

Wearable Technologies: Sci-Fi Novels Gone Awry?

My introduction to wearable technology was at the Thiel Summit almost a year ago. In a workshop about wearable tech, I met a man who had self inserted chips into the crevice between his thumb and index finger. The purpose of this surgery? To be able to open his bedroom door without a key and yet have it securely locked when he is not around. Firstly, the thought that someone would perform surgery on himself was surprising; I can't ever look at, let alone place an electrical circuit into, the innards of my hand. Secondly, it made me really wonder: are we that lazy to not want to open the door? The relationship between wearable technology, the Internet of Things and virtual reality phenomena are resulting in pivotal pieces of infrastructure, and as these phenomena grow, it forces our distinction between the necessary and the nonessential.

Wearable technology, by definition, does not actually mean creating a generation of cyborgs, but rather is meant to innovate simple, everyday accessories to enhance human livelihood. For example, the transition from analog to digital watches was last century's wearable phenomenon; today, we marvel at the Pebbles, Fitbits, and Apple Watches of the world. If smart watches provide any indication of both the benefits and disadvantages of wearable tech, it seems that the constant source of notifications and distractions breed impatience and a lack of focus more than anything else.

My concerns with wearable technology is centered around the post-millennial generation who have grown up with iPads rather than alphabet blocks, or as I call them, the "140 character generation". Yes, concise and quickly-received messages have the benefit of lots of information in a small amount of space and time, but attention rates can and probably will drop dramatically. And while rapidly developing second and third world nations churn out attentive and competent additions to the international workforce, our competitive advantage decreases. Loss of interest, attention, and overall creativity in our youth can only spiral into a stagnant economic growth at some extreme point of time. We should mitigate our extreme innovative inclinations with wearable technologies for the sake of creating a sensible generation rather than one that wants everything 'now.'

Don't get me wrong: it's super cool. There are people who are changing the way women use nail polish: no longer is it just decor, but if dipped into a drink, it will change color to indicate if a drug has intoxicated the drink. This "wearable technology" acts both as a safety measure and fashion forward thinking. Hearing devices are a type of wearable tech that groups are enhancing to detect quiet vehicles like hybrid and electric cars. Recreating sight for the blind, 3D prosthetics, camera pins for the police...these are all the ways wearable

technologies are going to create a sustainable and healthy future. But if your opinion of wearable technologies is to create new ways to alert you of pending Facebook notifications, then you are asking for a society with more stagnant growth patterns and laziness than anything else.

The next time someone asks for your opinion on wearable technology, remember that wearable technology is not about instant gratification as much as it means progressing sanitation, standard of living, and human interactivity. So as these wearable tech startups begin to populate the world, I urge you to create a rubric to evaluate them. My rubric goes as follows:

- How are notifications received (vibration, color changes?)
- What kinds of notifications are being sent
- How often is the primitive form of this technology actually used by me (e.g. I wear a watch everyday so watches are pertinent to me, but glasses are not)
- If I were to lose one of my five senses, would this technology help me regain some kind of composure?

My hopes for wearable technology is that it evolves to assist our human evolution, not handicap it. I don't want to see our blood types poisoned by inserting chips unnecessarily into the crevices of our body, but I do want wearable technology to create longer lifetimes, invent eco-friendly homes, and above all, sustain the planet and humanity. It is a lot to ask for, but it is being asked anyways. So, to the generation of wearable tech startups and companies, you have big expectations to fulfill.