

# The phenomenon of "ambient awareness" by clive thompson

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What does a person notice? Daily, we receive a huge quantity of information that pours into different aspects of our lives. These small tidbits of information can be beneficial in a way that can make one's surroundings more understandable and even pleasant, but they also can be insignificant. The author of a " Brave New World of Digital Intimacy", Clive Thompson, defines this phenomenon as " Ambient Awareness". Ambient Awareness is a new form of being overtly aware and socially conscious. This consciousness comes from constant contact with friends, family and strangers through " awareness tools" such as " microblogging" and daily updates.

Adults who use social media today usually utilize it for their own satisfaction, hobbies, or to connect with different people. Everyone needs to understand how to better inhabit this environment. However, what if Ambient Awareness is a paradox? What if social connection is best described by an ability instead of an obligation? It's not that everyone has the ability to connect, but that everyone wants to connect. Although the word ambient awareness is not repeated frequently, it is however a word that is synonymous with other terms that Thompson mentions throughout his essay. The strand of words includes: " incessant online contact", " frequent tiny updates", " daily minutiae" and " constant, up-to-the-minute updates." Prior to discussing the paradox of ambient awareness, the author discusses how people over the age of thirty find the idea of "... describing your blow-by-blow activities in such detail... absurd" Thompson.

When interviewing those who utilize social media frequently, the majority admitted that at first they couldn't understand the point of why a person would describe their every minute action. A documentation specialist, Ben <https://assignbuster.com/the-phenomenon-of-ambient-awareness-by-clive-thompson/>

Haley, told the author how his first reaction to Twitter was that he assumed that it was silly. However, Haley decided to give it a try. As time passes, the documentation specialist noticed how he became really addicted to Twitter, checking and rechecking it multiple times a day. These people that Thompson interviewed wondered why people would want to tell others what they're doing every hour of the day. Indeed why would one want to know all of these details about others? Thompson mentions, "... the growth of ambient intimacy can seem like modern narcissism taken to a new, super metabolic extreme — the ultimate expression of a generation of celebrity-addled youths who believe their every utterance is fascinating and ought to be shared with the world".

The author defines ambient intimacy as being able to maintain your connections with people regularly. This should be in a way that was never possible before because time and space made it impossible to do so. Facebook and Twitter, which the author defines as awareness tools, are a perfect example of how social media facilitates ambient intimacy. Facebook allows one to see what their friends are up to, what are their hobbies and what type of movies they enjoy watching. Twitter provides one with opinions and world news. Again, that doesn't answer why people are addicted to social media? Why do they dedicate so much time to it? Thompson summarizes it well.

However, before I continue to discuss this phenomenon, I would like to focus on the word " ambient intimacy" which, in my opinion, is paradoxical.

Intimacy means closeness, privacy and close familiarity while ambient

means relating to one's surroundings. Through social media one can get to know others who otherwise would be simple acquaintances. It makes a person feel closer to those who maybe live in different areas around the world. Knowing all of these details about individuals creates intimacy. It also allows people to save time when they do meet up in real life, letting them catch up easily. Many social media users, when they sign up for social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter, decide to turn on their notifications that provide pop-ups that show up on their computer or smartphones screens. This provides them with a small window into the lives of others. The beauty of ambient awareness is that one can spend their entire day in the office or at home on their computer and still feel connected to their friends, family and strangers. Thompson wrote that : " Each little update — each individual bit of social information — is insignificant on its own, even supremely mundane. But taken together, over time, the little snippets coalesce into a surprisingly sophisticated portrait of your friends' and family members' lives, like thousands of dots making a pointillist painting. This was never before possible, because in the real world, no friend would bother to call you up and detail the sandwiches she was eating. The ambient information becomes like " a type of E. S. P.," as Haley described it to me, an invisible dimension floating over everyday life (526)." The paradox and appeal of ambient awareness is that it's not that we are always connected but that we have the ability and the choice to connect. That's why Thompson talks about ambient intimacy, where the ability to connect is only a click away. When one is presented with the choice to turn on their notifications for social networking services such as Facebook, Twitter or

Flickr, they are making the conscious decision to remain connected to others. It's really where sharing our personal information with others is a way to make a person feel more connected with those who live in different countries. So perhaps it's not about, as Thompson mentions in the beginning of his essay when comparing browsing on Facebook as "... poking your head into someone's room to see how she was doing." (523) Perhaps it's more about exposing more information about thyself that gives people the chance to connect with them. In my opinion, it's a new form of connection; one that humans have never experienced before.