

## Media Fast Assignment

Before beginning my 24 hours without media, I was fully aware that technology was an extremely important part of my life and the lives of millions of others. Just about all of my daily tasks and leisure time consist of media use, so this day would be a challenge. I was correct; this project further opened my eyes to how much our society and culture relies on media.

I decided that it would be an easier task to do while at home for fall break, and I began to plan out my day. When I told my mom about the assignment, she was very excited and made it her mission to come up with activities we could do together during my media-less 24 hours in order to pass the day along while spending some nice time together. In order to prepare for the day I informed some of my closest friends that I'd be out-of-communication for the next 24 hours. While it may sound a little crazy, I found it necessary to warn my friends because it would be strange if I didn't respond to their texts within 24 hours. I also planned to completely turn off my phone and my computer and put them in my closet to avoid any possible technological interactions.

My plan was to start right before bed, wake up and go to an exercise class, followed by going out to lunch with my family. My mom came up with an idea to go to a nature park about 30 minutes from my house that we had never visited before; she felt that this would be a good use of my time as well as a fun activity for my family to participate in. After visiting the nature park, my mom and I would do some shopping and then meet my cousins and grandparents for dinner. So that was my activity-packed, media-less, planned day. I strategized to fill it with activities in order to minimize any down time because I thought that that would be when I would resort to using technology.

I also planned to always be with someone so that I didn't feel completely disconnected or lost.

My plan was initially going well; however, throughout the day I ended up engaging in digital media without necessarily even realizing it at the time. These "cheating" incidents were occurrences I had not accounted for when planning out my day. As I began my media fast, I instantly missed technology as I normally watch a TV show or do something on my computer before bed. Instead of using digital media to fall asleep, I resorted to a different culture of media: written. I read a magazine, but when that didn't sufficiently entertain me I started a book that I had planned to read this past summer but never got around to opening. Although written media is different than digital media, it ultimately provided me with the same relaxation or escape that enabled me to fall asleep. I then realized that I didn't have my phone to use as an alarm for the morning so I told my dad to make sure to wake me up in time for my exercise class. I refrained from using the radio in the car on the way to my exercise class, but I realized soon after my arrival that they play music in the facility. I stayed, and therefore I had already "cheated." When I went to lunch with my family, there was a TV in the restaurant that I avoided as much as possible. While I had thought my plan was avoiding all media, my first two activities of the day already ended up involving digital media in some way.

My next activity was to take a walk in the nature park, which was initially devoid of all technological influences until we got lost along the way. All I wanted to do was take control of the situation and use our navigation system, but I refrained. When we finally found the park, it was so pretty that I impulsively wanted to take pictures, but I managed to refrain from that as well. The next part of my plan involved shopping with

my mom; that seemed easy enough, until I realized that about half of the stores we walked into had televisions on. In one shoe store, I picked up a pair of shoes and an employee ran over to me with an iPad in hand to show me the shoes in different colors. I only realized in the car home that I had “cheated” yet again by using the store’s iPad. While shopping, my mom and I split up for a few minutes to go into separate stores and when we couldn’t find each other it was frustrating for us to not be able to contact one another. During my shopping trip, I ran into a friend from Richmond who said that she had texted me earlier that day and was wondering why I hadn’t gotten back to her. I then went home to find my dad and my brother watching TV and I couldn’t go into the room, which was again pretty frustrating. I had dinner with my extended family that evening, which went relatively well if it weren’t for a television in the restaurant.

Throughout the day I would say I mainly felt frustrated and out of it, but also relaxed. Being able to do the media fast at home was definitely helpful because I didn’t have to work on homework, and it became a day full of family activities and errands that kept me occupied. When thinking back on the challenge I realize that the fact that I had to make an elaborate plan in order to have a media-less day shows how much I rely on technology in my daily life. Digital media is such a part of our daily lives that it has become an involuntary extension of us. I found myself not even realizing that I was using technology throughout my day, and I often reached into my pocket to grab my phone and realized it wasn’t there. The media fast also made me much more aware of the technology usage of the people around me because if my mom was on her phone while I was trying to talk to her I would get frustrated and demand her full attention. Despite my frustration I also found my day to be relaxing, I found myself to be less anxious and as my mom said

I was less “on edge”. I think my relaxation is a result of not being constantly aware of what other people were doing. With social media these days I can see what my friends are doing at their respective colleges or what pictures my ex-boyfriend is uploading and all of these things cause minor anxiety for me. I may even take these feelings out on other people I am with without realizing it. In this sense, media has created a global village in which time and space are eliminated and I am constantly aware and involved in what other people are doing while they may be in a different state or country. The fast also made me think about my uses and gratifications through my media usage. I thought about how I sometimes use media as an escape or diversion from reality. I sometimes find myself looking through someone’s pictures or watching a random video clip that do nothing for me except provide some sort of escape. I often use digital media as a relaxation tool; whether I am watching a TV show before bed or listening to music while I work out, I use technology to relax and pass time throughout my daily life.

After my media-less day I have realized that it may be worth “un-plugging” from media when on vacation or for special occasions or even just for meals. It is nice to really live in the moment and not be so concerned with what others are doing. That way, I can really enjoy where I am in the present. I also realized that I am able to survive a day without being in constant contact with my friends. Overall I found this challenge to be a really interesting experience as it opened my eyes even more to the impact of digital media on my daily life.