four weeks in early-2017. Each time I learned something new, but the thing I learned during that last hiatus, was that the Internet is really useful, and really convenient, and, if used the right way, really fun! So I needed a hybrid of quasi-regular Internet usage/access, and time spent away from consuming anything and everything that came my way. And with the intent to “unmedia” my life - I found the balance.

Unmedia - Two

Good information. Bad information. True information. False information. No information.

I fall in the very latter camp. I am without knowledge of what is happening where, or why, or how in the world outside my door. General tidbits of info come through via text messages, e-mails, phone calls, and real life conversations - but I don't "really" know the whole story. I am not "out there" in a cabin in the woods with no correspondence with human existence - in fact, I use the Internet quite regularly, and on a daily basis, and I write often, talk to online friends through e-mail and IRC, respond to blog posts I have written, and so on. In all of these exchanges, I do not bring up the news, and incidentally, neither do the people I am corresponding with. We just...talk, about ourselves (perhaps in a self-absorbed sense, but more so to inform the other person about who they are "talking" to).

Am I in danger?

Of lacking outside knowledge? Of appearing ignorant? Of knowing to run for the hills if a meteor is coming towards Earth? Well, I have many books to read, and a library not far from my home, so I can obtain new knowledge fairly easily. I could appear ignorant on occasion, but the worst that would happen there is that I would lose some cool points, and not care and carry on. And if there is a meteor coming towards Earth, we are all goners, anyway, so no need to panic ;)

Conclusion: not in danger

Do I have a Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)?

I'm not sure what I would be missing out on? Like David Rushkoff mentioned in the book Present Shock; there is "streaming media", and "stacked media" - and the streaming media we will never catch up on. It is ongoing, constant, overwhelming, and oftentimes useless. It is completely impossible to stay on top of the streaming news cycle, and if I am comfortable with letting go of 80% of it, I am comfortable with letting go of ALL of it. "Stacked media" such

as e-mails and text messages will be right there waiting for me when I return from whatever event in life I was doing that caused me to miss that e-mail or message. After all, the message doesn't "go away" or dissolve just because I didn't see the notification in real time.

Conclusion: I have no (illogical) Fear Of Missing Out

Unmedia - Three

Amusing Yourself, or, Becoming Anti-Bored

This is a large subject to unpack. Yes, boredom is real. Yes, it is unavoidable. Yes, it increases without the (negative) stimuli of rage, fear, helplessness, manic highs, depressive lows, and cynical numbness. Knowing (as humans) that we cannot truly escape boredom, and will never outrun the beast of time - it is best to embrace it, deal with the "digital detox" symptoms of short term dopamine deprivation, and just "get through it". It takes time, sometimes days, or weeks, or months - but it is the fluency with which boredom is dealt that truly improves you as a person. New, and better habits form. Creativity is unleashed. Time is still there, but filling that time with things that bring fulfillment and joy become ...within reach, and attainable, and then you begin to realize that you are not a slave to the viral news cycle and all hazardous byproduct of "extra emotions" that you are left with when (inevitably) boredom does strike again. Boredom is like a mantelpiece for how time is spent - make use of it, BUILD with it, DO with it, or let it be a crushing hurdle in life when it is not managed properly.

Unmedia - Four

The Feed Is Not The Problem

Twitter, Facebook, news aggregators, aka "feeds" - these are not the problem most people have. There is nothing mythical or unique about a list of headlines + links that make people feel bad about themselves, the world, their life. It is the FREQUENCY

that we CHECK and SCROLL the feed that causes issues for most people. It is, in simple terms, an addiction. Social media, or news, (or in some cases television) addiction - and addiction always drags out the worst in a person's character. People always (with some dim light in the back of their mind) think that THIS time the feed will be good. The news will be better. The world will heal itself. Something extraordinary will justify the minutes / hours / days / weeks of hopeless refreshing. But the justification is never there, because addiction (to anything) is not justifiable.

Yes, social media, and news sites can and will harvest your data and sell it to competing marketing firms, and that is an immoral, privacy-invasive, deceptive thing to do - but - this isn't the "issue" that makes people feel alienated or put-off by the media at large, it is the habitual revisitation of those sites and services that make people develop a sort of notification neurosis.

Someone once said to me: "an alcoholic is not responsible for their alcoholism - but they ARE responsible for their recovery from it". The same can be said for media consumption. No one will fix the feeds for the media addicted. Only the addict can fix their affliction.

Unmedia - Five

Lost to Time(lines) and (Cyber)space

Mostly, it isn't *just* repetitive checking, reading, scrolling, and the resulting "*notification neurosis*" that comes from such activities that is a threat to ourselves/society - but rather the time lost when doing such activities. Humans, everyone, no matter who they are, have a "mono mind", meaning when they are in the act of doing ONE thing, it is categorically impossible to be doing something else at the same time. Even people who claim to be multi-tasking are doing nothing of the sort because the brain will not allow it. It goes from watching TV/checking Twitter on a phone, to writing a blog post/while

“simultaneously” listening to music, to feeding a child/catching up on sports scores. So, everyTHING that you do, you are by definition NOT doing something else. Every minute and moment spent consuming media (social, televised, or otherwise) is a moment NOT spent on anything else.

Priorities are important. Prioritizing you, or another human's well-being should always be the number one priority in life. What happens in the broader world *are* real things that are happening, but concerning yourself with them for more than a fleeting moment is not conducive to a prioritized existence. And time, itself, and the finite amount of it that we, everyone, has in this world, will *always* be our most valuable asset and how we *spend* it will always be our best investment.

Unmedia - Six

Dancing Around The Zeitgeist In The Room

One thing I have noticed in the past decade, in terms of social interaction (in real life and *certainly* online), is that almost everyone seems to be “on the same page”. Everyone has visited the “digital water cooler”, everyone has seen the days viral headlines, everyone seems to be either on one side, or another, or undecided (yet still informed) on any given subject that made it's way around the WWW for that day. This “zeitgeist” of current events (or as I simply call it, “Like Think”) is probably the polar opposite of someone, or group of people, generating a new idea (or ideas) in terms of...anything. Everybody has the “task” of thought worked out for them already, and are given their row of multiple choice opinions on the world “at large”, and they either fall here, or there, or somewhere in-between. Original thought falls by the wayside, uniqueness is tampered down, grass root concepts and beliefs are discounted as “not being relevant for the subject at hand” or “not on the list” of things it is OK to agree or disagree with. It diminishes character, makes people uncomfortable.

To an extent, avoiding these media matters has given me more mental fortitude. Given me a different view of the world. Helped me focus immensely and truly on what it is that I want to be focused on in life. And at the end of the day, a “don't care” approach is almost necessary to proceed living a media-free life. Certainly, a job for the non-conformist.

Unmedia - Seven

The Permanent Vacation (Conclusion)

At the end, like someone who has had experience with Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) will tell you, counting the days, weeks, months, years, or/and *decades* sober matters in terms of reinforcing your habits, beliefs, and lifestyle. Taking a digital detox has never truly worked for me, in terms of “resetting” where I need/want to be psychologically. It simply isn't enough to *truly* “treat” the addictive nature of social media, or mass media, in general. To reach that finish line, you would have to first recognize that there is no finish line. It's an ongoing practice, like vegetarianism, yoga, or anything else that requires regular practice or/and abstinence. But is it worth it? Yes, of course. Always will be.

And as I mentioned before; there is no “silver bullet” or pre-packaged method as to HOW to officially “go off” mass consumption - just general practice, reaffirming your values/principles, and media abstinence. What comes of that is more mental clarity, psychological health, and a reclamation of your life.

I hope this document helps.
