

Key Themes in Digital Disconnection Research:

Authenticity, wellness,
datafication and power



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ORGANISERS:

- Trine Syvertsen, Professor, University of Oslo, Norway.
- Gunn Enli, Professor, University of Oslo, Norway.
- Tero Karppi, Associate Professor, University of Toronto, Canada. (Local host)
- Anne Kaun, Professor, Södertörn University, Sweden.
- Ana Jorge, Associate Professor, Lusófona University, Portugal.
- Stine Lomborg, Associate Professor, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.
- Mariek Vanden Abeele, Associate Professor, Ghent University, Belgium.
- Victoria Andelsman, PhD candidate, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.
- Christoffer Bagger, Postdoc, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.
- Sara Van Bruyssel, PhD candidate, Ghent University, Belgium.
- Tom De Leyn, Postdoc, Ghent University, Belgium.
- Bert Verhulst, PhD candidate, Ghent University, Belgium.

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1. Alves & Jorge

Artur de Matos Alves, Téléuq University, Montréal, Québec.

Ana Jorge, Lusófona University, Lisbon, Portugal.

Wellness and power in the “digital commute”: reshaping affect and productivity in Microsoft Teams

During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital meeting platforms implemented features and functionality accommodating the changing needs of workers and employers working remotely. These features reflect particular power relations and views of work, wellbeing, and work-life balance. They also signal shifts in perception and attitudes towards habits and discipline.

The analysis draws from the works of Lefebvre (2019), Rosa (2010, 2014), Wajcman (2019a, 2019b) and Sharma (2017) on acceleration, rhythms, and time under capitalism. Particularly, it engages with scholarship looking at how neoliberal notions of wellbeing, time management, and self-tracking are integrated into remote work (Docherty 2021). Mindfulness is also put to service for the same cause, as it promises “timelessness” Coleman (2022), a state outside of linear and quantifiable time to those who practise it (Primdhal 2022).

This paper addresses the question: how do remote work platforms respond to or shape these shifts, in discourse and technology implementation? It analyses the discursive construction of the notion of “virtual commute”, as proposed by Microsoft’s Teams Insights suite (in collaboration with Headspace, a company specializing in meditation and mindfulness applications).

We investigate how notions of work-life balance are deployed in discourse and enacted or codified in digital platforms. Specifically, this paper analyzes the discursive and material construction of the “virtual commute”, as well as the enactment of notions of wellbeing, self-realization, and work productivity. The study employs discourse analysis

(Chiapello and Fairclough 2002; Fairclough 2012; Van Dijk 2005) of promotional materials and user comments on Microsoft's "virtual commute" published between 2020 and 2022, along with a walkthrough of the relevant features of the application (Light et al. 2018).

This paper argues that the virtual commute, while presented as a "transitional period", reshapes affect and productivity in a quantified platform responding to the requirements of remote work. The "virtual commute" shifts the meaning of "commuting" by designating a regulated period comprised of work tasks and mindfulness activities, promoting wellbeing, self-awareness and work-life boundary-keeping.

2. Bagger

Christoffer Bagger, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Who Helps Me Be Alone? The Digital Work of Digital Disconnection

Disconnection requires work, and sometimes more work than is readily apparent. This paper will present an integrative framework for how digital disconnection - understood as the deliberate non-use of media - is made possible by the work and efforts of not just the disconnecting individual, but also the people surrounding them, as well as people with whom they otherwise have no interaction. Broadly speaking, I argue that digital disconnection is something which creates work along axes. It creates work for (1) the selves disconnecting, (2) their surroundings and for (3) strangers somewhere else producing the tools and services which facilitate – or wish to minimize - disconnection. Asking the central question “Who is digital disconnection creating work *for*?”, this framework will integrate several strands of disconnection research under the aegis of digital labor (Gandini, 2021; Jarrett, 2022) and digital work (Orlikowski & Scott, 2016).

Thus far digital disconnection research has broadly been interested in either the the meaningfulness of disconnection to the individuals implicated (e.g. Bucher, 2022; Portwood-Stacer, 2013), on the communities and surroundings which do or do not make disconnection possible (Sutton, 2020; Fast, 2021), or on the technologies which make disconnection more or less impossible (Karppi, 2018). The focus on the labor and work which underlies this framework will unite these different concerns. Whether it is our selves, our partners (Lai, 2021) or workplaces (Fast, 2021), or people we have never met (Beattie, 2020), our disconnection is likely made possible by someone else’s labor. In considering this, we can ask vital questions about whether digital disconnection “reduces” or “shrinks” the amount of digital communication which underlies the digital economy (Gandini, 2021; Jarrett, 2022), or whether it merely *displaces* these activities on to other actors, as is the case in other aspects of the digital economy where work is ostensibly reduced or eliminated (Andrejevic, 2019; Munn, 2022).

In this way, the paper will expand on the commonplace focus on individual struggles to disconnect, which are prevalent in both research and popular literature on disconnection (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020; Bagger, forthcoming; Portwood-Stacer, 2013). It will integrate this

focus with the recent turn towards disconnection as something potentially facilitated by families, workplaces, or other formal organizations (Fast, 2021; Syvertsen, 2022; Lai, 2021), or made possible by third parties such as companies delivering services or producing apps or other products facilitating disconnection (Beattie, 2020; Karppi et al., 2021).

In problematizing the common preconceptions of individualization in the emerging field (Enli & Syvertsen, 2021; Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021), this paper will bring digital disconnection research into dialogue with broader discussions of the often-invisible labor and work inherent in the digital economy (Fuchs, 2014; Gandini, 2021; Munn, 2022; Jarrett, 2022). In addition to questions about the value or feasibility of digital disconnection (Bucher, 2020; Karppi, 2018), the framework presented in this paper presents a heuristic to inquire into the material effects of disconnection beyond the disconnecting individual themselves.

3. Bakardjieva

Maria Bakardjieva, University of Calgary, Canada

Digital Disconnection as Political Project

This paper puts the concept of digital disconnection in a conversation with conceptualizations of authenticity drawn from several schools of thought -- Critical Theory, phenomenology and Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action -- with the goal to tease out its significance and potential as a political project.

The rise of authenticity as a normative ideal is traced back to Romanticism and Existentialism. Early exponents understood it as an inner space of sovereign self-development and self-determining freedom (Taylor, 1991). Marcuse (1964) drew on Marx and Heidegger to launch a critique of inauthentic life in a society where human beings are forced to submit to objectification and thus relinquish the realization of their full potentiality. Considered in the context of intersubjective relations, authenticity is a defining attribute of communicative action oriented toward understanding. According to Habermas (1984), speech acts constituting the intersubjective lifeworld make three main validity claims: to truth, to social rightness, and to authenticity. In this tripartite structure, authenticity stands for expressing what the speaker truly believes and feels, his or her real intentions. These validity claims are also central to deliberation in the public sphere.

Seen from these perspectives, the political value of authenticity and the stakes in pursuing and defending it loom large. The realization of human freedom and potentiality and the collaborative construction of a shared world depend on it.

In our current digital environment characterised by the commodification of human communication, corporate surveillance and algorithmic behaviour control, the conditions for authentic life, both subjective and intersubjective, are eroded. Individuals are objectified not only in their capacity as labourers, but also as social beings - interlocutors, friends and group members. Digital disconnection then, acquires significance as a political project. It becomes a key tactic (de Certeau, 1984) in a repertoire of resistance that the powerless should develop and deploy individually and collectively in defence of authenticity against the glance and nudges of what Zuboff (2019) has termed surveillance capitalism.

4. Bossio, Belair-Gagnon, Holton & Molyneux

Diana Bossio, Swinburne University, Australia.

Valerie Belair-Gagnon, University of Minnesota, USA.

Avery Holton, University of Utah, USA.

Logan Molyneux, Temple University, USA.

Balancing digital wellbeing and living online: Social media strategies for connection and disconnection in journalism

Much recent public discourse about constant social media connection advocates disconnection strategies like digital detox (Syvertsen and Enli, 2021) and digital wellness (Jorge et al, 2022) to ensure authentic connection (Enli and Syvertsen, 2021). However these strategies have often been championed within social contexts of individual responsibility for the consequences of social media use, to be mediated via self-regulation (Chia, et al., 2021) and consumer-led self-optimisation (Moe and Madsen, 2021). But how do these forms of digital well-being relate to media-centered professions, where constant online connection is not an individual choice, but a requirement of their role?

Research in journalism studies disciplines have shown journalists face continual organizational pressure to “live online” to fulfill their professional obligations and advance their careers (Perreault and Perreault, 2021). However there is a dearth of organizational support of policy for journalists dealing with the negative consequences of ‘living online’, including trolling and gender-based harassment (Holton et al., 2022). In the absence of institutionalized, collective knowledge about how to integrate social media into their working lives, journalists often mediate increasingly complex forms of online connection and disconnection, with a number of personal and professional impacts (Bossio and Holton, 2021).

Using evidence from our forthcoming book: “*The Paradox of Connection: How digital media is transforming journalistic labor*” (Bossio, et al., 2024), we explore the motivations and impacts of disconnection practices for journalists. We argue that journalists negotiate uses of social media according to their unique professional needs, such as news production and distribution, as well as the traditional boundaries of their professional identity and ideology, and the necessity to live and work productively within the perceived boundaries of digital labor (Hayes et al., 2007). Such an approach, we propose, is problematic because it negates the urgent need for media organizations, policy makers and platform companies to adopt a more systemic approach that would recognize both disconnection and connective practices as labor.

5. Bozan & Treré

Veysel Bozan, School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University, UK.

Emiliano Treré, School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University, UK.

At the intersection between digital inequalities and digital disconnection: studying the materiality of disconnection in rural Turkey

In the last two decades, the study of the voluntary disconnection from communication technologies has gained attention in academic research, especially in the Global North (Syvertsen 2020; Chia et al. 2021). More specifically, this research has brought a considerable different aspect to the study of media technologies refusal, criticizing previous debates on the digital divide and amplifying non-use as a decision rather than lack of access (Wyatt et al. 2002; Selwyn 2003). Yet, the discourses and motivations of disconnection in places characterized by digital inequalities remain largely understudied in terms of authenticity, lifestyle, productivity, social relations and so on. Digital inequalities research has lacked a focus on voluntary non-use and its consequences, whereas digital disconnection studies have focused on non-use but neglected the materiality of digital inequalities. In this article, we address the material aspects of digital inequalities and examine whether non-voluntary disconnection shares similar meaning with discourses on digital detox. Our theoretical approach tackles the material condition of dis/connection (Dourish and Mazmanian 2013), including its infrastructure, geography, and socio-economic conditions. Located at the intersection between these two approaches, this article relies on twelve semi-structured interviews in rural Turkey. We ask: What are the digital inequalities people face in these settings? How does limited access to the internet shape digital media use and disconnection practices? What are the meanings of being disconnected in digitally unequal communities and how do they compare to previous disconnection studies? The findings show that the main inequalities are due to infrastructure, geography, and socio-economic conditions. These inequalities shape the practices and meanings of digital disconnection, revealing obstacles, frustrations and a forced kind of disconnection that is very different from the romantic portrayal of detox retreats that dominate the literature in the Global North. The insights of this research illuminate the unexplored area of intersection between these two areas of research, engaging a fruitful conversation that enriches both fields of inquiry and unfolds future research opportunities.

6. Cascone

Miriana Cascone, Södertörn University, Sweden.

Places of deprivation: detention centers and the forced disconnection from the media and public life

This paper examines how the architecture of detention pushes migrants into forced disconnection, mainly implemented through restrictive use of the media available in the centers, resulting in disconnection from their lives and other people. In line with previous research on media use and citizenship under conditions of deprivation, I discuss how lack of access to media infrastructure can also result in an absence, loss, or reduction of one's civic role. The intention is to explore situations in which access to media and thus to active and informed citizenship is denied, not only in terms of official status but also in terms of exclusion from a shared sphere of orientation. The focus is on the Swedish context of migrant detention centers and the policies undertaken by the country, repeatedly praised for its detention practices considered the most humane among European countries. Despite this, it will be shown how detention succeeds in reinforcing a sense of non-belonging to the host country, which is unwilling to provide migrants with the right tools for more active participation, nor to their country of origin, to which they do not want to return. The article is based on interviews with individuals who have lived for a longer or shorter period in Sweden and who, for reasons that are not always clear, have been placed in detention, losing their right to remain in the country. How can this specific condition of deprivation affect their perception of belonging and the possibility to enact active citizenship? The contribution of this article to this field of study is an analysis of the relationship between media access, civic participation/role, and sense of (non)belonging in a context where deprivation and vulnerability are imposed and created. European detention centers will be discussed here as political places of exclusion.

7. Dutt

Bindiya Dutt, University of Stavanger, Norway

Social Media Wellbeing

Social media use is a topical issue and raises several concerns including online comparison and social media fatigue, which may have implications on the perceived wellbeing of users. Thus, this study explores how university students in Norway perceive their wellbeing in respect to connection and disconnection from their social media usage. To answer this, the study employs a qualitative approach by drawing from a set of 15 in-depth interviews ascertaining how informants perceive their social media use, what ‘balance’ means to their social media connectedness, and how it impacts their subjective sense of wellbeing. The research draws on the theory of mediatization as well as the uses and gratification theory. The mode of analysis rests on an interpretative phenomenological analysis to place findings within the larger context of the role of social media in the daily lives of users. Conceptually, this paper adds value to how scholarship can theorize wellbeing within social media contexts. Whereas empirically it illuminates how users perceive their wellbeing within the social media landscape and the solutions they propose to balance social media use.

8. Enli

Gunn Enli, University of Oslo, Norway.

What is Authenticity in Digital Disconnection Studies?

This paper unpacks the concept of authenticity, and critically examines how the notion of an authentic life as the desired result of disconnecting from digital devices. What is meant by living authentically in the current discourse related to how users report experienced digital overload, ambivalence towards digital technology and struggles to find a balance between their offline and online presence and self-representation?

Starting off with a conceptual discussion, and tracing the origins of the currently hyped concept authenticity, the paper draws on perspectives from philosophy, in particular the existentialist philosophical tradition and the notion of an ‘authentic self’ (Sartre, Beauvoir, Heidegger, Kierkegaard), and the question of being ‘true to oneself’ rather than to societal norms and expectations, and what it means to be living an authentic life (Taylor 2007).

In contemporary society and debates about digital disconnection, the ideal of authenticity is pervasive, and tapping into a trend in which individuals are encouraged to search for the ‘real’, unpolished and genuine. However, this paper suggests a critical perspective on the trend and the many uses of the term authenticity. Given that the ideal of authenticity emerged in tandem with a distinctively modern conception of the self, we might question to what degree the focus on being authentic as purpose of digital disconnection is leading to inwardness, breeding an anti-social, self-centered preoccupation with oneself (Adorno 1973), adapting to a “Californian cult of the self” (Foucault 1983).

In summary, the paper is conceptual, dealing with the concept of authenticity, draws attention to the uses of the term in recent digital disconnection research, and critically reflect on the implications of adapting authenticity as an ideal. The paper concludes with suggests a tentative definition of authentic communication in the age of connectivity.

9. Feldman

Zeena Feldman, King's College London, UK.

Disconnection, Choice and Freedom in the Smartphone Age

In the UK, the smartphone enjoys near-total penetration, with over 90% of those aged 16 to 44 owning one (Ofcom 2021). The smartphone is so entrenched in everyday life that it has generated a slew of new medical conditions, from 'texting thumb' to 'text neck' (Barber 2021; David et al. 2021). What might it mean, then, to disconnect from this ubiquitous device which routinely structures our waking lives?

I respond to this question by drawing on original research which maps the contemporary conjuncture of smartphone disconnection-and-hyperconnectivity in the United Kingdom. I consider findings from a study of 30 postgraduate students who were asked to sketch their affective understanding of smartphone disconnection. I then present a thematic analysis of the UK's digital detox marketplace, from app-based interventions to self-help books to rural holiday retreats. Finally, I draw on my own ethnographic fieldwork at one such digital detox retreat.

The combined dataset foregrounds the complicated and paradoxical role that choice plays in how users conceptualise and operationalise their relationships with smartphone connectivity. The research reveals a 'digital imaginary' (Coover 2019) where the notion of (dis)connection is habitually understood through the language of obligation, trade-off and anxiety. To that end, this talk deploys Soren Kierkegaard's (1844) theorisation of anxiety and freedom in order to think through the promises, appeals and realities of smartphone detox. This provides a basis on which to substantively rethink how choice and agency operate in the era of smartphone hegemony.

10. Good

Katie Day Good, Miami University, USA.

Who Gets to be ‘Screen Free’? Exploring a Disconnection Divide in U.S. K-12 Public and Private Schools

As digital technology becomes more commonplace in schools, it is important to understand how educational institutions conceptualize and communicate its purpose in learning and democratic citizenship. To that end, this paper examines how public and private K-12 schools produce diverging visions about the value of technology in education in the U.S. It offers a critical discourse analysis of the technology “mission statements” published on the websites of Waldorf schools, private institutions oriented toward progressive education, and on the websites of neighboring public school districts in six U.S. cities. Tracing how the public schools envision equipping their classrooms with technology and embracing an ideal of “digital citizenship” as beneficial to students’ learning, while neighboring Waldorf schools move in the opposite direction, positioning their classrooms as low-tech “havens” from screens, this study makes two contributions. First, on methodology, it highlights educational institutions’ original and public-facing writings about technology as important and under-examined documents of the social construction of digital technology. The second contribution is to communication theory, arguing that at the same time that many young people experience a “digital divide” of unequal access to technology, many also experience an emergent “disconnection divide,” or an inequality of opportunities, woven into the institutions of everyday life, to disconnect and find respite from technology. Such divergent philosophies and landscapes of technology in education have implications not only for children’s experiences with digital devices, but also for broader discussions about the perceived value of commercial and surveillant technologies in learning, citizenship formation, and democracy. The presence of a disconnection divide in public and private schools suggests that disconnection may become a luxury good and, as Treré (2021) argues, that “the possibility to connect and the ability to disconnect are both determined by socio-economic and cultural factors including status, class, nationality, gender, (dis)ability, etc.”

11. Ieracitano & Comunello

Francesca Ieracitano, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy.

Francesca Comunello, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy.

Gender differences in digital disconnection experiences: disclosing hidden forms of unbalanced power through smartphone deprivation.

Structures of social power are present in and become visible through the relationship users have with technologies (Zuboff, 2015; Beer, 2017; Kirkpatrick, 2017). This also applies to digital disconnection experiences, that can reveal gender differences (Franks et al., 2018; Nguyen, 2021) and forms of unbalanced power.

Aim: This paper explores the gender differences in smartphone deprivation experiences among young Italian users. The study focuses on perceptions of “returning to authenticity” and the forms of unbalanced power that may emerge in the different relationships that boys and girls have with and through digital technology.

Research questions include:

RQ1: Are there gender differences in experiencing digital disconnection?

RQ2: Does the feeling of returning to authenticity have different meanings for boys and girls?

RQ3: What forms of unbalanced power emerge in the different relationships boys and girls have with (and through) digital technology?

Methods The study used solicited diaries from 57 Italian students aged 13 to 26, and the diaries were analyzed through thematic analysis.

Results The main themes that emerged from the narratives were:

1. *Expectations and hopes related to smartphone deprivation*

Participants consider smartphone deprivation as a return to authenticity. Boys tend to perceive it as "diving into nature", "living relationships more deeply", and coming back to a pre-technological age or to early 2000, when they thought that being technologized and using the Internet by cell phone “was a thing for ‘rich people’ and ‘super tech people’ ” (F_19yo_male), while girls tend to perceive it as a liberation from physical and relational "chains". “Digital disconnection It will also be a liberation, from all the people who will have to

contact me and know that they cannot do so. For example, my father and brother are always asking me for favors” (R19f) “,"Probably, I will feel much more relaxed and free in my actions" (GC17F).

2. Confidence vs safety

Boys also perceived an increase in self-confidence during the experience of smartphone deprivation, while girls perceived a feeling of danger and unsafety. During the experience of smartphone deprivation, many girls preferred to renounce hanging out at night: “I also worry about having to go out, for example with the dog, alone without having a way to call anyone in case of danger” (B19f).

3. Becoming aware of controlling behaviors

Boys also became aware of their controlling attitude during the smartphone deprivation experience: “Chiara (my girlfriend) is hysterical about this smartphone thing (deprivation)... She says I do not want to call her. I made her read the professor’s email... It’s weird for me to see her so insecure; previously, the controlling one was me” (P19 m).

12. Jespersen

Malene Hornstrup Jespersen, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Fieldwork in the Silence: A protocol for (auto)ethnographic research on digital detoxing and meta-attentional practices

In recent decades, digital technologies have fundamentally changed our everyday lives. Concurrently, a concern has arisen that online connectivity is leading to a “crisis of attention” (Cook 2018): a fear that human capabilities of sustained attention are dwindling. As a response, digital disconnection practices have emerged to bring the individual back to a perceived authentic *presence in the moment* that, within this understanding, cannot be achieved digitally. Digital disconnection is often combined with practices of attentional self-regulation such as meditation and mindfulness, where regaining control over one’s own attention is central.

In May 2022, we gathered a group of researchers and students to conduct three days of unconventional fieldwork at a digital detoxing silent retreat on the Danish island of Samsø. The silent retreat was advertised as a wellness stay intending for the participant to “pull back from all the things that distract us daily” and instead “give your full attention to your inner life”. The aim of the fieldwork was twofold: on one hand, we aimed to study our own reactions as we embarked on this silent retreat, which encompassed digital detoxing as well as mindfulness and yoga sessions, and on the other hand, to develop methods for studying our own attention in a digital detox setting in an *in situ*, non-invasive, and systematic auto-ethnographic manner. This led to a novel methodological combination of interviews, diary entries, self-assessment scales, and non-digital “clickers” with which we tracked our subjective experiences of distractions and urges to look at our phones (despite their absence).

This research presents the methodological framework that was developed as well as tentative results from our pilot study. The results reveal initial insights into what is missed when smartphones are absent in a digital detox setting and patterns in how distractions and smartphone urges are felt during a silent retreat.

13. Jofré

Dr David Jofré, University of Santiago, Chile

Unsafe, unaffordable, unsuitable: Main motivations of Chilean environmental activists to disconnect from digital media before Covid-19 outbreak

A robust body of literature has demonstrated the influence of ongoing socio-technological changes on contemporary social movements and activist communication. In this context, complex activist media practices seem to emerge from the combined use of legacy, alternative and digital media to pursue political goals and mobilise citizen support (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Freelon, Marwick & Kreiss, 2020; Treré & Mattoni, 2016). However, studies on mediatisation take a turn in light of growing evidence of social groups that, instead of rapidly adapting to socio-technological change, resist it and engage in digital disconnection practices (Kaun and Schwarzenegger, 2014; Syvertsen, 2020). Citizens may well disconnect due to socioeconomic inequalities or state repression, but from a political perspective, they can also avoid digital media to pose a challenge to datafication, the culture of connectedness and the symbolic power of profit-oriented platforms (Kaun and Schwarzenegger, 2014; Kaun & Treré, 2018; Van Dijck, 2013). This scholarship has mostly looked into individual motivations to disconnect in Western Europe. Cases of digital media avoidance by activist groups, in other latitudes, have received less attention. This study seeks to fill some of these gaps by examining the main reasons for environmental movement organisations and communities to remain disconnected from digital media. It is grounded on empirical data collected between 2016 and 2017 in central regions of Chile, prior to the 2019 social unrest and subsequent pandemic that enforced lockdowns and led to greater reliance on digital platforms. Insights from semi-structured interviews with 25 environmental activists show that digital media can be perceived as untrustworthy due to surveillance, censorship and user data extraction. They can also be too expensive to maintain and barely useful for some of their community-building goals. Therefore, some Chilean environmental activists opt to shun digital media altogether, or selectively discard or push back some platforms according to their political aims.

14. Kappeler, Festic & Latzer

Kiran Kappeler, University of Zurich, Switzerland.

Noemi Festic, University of Zurich, Switzerland.

Michael Latzer, University of Zurich, Switzerland.

Dataveillance as a Reason for Disconnecting

Today, almost all mundane activities include using the internet. This omnipresence has led to counter movements, where people consciously disconnect from digital services and devices as a response to their overuse and to increase their well-being (Büchi et al., 2019; Gui & Büchi, 2019; Nguyen, 2021; Syvertsen, 2017). The omnipresence of the internet in our everyday life also entails permanent automated collection and analysis of personal user data (Büchi et al., 2022; Clarke & Greenleaf, 2017). Such dataveillance is problematic from a societal perspective (Lyon, 2006) and is viewed skeptically by some (see Möller & Nowak, 2018). Our explorative analysis of 16 in-depth semi-structured interviews with adult Swiss internet users coming from various backgrounds shows that besides internet overuse, a sense of dataveillance can play a role for disconnecting from popular services. Participants reported consciously refraining from using services that are widespread in their social networks, for instance, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Reasons for such disconnection lie in being skeptical about the platforms, finding surveillance capitalism problematic, viewing dataveillance as problematic and not wanting to contribute to these mechanisms. The consequences of such disconnection were two-fold. On one hand, this led to greater well-being as participants acted in line with their values. On the other, it led to frustration and social exclusion due to the non-use of widely used and normalized services. Hence, some participants decided against disconnecting from these services even though they wished to do so intrinsically. They did not disconnect from these services because they felt they could not opt out on certain conversations or group activities, e.g., related to their children's schools. Overall, our findings show that the individual motives and internal processes that lead to disconnection vary with respect to individuals' personal characteristics, their previous experiences with technologies and their trust in actors.

15. Kratel, Altmaier, Borchers & Zurstiege

Victoria A. E. Kratel, University of Tübingen, Germany.

Nina Altmaier, University of Tübingen, Germany.

Nils S. Borchers, University of Tübingen, Germany.

Guido Zurstiege, University of Tübingen, Germany.

Being online is bad, being offline is worse:

A qualitative study of 35 media users trying to navigate the impossible

In today's highly connected societies, navigating the need to be both connected and disconnected from digital media is a major challenge for media users (Fast, 2021). In our study, we examined how media users make sense of and seek to meet this challenge. What is unique to our approach is that we focus on the way that media users conceptualize the challenges involved in their individual media practices and how these very conceptions manifest in their behavior. In doing so, we understand digital disconnection not as an isolated personal choice but as a facet of our increasingly "digitally embedded" lives (Syvertsen, 2022, p. 1). We conceive of digital connection and disconnection as complementary processes, which "should not be studied from a binary perspective but as parts of users' repertoire in dealing with constant connectivity" (Syvertsen, 2022, p. 3).

Perceiving digital disconnection as being embedded in users' media biographies and daily practices, our study presents a set of qualitative narrative interviews conducted with 35 participants. We ensured that our participants were diverse with respect to gender, age, and educational status in order to cover a broad range of experiences. Following Feldman's (2010) theory of *Life Span Development*, we interviewed both adolescents and individuals in young, middle, and late adulthood. The participants in each of these groups possessed low, middle, and high levels of education.

The spectrum of reported disconnection behaviors ranged from habitual types of disconnection to more deliberated complex strategies aimed at regaining control. Our data also highlights the role of institutions such as schools and workplaces, indicating that questions concerning the use and non-use of digital media are also questions of power.

16. Litherland

Benjamin Litherland, University of Huddersfield, UK.

Disillusionment, distancing, and disengagement:

Jeremy Corbyn Fans and their responses to the 2019 General Election defeat

This paper is based on research conducted during the 2019 UK General Election. We interviewed 45 supporters of Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the Labour party, three times before and after his ultimate defeat. We sought to explore how conceptualizations of “fans” could be applied to national politics, particularly in relation to forms of networking, productivity, and the emergence of distinct communicative and interpretive spaces.

Since their emergence as a sub-field of audience studies, fans have been categorized by their ‘active, enthusiastic, partisan, participatory engagement’ (Fiske, 1989: 146–7). Fannish engagement has been theorized as a model set of behaviours for participatory cultures (Jenkins, 2009), offering a key social and affective mechanism by which productivity and creativity are encouraged and coerced in digital and social media ecosystems (Stanfill, 2019). Where studies of fans initially focused on popular communication and sport, they have more recently been expanded to make sense of formal political participation (Sandvoss, 2013; Dean, 2017). In this reading, the mediatization of politics means that fannish participation offers new challenges and opportunities for democracy via an engaged and productive audience (Jenkins et al, 2016).

This paper proposes that if fandom is usually understood as a form of regular consumption of texts and a site of productivity and participation, it can also drive forms of disengagement, disconnection, and ‘non-participation’ (Baudrillard, 1978; Casemajor et al, 2015). Research participants who were usually active in online discussions and campaigning before the election quickly turned to disengagement in the weeks and months after Corbyn’s defeat. This disengagement included avoiding newspapers and other news sources, leaving fan pages or groups, or turning off or deleting social media altogether. Placing studies of fans in dialogue with digital disconnection studies offers unique challenges to foundational assumptions about political audiences, fandoms more broadly, and the role of participatory cultures in democracies.

17. Lupinacci

Ludmila Lupinacci, University of Sussex, UK.

“*BeReal* won’t make you waste time”:

Liveness and the temporalities of disconnection

When it comes to social media platforms, practices of self-regulation and temporary disconnection are often described as an attempt to escape from the burden of addiction and mindless scrolling. Such a notion is anchored in the idea that certain types of interaction are a waste of time, and that it is by avoiding them that people can protect their wellbeing and their productivity. Moreover, this pursuit is also frequently premised on the widespread conception of the digital as a separate and inherently impoverished dimension of social life, which means that it is only by keeping a safe distance from mobile phones and social networks that one can fully enjoy authentic experiences. In this presentation, I start from a technographic analysis of the institutional and promotional materials of the photo-sharing app *BeReal* to theorize how the historical concept of liveness – which I conceive as the continuously updating quest for immediate connection through media – can be a productive entry point to examine the temporalities of disconnection.

As part of its ‘not like other platforms’ discourse, *BeReal*’s temporal affordances promise the replacement of orchestrated serendipity (a key feature of algorithmically mediated encounters with content, which favors continuous connectedness and infinite scrolling) by coordinated spontaneity (a paradoxically synchronized and yet improvised activity). As described by the platform itself, *BeReal* “is real life” and “won’t make you waste time”. I argue that this constitutes an exemplary refashioning of historical claims of mediated liveness, in which the conflicting desires for, on the one hand, connection through technical mediation and, on the other hand, ‘living in the moment’ have to be continuously negotiated. Those findings matter because they demonstrate how claims of immediacy and the direct access to ‘reality’ are manifested and disputed in contemporary sociotechnical practices, and how the temporalities of disconnection are coopted into platforms’ discourse.

18. Parry & Le Roux

Douglas A. Parry, Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

Daniel B. le Roux, Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

Apathetic and Ineffective: A South African Student Perspective on Using Mobile Apps for Digital Disconnection

Ubiquitous connectivity is the norm. An increasing chorus, however, rails against this way of living, highlighting the benefits of disconnection for one's well-being. While numerous studies have focused on the motivations and strategies for, and consequences of, disconnection practices in general (e.g., Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Nguyen, 2021), little work has focused specifically on experiences of using smartphone applications to monitor and regulate smartphone usage (cf., Schmuck, 2020). This presentation draws on qualitative data collected as part of two distinct studies among students in South Africa to explore the motivations and consequences of app-based disconnection practices in this understudied region. In the first study, interview data were collected from 10 participants after they participated in an intervention during which they were required to use an application to monitor and regulate their device use to conform to a usage target for a month. The second study involved interviews with 20 participants who reported regularly using mobile applications to monitor and/or regulate their smartphone usage.

Integrating perspectives from these studies, the presentation explores the motivations that underlie use of these applications, the ways in which they are enacted to regulate smartphone use, and users' perceptions of their effectiveness in supporting disconnection. Against the backdrop of prior findings indicating low adoption or desire to use applications to support digital well-being among the targeted population, the presentation considers a central theme emerging from the qualitative data: feelings of apathy towards digital well-being generally and, by extension, digital well-being applications, specifically. While a minority of participants felt that such applications can help them manage their behaviour, most felt that they were not useful or effective in supporting digital disconnection, nor were they interested in managing their media use. The data suggest that mere awareness of any potential negative consequences of unregulated device use doesn't motivate behaviour change. Rather, the

successful integration of digital well-being applications occurs among those that are, firstly, mindful of the relationship between their behaviour and their wellbeing and, secondly, motivated to perform optimally in the pursuit of personal goals. The presentation builds on these findings to discuss digital well-being apathy through the lens of goal-conflict.

19. Rolandsson & Koc

Torbjörn Rolandsson, Stockholm University, Sweden.

Alican Koc, McGill University, Canada.

How online can a punk get? An interview study of how punk cassette labels navigate the tension between being online and authentic (punk) being

Anxiety over the perceived threat digital media poses to the capacity to express authentic selfhood, has become a feature of many western cultures. Authenticity is often defined in a modernist fashion, as the ability to “be true to yourself”, which is achieved by a subject expressing an essential truth about itself, without interference (Taylor, 1992). Digital media, meanwhile, are regularly framed as instances of such interference (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020), which explains the emergence of such disconnective practices as “detoxing” (Syvertsen, 2022). Many recognize, however, that connectivity and disconnectivity is not a dichotomy, but a spectrum (Karppi, 2011; Kuntsman & Miyake, 2019) on which contemporary expressions of selfhood take place.

This paper explores how punk cassette labels in Stockholm and Montréal, the authors respective scenes, navigate this spectrum. The focus on punk is motivated by our belief that this subculture is an extreme case (Yin, 2014) of the anxieties outlined above. Punk is a subculture characterized by a deep commitment to the modernist ethic of authenticity embraced in society more widely (Lewin & Williams, 2009), while it also is deeply skeptical towards digital media. This skepticism stems from concerns over how phenomena related to platformization (van Dijck m.fl., 2018) threatens the possibility of being authentic, and thus the culture itself. Simultaneously, punks rely heavily on digital platforms to constitute their culture, by promoting shows and distributing music.

Drawing on interviews with the people behind one Swedish and one Canadian punk cassette label, we show how our informants approach this aporia. They did so through media practices that intertwined analogue and digital media, and thus connectivity and disconnectivity. These media practices were furthermore negotiated by situating them in the context of punk ideology, and discursively constructing some of them as more authentic than others, based on their degree of perceived connectedness.

20. Ross, Gilbert, Klingelhofer, Matassi, Nasenne, Bryussel & Verlinden

Morgan Quinn Ross, The Ohio State University, USA.

Alicia Gilbert, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany.

Julius Klingelhofer, FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany.

Mora Matassi, Northwestern University, USA.

Lise-Marie Nassen, KU Leuven, Belgium.

Sara Van Bruyssel, Ghent University-imec-mict, Belgium.

Alice Verlinden, KU Leuven, Belgium.

Mapping Transdisciplinary Views on Disconnection Studies:

Perspectives from an Interdisciplinary Research Collective

As digital disconnection coalesces into a distinctive research domain, it is important to take stock of the varying approaches to and understandings of disconnection (Bagger, 2022; Vanden Abeele & Nguyen, 2022). To this end, at the 2022 Disconnection Preconference, the authors of this abstract formed a monthly discussion group with the goal of finding common ground across our different perspectives to the study of disconnection.

In broad terms, we have identified two disconnected perspectives on disconnection research at the ends of a continuum. On one end, some researchers tend to apply a positivist lens, use quantitative methods, and view disconnection as an individually functional phenomenon (Hall et al., 2021; Radtke et al., 2022; Schmitt et al., 2021; Schmuck, 2020; Slot & Oprea, 2021; Van Wezel et al., 2021). For example, some of us measure the degree to which individuals disconnect in daily life and their subsequent well-being (Klingelhofer et al., forthcoming; Nassen et al., 2022; Ross et al., 2022; Verlinden et al., 2022). On the other end, some researchers tend to apply an interpretivist lens, use qualitative methods, and view disconnection as a socially meaningful phenomenon (Figueiras & Brites, 2022; Gangneux, 2021; Kaun, 2021; Light & Cassidy, 2014; Pennington, 2021; Plaut, 2022, Syvertsen, 2022). For example, some of us talk with participants to situate their disconnection in social, political, and cultural contexts (Matassi, 2022; Van Bruyssel et al., 2022).

As disconnection research expands, making these underlying approaches visible represents an important step to avoid blind spots within the field. Yet, it can be difficult to

communicate across this continuum. We thus advocate for awareness of one's position on this continuum – and the underlying assumptions that come with it – in order to facilitate engagement with other perspectives on disconnection.

Our continuum represents the dimensions of disconnection that have framed our interdisciplinary discussions, but we do not present it as a universal framework. For instance, the cultural context and (in)voluntary nature of disconnection are absent from it. Nonetheless, we hope that this continuum invites conversation that bridges various theoretical and methodological perspectives and contributes to building a cohesive yet inclusive field.

21. Schwarzenegger & Treré

Christian Schwarzenegger, University of Augsburg, Germany

Emiliano Treré, Cardiff University, UK.

“Find me on Mastodon!” – The politics, aesthetics, and genre of (not) disconnecting from Twitter

After Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter, possible alternative platforms were sought and prominently discussed on Twitter itself. Musk's erratic, politically partisan understanding of how to run the platform, pardoning extremist voices or amplifying them under the cloak of free speech, had alienated many users. Political progressives and liberal voices threatened to leave Twitter if the situation worsened. One of the supposed alternatives that could provide refuge for the disconnected was Mastodon. Consequently, calls like "Find me on Mastodon" or "Let's connect on Mastodon" were widely announced and users shared instructions for reconnection in exile. Based on a qualitative analysis of the (Academic) “Find me on Mastodon”-trope in Twitter posts, several deductions can be made, and we would like to discuss their implications:

1. Disconnection appears as the essential sanction and articulation of dissatisfaction towards a platform. When use and participation are established as central metrics, disconnection and non-use appear as ultimate tool that "tangibly" harms.
2. Disconnection has a (personal and social) cost and users strive to minimize the investment for disconnection. Therefore, they think about how to disconnect, but still find an unchanged chance to connect (elsewhere). Likewise, the advantages (keep the good and get rid of the bad) of disconnection are emphasized.
3. To develop political potential, disconnection needs to be communicated and made visible, rather than simply being accomplished silently. To gain visibility the notion must be shared repeatedly.
4. Disconnection as a political means only works if you do not step out of the platform ecology – actual disconnection is not an option for discourse since it will erupt the protest discourse it was meant to ignite.
5. This established a “disconnection-announcement”-subgenre on Twitter. The genre logic and aesthetic of the communication enables and undermines critical potential of disconnection at once since it appears as empty threat.

22. Šiša

Anamarija Šiša, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

The ghosts of contemporary dating life:

Conceptualizing disconnection on mobile dating apps

During an interview on the use of mobile dating apps in May 2021, a 27-year-old male dating app user told me: "Ghosting can be a negative experience because in person no one will get up in the middle of the conversation and just leave. On dating apps, however, this is the most common result of the conversation". Ghosting is a technologically mediated break-up practice, used for unexpected unilateral disconnection from others without explanation. It represents the non-use or the termination of the use of digital communication technology in an environment where it is expected that interaction will happen and continue developing. Findings from the qualitative analysis presented in this paper are based on interviews with 26 dating apps users from Ljubljana, Slovenia, and demonstrate that the use of ghosting on dating apps facilitates the normalization of this communication strategy in contemporary dating. Dating apps enable what Eva Illouz (2019) calls negative choice, the choice to unchoose: to leave the interactions and relationships at any stage. Choosing ghosting as a strategy on dating apps is related to their gamified environment that demands perpetual activity, availability and, interaction. Ghosting on dating apps then emerges as a response to general hyperconnectivity in order to navigate the increasing information overload and to the feeling of loss of the possibilities for authentic connections in commodified digital spaces. According to users, the desire to disconnect from others and exit the apps is as high and ambiguous as the desire to connect and experience an ego boost or excitement of interactions. Ghosting is therefore a practice that enables moving the emotionally challenging workload of terminating a relationship or communication to technology in order to make possible the reproduction of a social order built on digital technology (Kaun, 2021).

23. Strycharz, Nguyen & Segijn

Joanna Strycharz, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Minh Hao Nguyen, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Claire M. Segijn, Associate Professor at University of Minnesota, USA.

Change in Media Use in the Digital Age: Constructs, Causes, and Consequences

The omnipresence of digital media has resulted in a culture in which people are permanently connected, being exposed to, and exchanging information (Vorderer et al., 2017). As much of this exchange is happening online, individuals also increasingly leave digital footprints (Acquisti et al., 2015). Such footprints can be collected and used for personalizing one's online environment, automated decision-making, or algorithmic practices (Huh & Mathouse, 2020). While both the constant connectivity and possibilities it gives for personalization have been shown to bring advantages for media users (Vanden Abeele et al., 2021; Strycharz et al., 2019), they are also met with users' need to reduce their connectivity. This trend towards less connectivity has been given different names in past research: refusal, avoidance, abstention, disengagement, digital detox, disconnection, chilling effect, to name a few (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2020).

While these constructs overlap in that they all represent a deliberate change in digital media use, or a form of intentional nonuse, they differ in the motivations for such change, and the consequences for important outcomes, such as individual well-being. For example, digital detox is often motivated by users' need to increase consciousness and media self-regulation (Glomb et al., 2011) and leads to improved well-being (Nguyen, 2021), while chilling effects are driven by the need to escape surveillance (Penney, 2017) and are seen as a threat to users' personal freedom, autonomy, and right for self-development (Richards, 2013). Recognizing such nuances and building on a literature review, and additional insights drawn from qualitative interviews and surveys conducted in the U.S. and the Netherlands, we will map disconnection and related resistance behaviors and offer conceptual clarity on the various types of disconnective practices, the different motivations related to them, and the different consequences they may have on key outcomes.

24. Syvertsen & Jorge

Trine Syvertsen, University of Oslo, Norway.

Ana Jorge, CICANT, Lusófona University, Portugal.

Emerging norms for disconnection: The power of place

A decade ago, smartphones would constantly ring in public places; now, social norms dictate that the sound be off. Through processes of domestication and adaption (Berker et al., 2006), norms evolve for when it is appropriate to put away digital devices. Norms vary according to generational, class, gender, and cultural characteristics (Doerr, 2021) and how explicit they are.

This presentation investigates place-based norms for disconnection. Place has emerged as a productive meeting point for interdisciplinary studies of experiences, emotions and behaviour; methods are developed for studying exotic, as well as mundane, everyday locations (Relph, 1976; Sumartojo and Pink, 2019; Wattchow and Brown, 2011). We pay attention to both the hard and soft power of the places we study: rules and regulations as well as softer nudges (Thaler and Sunstein, 2009). We are especially interested in how the atmosphere provides clues to be interpreted and negotiated (Jorge, 2023, forthcoming; Sumartojo and Pink, 2019). Clues can, for example, be about how furniture is situated (inviting to socialise or meditate), acceptable pursuits (the presence of paper books, board games), cultural hints (candles, antiques), or sounds (waterfall, music).

The sites selected for this presentation draw on our collaborative projects and include pilgrim lodges and mountain huts, co-working spaces and libraries. We analyse clues through on-site observations and interviews to frame how they are perceived. The places are connected with values significant in disconnection studies, including authenticity (Syvertsen and Enli, 2019), wellness (Vanden Abeele and Nguyen, 2022), productivity (Karlsen and Ytre-Arne, 2021), and ideology (Sutton, 2020), and belong to domains that are increasingly datafied such as tourism (Romero Dexeus, 2019 check), work (Fast, 2021), and information search and retrieval (Harper and Oltmann, 2017).

The paper argues that investigating place-based norms for (dis)connection offers a productive middle ground between the macro level of platforms and politics and the micro level of individuals' experiences.

25. Talvitie-Lamberg & Ripatti-Torniainen

Karoliina Talvitie-Lamberg, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Leena Ripatti-Torniainen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Media refusers: the participation and agency of social media non-users in the public realm

To what extent can individuals and groups engage with the public realm from beyond all social media? This question is critically important since through the public realm meanings are constructed, communicated, and shared in society, and questions and agendas are formulated, between people unknown to each other. Our study seeks to understand what absence from social media means for inclusion in and exclusion from the broader public realm. We draw on concepts that perceive the public realm as existing in extensive socio-cultural and political processes (Arendt 1958; Cayton 2007; Dewey 1927; Ripatti-Torniainen 2018; Warner 2002; Weintraub 1998; Young 2000). We use this conceptual premise to investigate the non-use of social media within the larger frame of participation and agency in the public realm. Participation that occurs on digital platforms and in platform-generated social realities (Just & Latzer 2017; Karakayali et al. 2019; Raun 2018) introduces new mechanisms of vulnerability and exclusion (Couldry & Yu 2018; Charitsis 2019; Helsper & Reisdorf 2017). Consequently, the refusal to use social media platforms is a growing phenomenon, which seems to result neither from a lack of opportunities nor skills. It may be a voluntary, conscious act (Hesselbreth 2018; Syvertsen & Enli 2020; Karppi 2014) and a way to resist datafication (Talvitie-Lamberg et al 2022; Portwood-Stacer, 2013, Van den Abeele and Mohr 2021) but not available to individuals in vulnerable positions (Büchi & Hargittai, 2022). Unlike previous studies and to understand what media non-use is in the context of the data welfare state (Andreassen et al 2021), we analyze non-users participation and agency in situations of social, cultural, and political engagement. Non-users' narratives (diaries and thematic interviews) were collected among four very different groups in Finland: 1) unemployed people, 2) immigrants waiting for their residence permits, 3) employees in leadership positions, and 4) established journalists in media companies. The presented results were analyzed through a combination of situational analysis and cultural discourse analysis.

26. Vanden Abeele, Murphy, Vicente, Gaeveren & Van Bryussel

Mariek M. P. Vanden Abeele, imec-mict-UGent, Ghent University, Belgium.

Stephen Murphy, imec-mict-UGent, Ghent University, Belgium.

David de Segovia Vicente, imec-mict-UGent, Ghent University, Belgium.

Kyle Van Gaeveren, imec-mict-UGent, Ghent University, Belgium.

Sara Van Bruyssel, imec-mict-UGent, Ghent University, Belgium.

Does Temporarily Digitally Disconnecting Improve Well-being?

An Experience Sampling Study Exploring Momentary and Lagged Associations Between Limiting Smartphone Use, Affect and Well-Being.

Over the past decade, we have witnessed an exponential increase in studies examining the effectiveness of digital disconnection on well-being (e.g., Brailovskaia et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2021; Tromholt, 2016; van Wezel et al., 2021). To date, most of these studies have focused on what happens when people undergo a longer-term digital detox from social media (e.g., 'The facebook experiment'; Tromholt, 2016). Overall, however, evidence surrounding these studies shows mixed evidence (see Radtke et al.'s (2022) for a systematic overview of recent literature). This observation has led researchers to call for further research into when, why and how digital disconnection works.

Three reasons for why certain digital disconnection studies show no consistent effect on well-being may be that (1) the media abstinence was enforced rather than fully self-initiated, raising questions about the ecological validity of the intervention, (2) the enforced abstinence concerned a longer-term period of one or several weeks rather than allowing participants to choose when and where to disconnect, and (3) the abstinence concerned foremost the use of social media, leaving more generic disconnection from the smartphone device unexplored. This study overcomes these limitations. It uses experience sampling methodology to explore how individuals momentarily, and 'in situ', disconnect from their smartphone, without facing any externally enforced interventions.

We collected data from 1400 adult participants, who answered 6 brief questionnaires per day for a duration of 2 weeks, resulting in over 67.000 data points detailing whether people had limited their smartphone use in the past 3-4 hours. Simultaneously, we collected

data on how stressed people felt. We explored momentary and lagged relationships, and looked at day- versus weekend differences.

Findings show that on work days limiting smartphone use coincides with greater stress, whereas on weekend days with lower stress. A tentative interpretation is that the motivation for disconnection differs on week days ('to be able to focus during times of work stress') from weekend days ('to put relaxation front and center'). Future research is needed to verify this interpretation.

27. You

Yukun You, University of Oslo, Norway

Digital disconnection apps on app stores: problems, solutions, and power

In recent years, the intentional digital disconnection (or digital detox) has been practised by many people in the media-saturated age, and the market of digital disconnection is growing rapidly. Researchers have conducted studies on different types of detox products and services, from detox camps (Sutton, 2020) to technology-based solutions like dumbphones (Ghita & Thorén, 2021) and productivity apps (Murray, 2018). In terms of digital detox apps, a few studies have been done on the app production, design, and use (Beattie, 2020; Ganito & Ferreira, 2020; Nguyen, 2021), based on a limited number of detox apps strategically sampled by researchers or mentioned by users. Little research has been done on the framing of dis/connection based on the actual search results of disconnection apps on app stores.

Inspired by framing analysis (Entman, 1993) and feature analysis (Hasinoff & Bivens, 2021), this app study explores the framing of problems and solutions regarding digital dis/connection, based on a larger number of apps on app stores. By searching keywords on Google Play and App Store, 120 apps were selected based on relevance, over half of which are productivity apps while the others are health and fitness apps, tools, lifestyle apps, etc., indicating the major motivations and sub concerns in app-initiated “disconnective practice” (Light, 2014). Combining the quantitative and qualitative analysis of app descriptions on stores, this study shows what are the frequently mentioned problems (e.g., distractions) and suggested app-based solutions (e.g., blocking the phone) in different contexts (e.g., work, leisure), and the values (e.g., productivity, wellbeing, and authenticity) they represent. The study also sheds light on relations between detox apps, app stores, operating systems, third-parties, and technology companies, to reveal the data flows behind the screen and the exercised power among platforms, devices, and infrastructures (Dieter et al., 2019) in the attention economy.