AI and self knowledge

One of the new apps that Apple are rumored to announce soon is their own Journalling app. I think this is not just because they have seen how popular journalling apps (like ‘Day One’) can be but I think it’s probably part of their overall health-tracking strategy. I.e. if you write every day on your iPhone what you have been doing and how you are feeling then there is context information to start making more sense of health tracking information.

This is particularly relevant for those who also have an Apple Watch and are tracking things like heart activity, calories burned, types of exercise, step counts and so on.

Or even for people who aren’t tracking any health data, they can correlate it with certain things they know from your iPhone – such as if you have traveled anywhere you don’t normally go, or who you have met with that day, and figure out trends or tips to feed back to you.

The application will provide enhanced interconnectivity with other Apple applications, using behavioral analysis to comprehend a user’s usual day. This will include evaluation of health data, location tracking, text message content, phone call history, calendar events, and any anomalies in the user’s typical routine. This will give it a unique advantage over other, third party journaling apps that are restricted from accessing such information from the iPhone.

The concept of the ‘Quantified self’

The “Quantified Self” is a concept associated with self-tracking and using technology to collect data on various aspects of our daily life, such as physical activity, sleep, nutrition, mood, and other personal statistics. The idea is that by quantifying these aspects, individuals can gain deeper

insights into their own behavior, habits, health, and emotional states. The goal is often to improve quality of life, enhance self-understanding, or achieve specific health or fitness goals.

Artificial intelligence (AI) can greatly enhance the capabilities of quantified self-technologies in numerous ways:

1 Data Analysis and Interpretation: AI can analyze the vast amounts of data generated by quantified self-devices and provide meaningful interpretations. For example, AI can identify patterns and correlations that may not be obvious to humans, such as how your diet correlates with your sleep quality or how your physical activity levels influence your mood.

2 Predictive Analytics: AI can use historical data to predict future trends. This could be used to anticipate health issues, predict the outcomes of certain lifestyle changes, or even estimate your performance in an upcoming athletic event based on your recent training data.

3 Personalization: AI can help to personalize your quantified self-experience. For example, it could analyze your data and provide personalized recommendations for improving your sleep, diet, exercise routine, or other aspects of your life.

4 Behavioral Change: AI can use techniques from behavioral science to nudge people towards healthier habits. For example, it could remind you to move after long periods of inactivity or provide encouraging feedback when you’re making progress toward your goals.

5 Integrating and Correlating Data from Different Sources: AI can help integrate data from different tracking devices or apps and find correlations. This could provide a more holistic view of your health and lifestyle.

6 Automated Health Monitoring: AI can be used to automatically

monitor health conditions and alert users or healthcare providers to potential issues. For instance, an AI might analyze heart rate data to detect signs of an irregular heartbeat.

The proven benefits of journaling

Research has highlighted the numerous benefits of keeping a journal or writing about thoughts and feelings. One key benefit is emotional processing and regulation. Writing about feelings can help individuals process and manage their emotions, which can lead to reduced symptoms of emotional distress, as revealed in a study published in “Behavior Therapy”.

Another advantage is the reduction of stress. Writing about stressful or emotional events can alleviate stress and anxiety. This was demonstrated in a study published in the “Journal of Experimental Psychology: General”, which noted that writing about emotions can free up cognitive resources for other tasks, thereby reducing the harmful effects of stress on the mind and body.

Additionally, there’s an improvement of mental health. Expressive writing can enhance mood disorders and decrease symptoms of depression, as shown in research published in the “British Journal of Health Psychology”.
Writing regularly in a journal has physical health benefits as well. According to a study published in the “Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)”, writing about stressful life experiences led to improved physical health outcomes for patients with chronic health conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis and asthma.

Better sleep quality has also been associated with journaling. A study published in the “Journal of Experimental Psychology” found that writing for just 15 minutes a night about completed tasks could help worry-prone individuals sleep better.

Furthermore, regular writing has been linked to improved cognitive function. The process of writing about experiences can enhance memory and comprehension.

Lastly, journaling can help enhance problem-solving skills. Writing about problems can lead to better problem-solving and decision-making as it provides a new perspective and enables an evaluation of different solutions.

Conclusion

In the last decade or so, smartphones have already changed our lives. For example, we now document our lives in photos to a hugely greater extent than before smartphones. In the near future, imagine we could take photos of our meals, and AI software could recognize what the foods are, calculate their calories and nutritional content, and correlate it with patterns in our health and mood. It could lead to a far more personalized understanding of our health.

In a world where technology and personal health are increasingly interwoven, Apple’s upcoming journaling app could take things to the next level.

By leveraging AI and the principle of the ‘Quantified Self,’ it has the potential to revolutionize how we understand and improve our daily lives.

The numerous benefits of journaling, both physically and mentally, underscore the value of such an app.

As we move forward, it will be fascinating to see how this new tool might shape our habits, health, and overall well-being.