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DIGITAL DISCONNECTION:
THE IMPACT ON PORTUGUESE ADOLESCENTS' WELL-BEING

Dissertation to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain
a Master's Degree in Communication Studies –
Communication, Marketing and Advertising

By

Maria Leonor Cunha-Vaz Martinho

Faculty of Human Sciences

September 2022



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ABSTRACT

Digital disconnection behaviours emerge due to the overwhelming presence of digital technologies in people's lives. The constant pressure to be online and connected has led individuals to reflect on their digital media practices and to search for healthier habits that do not include being in front of a screen. Hence, reducing or withdrawing from digital devices or social networks has become a growing trend in recent years, as well as a subject of interest for several researchers. However, studies on the potential outcomes of engaging in digital disconnection experiences are scarce.

The present dissertation explores the digital disconnection journeys of Portuguese adolescents in-depth, starting by comprehending the motivations that lead to one's urge to unplug from the digital world and then exploring the strategies implemented to conduct this new behaviour. Through this analysis, the final purpose is to assess whether digital disconnection experiences impact young individuals' well-being. This exploratory research follows a qualitative methodology, with interviews conducted to 20 Portuguese adolescents aged between 15 to 18 years old.

The results have demonstrated important findings that enrich the research field of digital disconnection. According to the participants, the urge to better use their time, the harmful social pressure related to social media, as well as their toxic environment are the main motivators to withdraw from social networks and reduce screen time. Moreover, three predominant behaviours were identified regarding the digital disconnection approaches – drastic disconnection, progressive disconnection, and self-regulation. In conclusion, when analysing the outcomes of embracing this new behaviour, the results have shown that, although the immediate effect may be negative, one's ability to overcome these challenges results in surprisingly beneficial outcomes for their well-being in the long run. Adolescents described building healthier routines, improving their friendships, surpassing personal insecurities, and sharing a feeling of self-accomplishment and discovery.

Keywords: Digital; Disconnection; Adolescents; Young individuals; Well-being; Digital media; Social media

RESUMO

Comportamentos de desconexão digital surgem como resposta à forte presença das tecnologias digitais na sociedade contemporânea. A constante pressão para estar online e conectado levou os indivíduos a refletirem sobre as suas práticas digitais e a procurar hábitos mais saudáveis, que não incluam estar demasiado tempo em frente a um ecrã. Deste modo, a redução ou abstinência de certos meios digitais ou redes sociais tem-se tornado uma tendência crescente nos últimos anos, bem como um tema de interesse para vários investigadores. No entanto, estudos sobre os potenciais efeitos de experiências de desconexão digital são escassos.

A presente dissertação pretende explorar em detalhe os processos de desconexão digital dos adolescentes portugueses, começando por compreender as motivações que levam ao desejo de se desligar do mundo digital, seguido da exploração das estratégias implementadas para conduzir este novo comportamento. Através desta análise, o objectivo final consiste em avaliar se as experiências de desconexão digital têm impacto no bem-estar dos jovens. Este estudo exploratório segue uma metodologia qualitativa, com entrevistas realizadas a 20 adolescentes portugueses entre os 15 e os 18 anos.

Os dados recolhidos demonstram resultados relevantes para o estudo da desconexão digital. De acordo com os participantes, a vontade de utilizar melhor o tempo, a pressão social relacionada com as redes sociais, bem como o facto de considerarem o ambiente digital tóxico, são as principais motivações para se desconectarem de redes sociais e reduzirem o tempo dedicado aos ecrãs. Foram identificados três comportamentos de desconexão digital predominantes – desconexão drástica, desconexão progressiva, e auto-regulação. Em suma, ao analisar os resultados foi concluído que, embora o efeito imediato possa ser negativo, a capacidade de superar os desafios leva a resultados surpreendentemente benéficos para o bem-estar a longo prazo. De acordo com as entrevistas, os participantes construíram rotinas diárias mais saudáveis, melhoraram amizades, superaram inseguranças e descreveram um sentimento de realização e descoberta pessoal

Palavras-chave: Digital; Desconexão; Adolescentes; Jovens; Bem-estar; Meios digitais; Redes sociais

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Patrícia Dias, for always being available to help and guide me through this challenge. Thank you for encouraging me to do my best and for believing in my ability to finalise this project.

Participating in the Dis/Connect project allowed me to broaden my academic horizons, challenge my knowledge and meet great people and distinctive researchers. Therefore, I would like to show my gratitude for the project, and above all, to Professor Ana Jorge and Professor Patrícia, for giving me this opportunity.

To my parents, my brother, and, of course, Paulo, a big thank you. Another chapter concluded with the best companions, I am eternally grateful for you.

To my dearest friends, a heartfelt thank you. I am now free to enjoy life with you.

And last but not least, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents, especially my beloved grandmother and godmother. I have now completed my studies :)

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INTRODUCTION

The role of digital media in today's society has become pivotal and essential to its evolution. If digital technologies were perceived as a revolutionary and unknown territory in the past, they have become an integral part of society. Although their innovative character has never been underestimated throughout the years, they are no longer unfamiliar to people, and we have grown to embrace them in our daily lives. Therefore, due to extensive research on this dominant topic, it has become clear that it no longer needs an introduction.

Therefore, acknowledging the importance of digital media and its impact on society, leaves one wondering whether the overwhelming presence of digital devices and their extremely rapid evolution would be sustainable for the human being. Perhaps, as an inevitable response, individuals started to reflect on their digital media practices, and some decided to take a step back from being constantly connected. Consequently, an interesting and surprising concept emerged, the idea of digital disconnection. At first, it may appear to be an opposing perspective to the digital realm, however, it is intrinsically related. Aiming to comprehend the individual's relationship with digital media only through the experiences of the connected ones, or as Wyatt et al. (2002) refer to as the 'users', is neglecting an important dimension of society, which entails the 'non-users'.

Digital disconnection is a growing behaviour and an emerging trend adopted by certain individuals who aim to withdraw from digital technologies and slow down from the pressure of being permanently online and permanently connected (Schneider & Hitzfeld, 2019). Studying individuals' relationship with digital media and their digital disconnection behaviours is a complex phenomenon that has sparked the interest of several researchers. Some have focused on the general concept of digital detox (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020), others on disconnection from specific digital technologies, such as social networks (Neves et al., 2015; Jorge, 2019), and others have introduced the topic of well-being related to digital disconnection behaviours (Nguyen, 2021). It is regarding the latter that the present dissertation aims to explore.

Among a substantial number of research on this subject, studies on the outcomes of digital disconnection and whether they are related to individuals' well-being are lacking, especially in the Portuguese population. Besides, the author has incorporated digital disconnection

behaviours into her digital media practices, not being active on social networks and having uninstalled social applications during some periods of her life. Therefore, this subject is of the author's interest to further comprehend its origin and potential outcomes. Hence, this dissertation arises as a response to this gap and curiosity. In other words, this dissertation aims to analyse the impact of digital disconnection behaviours on the well-being of young Portuguese individuals. Nevertheless, it is crucial to clarify that due to its dimension, this is an exploratory study whose main purpose is to introduce this new emerging topic and to encourage further studies in this research field.

In order to attain a solid response to the main research question, it is fundamental to analyse two aspects of the digital disconnection experience of each participant. First and foremost, it is crucial to comprehend the main reasons that motivate one to engage in digital disconnection behaviours (Research Question 1). Subsequently, after understanding the 'why' of digital disconnection, the following question focuses on how individuals approach digital disconnection – how does the process of digital disconnection occur (Research Question 2). To conclude, the final research question aims to assess whether digital disconnection experiences impact young individuals' well-being. Through a qualitative methodology, this dissertation is based on interviews with 20 Portuguese adolescents, which were organised according to the three research questions.

The present dissertation is organised into two main parts, the first regarding the theoretical framework (Part I) and the second about the empirical study (Part II). Within 'Part I – Theoretical Framework', the literature review is divided into three chapters that aim to build a well-grounded base of the existing research on the dissertation's topic. The first chapter starts the theoretical framework by exploring the relationship between young individuals and digital media, their use practices, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using them. Moreover, the following chapter dives into digital disconnection behaviours. The goal is to define the concept, analyse the motivations to disconnect and the strategies implemented to conduct this behaviour. To finalise the theoretical framework, the third chapter focuses on the impact of digital disconnection experiences on well-being.

The second part – 'Part II – Empirical Study' – consist of two chapters. The fourth chapter describes the methodology used to conduct the dissertation research in detail, including an explanation of the sample, the data collection process, as well as the data analysis phase.

Afterwards, the fifth chapter corresponds to the presentation and discussion of the results. This section is organised according to the research questions, where the goal is to provide an answer to each of the research questions while thoroughly discussing the results. The most common motivators to engage in digital disconnection behaviours are the waste of time, the negative social pressure and the toxic environments of social networks. Regarding the strategies implemented to disconnect from digital technologies, three types of 'disconnectors' were identified – the drastic disconnectors, the progressive disconnectors, and the self-regulators. In the end, the journey of digital disconnection was characterized by immediate negative effects on adolescents' well-being, and only after surpassing the initial challenges, beneficial outcomes in their well-being were experienced. The main findings are summarised in the last segment of the dissertation, the Conclusions, where suggestions for further studies are also provided.

PART I – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER 1: Young people and digital media

1.1. Use practices

Nowadays, digital media have become an integral component of society's everyday life. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), as well as the Internet, have been present for the young generations since their birth, being inherent in their "coming of age" process (McMillan & Morrison, 2006). Moreover, the portability and easiness of access offered by wireless technologies and mobile devices, especially mobile phones, allowed individuals to be permanently connected and continuously exposed to new information (Wei & Lo, 2006). The pervasiveness of digital media in society contributes to an always-on mentality and complex digital media practices.

Nonetheless, youth digital media habits are ever-changing due to the constant innovation of digital technologies. Adolescents are characterised as flexible adapters, rapidly shifting from 'old' habits to new trends (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020). Therefore, it is fundamental to have an overview of the use practices of youth for the purposes of the present research. A summarised review of the adolescents' digital media practices worldwide will be presented first, followed by Portugal's specific statistics.

1.1.1. Worldwide data

First and foremost, it is crucial to have an insight into the world's digital media practices. If digital technologies were once said to be an integral component of society's everyday life, nowadays, they have become critical to humanity (Ericsson, 2021).

"Mobile technology has had an incredible impact on society and business, above and beyond what anyone could have imagined" (Ericsson, 2021, p. 2). The Ericsson Mobility Report stated that, by the end of 2021, 8,1 billion people worldwide had a mobile subscription, and 6.3 billion had a smartphone subscription. In terms of portable computers or tablets, the number of subscriptions is inferior, with a total of 300 million subscriptions (Ericsson, 2021).

Today's youth grew up with the Internet, hence being considered “early adopters and intensive users of digital media” (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020, p. 112). In fact, according to Ofcom’s report “Children and parents: media use and attitudes” (2022), in 2021, almost all children aged between 3 and 17 years went online (99%). The mobile phone is the most used device to connect (72%), followed by the tablet (69%), and finally, the laptop (47%) (Ofcom, 2022).

Ofcom's report sample's most frequent online behaviour was using video-sharing platforms, such as YouTube and TikTok (95%). When referring to using these platforms, either passive or active behaviours are included. While YouTube is the online platform most used by children to watch content (89%), TikTok is the most popular for posting content. Concerning television content consumption, there has been a significant shift. While 47% of children still watch live television, 78% watch paid-for on-demand streaming services, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video (Ofcom, 2022).

Concerning online gaming, data collected in 2021 revealed that 6 out of 10 children aged 3 to 17 years old play video games online. Moreover, 36% of children between 8 to 17 years old played online games with other unknown players, and 16% communicated via game chat with people they didn’t know (Ofcom, 2022).

An overview of the digital media habits of the age group between 16 to 17 years old deserves greater focus for this dissertation research purposes. Thus, the following figure (Figure 1) reveals insights into this specific age gap (Ofcom, 2022).



Figure 1: Ofcom – Children and Parents: media use and attitudes report 2022 (Ofcom, 2022, p. 6). Adapted by the author.

Narrowing down the global context to the 27 countries of the European Union, data from 2021 show that 95% of individuals between 16 to 29 years old use the Internet daily (Eurostat, 2022a). Out of all Internet-related activities, voice and video calls represent 84%, and participation in social networks, including creating social media profiles, posting messages or other contributions to Facebook, Twitter, etc., decreases to 83% (Eurostat, 2022b).

As stated by Ahn (2011), “Teenagers are among the most prolific users of social network sites. Emerging studies find that youth spend a considerable portion of their daily life interacting through social media.” (p. 1435). Social networks are one of the biggest motivators to spend time online, where users watch other people’s content or share their own. As presented in Figure 1, 94% of adolescents aged 16 to 17 have their own social media accounts, allowing them to interact and participate in those platforms actively. According to Ofcom's (2022) report, having social media profiles depends on two factors, the platforms in question and the teenager's age. Instagram is mostly associated with older adolescents – 70% of 16 to 17 years old individuals have Instagram profiles. However, in 2021 the two most used and popular online platforms were YouTube and TikTok. YouTube was reported to be the most used, with 89% of children between 3 to 17 years old using it. Whereas TikTok was the third most used app, half of the children aged 3 to 17 used it (Ofcom, 2022).

1.1.2. Portugal data

In a national study from 2014 to 2015, Amaral et al. (2017) aimed to further comprehend digital media consumption by analysing the digital media practices of young Portuguese people. According to the authors’ national study, which took place from 2014 to 2015, almost 90% of Portuguese students access the Internet daily, with an average of 253 minutes per day. The portable computer is the number one device used to connect to the Internet (91,8%), followed by the mobile phone (79,3%) (Amaral et al., 2017).

Regarding online activities, the top three online activities selected by the respondents are listening to music, watching movies/series/videos, and using social media, in order of preference. Therefore, it can be concluded that entertainment is the dominant source of digital media consumption. Using social media is the most frequent activity among Portuguese students daily (64,3%) (Amaral et al., 2017).

Considering this data, digital devices are predominately present in Portuguese young people's daily practices. Leisure activities are the leading digital media practice in this national context, with a higher emphasis on social media activity and video games (Amaral et al., 2017).

In 2013, the *Observatório de Comunicação* (OberCom) defined the Portuguese generation between 15 to 25 years old, in regards to their media practices and relationship, as the following:

“Media dependence on the use of mobile phones and the Internet; Increased Internet usage at home and other locations (new mobile generation); Internet use for basic tasks and contact with other/online information research (“wiki” generation); Greater participation in public life through the web” (OberCom, 2015, p. 4).

The mobility of digital devices has allowed individuals to access the Internet from anywhere at any time. In recent years, it has been reported an increase in smartphone usage to access the Internet, versus computers. The *EU Kids Online Portugal* report (2019) has identified an increase in smartphone usage to access the Internet of 87%, while in 2014 it was reported to be 35%. Whereas, regarding computer access, there has been a decrease from 60% to 41%. In addition, in 2018, Portuguese adolescents claimed to spend 3 hours per day on the Internet, which they mostly used for entertainment and communication purposes. In this report, an interesting reflection on teenagers' perception of the Internet was presented. When asked to share their opinion about the sentence “There are a lot of good things on the Internet for children and teenagers your age”, 42% said the quote is only partially true (Ponte & Batista, 2019).

During the past two years, society has been confronted with several challenges, and hence, new needs and habits have been created. In order to grasp an accurate and updated overview of the Portuguese context, essential data can be collected from the statistical research projects of the *Instituto Nacional de Estatística* (INE). In 2020, 84,5% of Portuguese families possessed Internet connection in their households, whereas out of the total Portuguese population, families with children up to 15 years old registered superior levels of Internet connection (98,2%). Considering that these results were collected during the COVID-19 global pandemic, it is relevant to highlight the increase of Internet users by 3,0 percentage points compared to the previous year (INE, 2020).

Internet use practices inevitably suffered slight changes since this data was collected during lockdown periods. As reported by INE (2020), Portuguese citizens used the Internet to exchange messages (89,9%), search for information about products and services (87%), send and receive emails (86,8%), read the news (85,7%), and participate in social media (80,2%) (INE, 2020).

Nevertheless, education-related activities demonstrated a noticeable increase in 2020 due to the shutdown of educational establishments, such as communicating with professors and colleagues through educational sites and attending online courses. Overall, phone and video calls were the most frequent Internet activity in the Portuguese national context.

1.2. Utopian and dystopian discourses on digital media

Current society has integrated digital devices into their everyday life, especially younger generations who have developed their own identity around these devices. To analyse the role of digital media nowadays, it is critical to consider the present-day society being studied. Several scholars defined contemporary youth as the “digital generation” and “digital natives,” among other labels, which characterise youth according to their media habits and preferences (Murumaa-Mengel & Siibak, 2019).

Understanding the role played by digital media on adolescence is very important since it is a phase defined by development processes, change, and identity formation. In Hur and Gupta's (2013) research study, the authors categorised this stage of life in four different aspects – biological change, cognitive development, social development, and identity formation (Hur & Gupta, 2013). The prevailing role of the Internet and social networks during the adolescence phase will inevitably exert both positive and negative effects.

In fact, over the last decades, researchers have shown to be ambivalent about their interpretation of the role of digital media in society. Both utopian and dystopian narratives characterise the conflicting discussion going on, some considering the Internet as “the great equalizer”, while others think it is “the doom of human connection” (Tiidenberg et al., 2017, p. 2).

The following subchapters will present research on both sides of the competing discourses. On one side, the benefits of digital media will be summarised, followed by the downsides and negative consequences.

1.2.1. Benefits of digital media

“One of the most important reasons for the preference of the Internet and social networks is the fact that individuals can communicate with people from different cultures, different education levels, and different ages through social networks.” (Tugtekin et al., 2020, p. 2)

Research on digital media has proven how new technologies have significantly impacted social interactions and created new forms of communication throughout the last decades. Some authors consider that a social shift from physical to virtual interactions has occurred – “the place where these youth connect – their *touchspace* – has morphed from yesterday’s coffeehouse to today’s website” (Rickman & Solomon, 2007, p. 417).

However, from a different perspective, some scholars perceive digital devices as social extensions that help individuals maintain their existing relationships. Following Hundley and Shyles' (2010) focus group study, young individuals use digital devices as a source of entertainment and socialising, mainly through social network sites. These devices are used to satisfy the current social need to keep in touch and stay connected (Hundley & Shyles, 2010).

The limits that separate online social interactions from offline relationships are not linear. Despite a clear understating of what is ‘real’ and ‘virtual’, digital media users use the Internet and social media to strengthen their offline relationships by maintaining contact with pre-existing friends and family (Boyd, 2007). McMillan and Morrison (2006), Hargittai (2007), and Hundley and Shyles (2010) were in full accordance that the online social life of individuals is a clear reflection of their everyday offline relationships – “online social life mirrors offline relationships in many ways” (McMillan & Morrison, 2006, p. 84).

Valkenburg and Peter’s (2007) research supported the stimulation hypothesis, which advocates that “online communication stimulates adolescents’ closeness to existing friends” (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007, p. 268). As stated by this hypothesis, the Internet allows users

to share their feelings more easily than physical interactions, enhancing the closeness of existing friendships.

Social network sites (SNSs) play a significant role during adolescence due to their increasing usage. According to the statistical article *Being Young in Europe Today*, in 2019, 84% of young people aged between 16 to 29 used the Internet to participate in social media activities. When referring to social media participation, the authors mean creating a user profile or posting messages on Facebook or Twitter (Statistics Explained, 2020).

The possibility to support social relationships through social networks is not the only positive outcome retrieved from their usage. Adolescents who are less comfortable with physical and interpersonal interactions find social networks a refuge to communicate and interact and a tool to overcome insecurities (Barker, 2009). Despite privacy issues and parental concerns regarding teenagers' social media use, the young generations consider these networks a vehicle to express themselves and “a space for teenagers to be teenagers” (Boyd, 2007, p. 16).

Through the lens of the avid users of social media, Barcelos and Rossi (2014) aim to comprehend adolescents' perceptions of positive as well as negative outcomes of social media usage. Focusing on the positive effects, the authors grasp three significant benefits – closeness with friends, maintenance and expansion of relationships, and promoting self-expression and identity construction. Social networks enable young people to communicate with friends and acquaintances regularly, in a less inhibiting environment, since users control what is shared. Distance is no longer a concern when communicating with others via social media and the possibility of meeting new people. Moreover, social media is a tool for youth to express themselves and create an identity carefully designed (Barcelos & Rossi, 2014).

Among the various existing digital devices, mobile phones have become central in the daily lives of younger generations. As concluded by Grant and O'Donohoe (2007), mobile phones surpass all other digital devices, such as television, gaming devices, computers, and others. The main reason for this specific preference is what the authors denominated “convenient entertainment” (Grant & O'Donohoe, 2007, p. 232). Mobile phones offer an easy distraction to occupy time, often related to interactive social activities with friends and family. Moreover, another factor that makes mobile phones appealing is the concept of “social

stimulation” (Grant & O’Donohoe, 2007, p. 234). This device enables users to effortlessly communicate with acquaintances through text messages and voice calls, independently of time or location. Users share a feeling of gratification and excitement when interacting, representing the emotional dimension of mobile phones.

Furthermore, digital media is considered an information tool and, as referred to by some authors, a “partial remedy” (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020, p. 112) to the poor relationship between youth and political and civic life. In an era characterised by political alienation among younger generations, digital media allows young people to easily access news and political issues discussed online. These media enable individuals to interact with other citizens and confront different social perspectives and topics. This exposure triggers them to actively engage in society's civic and political sphere (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020). McMillan and Morrison’s (2006) research shares the same point of view regarding the positive impact of interactive technologies on young people’s political activity. Digital media play a significant role in informing, bringing awareness, and, hence, generating interest in civic and political matters (McMillan & Morrison, 2006).

Young people perceive current digital technologies as more approachable forms of connecting and participating in society. Loader et al. (2014) define the present youth as “networked young citizens” (p. 145), a generation strongly influenced by social networks regarding political attitudes and civic behavior. In the present digital age era, politicians, educators, and policymakers are faced with the challenge of finding new ways of communicating and reaching younger generations. New digital media respond to this urge to reinvent politics and civic interest among youth. Using these technologies, young people quickly access information and are informed of the world’s politics. Through these platforms, young people find a way to be part of society, manifest their opinions, protest, and create digital networks (Bennett, 2008).

Various authors have focused their research studies on the act of multitasking that derives from this digital, fast-paced society. In Hundley and Shyles' (2010) research, the young participants simultaneously used two or more digital devices. Common examples of this behaviour are listening to music while studying and texting while watching television or surfing the net (Hundley & Shyles, 2010). Despite the cons of multitasking, individuals who follow this behaviour face several benefits. When using more than one digital device at once,

users share a feeling of control over their media consumption. In addition, multitaskers can manage their time more efficiently, accessing more information in a shorter period. Thus, people are highly engaged, constantly connected, and assimilating greater levels of media content (Bardhi et al., 2010).

As previously mentioned, online video games are a regular entertainment activity among adolescents. Ofcom's (2022) statistical report shows that 73% of teenagers between 16 and 17 years old play games online. Despite rising critics of the negative impact of this activity on young people, it is possible to identify the benefits of online gaming, such as its social aspect. When debating the appeal of video games, Jansz and Martens (2005) concluded that video games are interactive, either between the player and the game itself or in terms of interpersonal interaction between gamers. When analysing what attracts younger generations to play video games, the researchers identified five motives. The first motive is the competition aspect that stimulates gamers to reach high scores and win. Although video games take part in virtual reality, gamers experience a sense of control over the game and its characters. Adolescents find video games to be a form of entertainment, escapism from ordinary life, and a pastime. Finally, through this activity, gamers are able to socialise and interact with other players.

Nevertheless, technology evolves as a response to individuals' necessities. According to Wajcman (2015), "technology can be thought of as a sociotechnical product, patterned by the conditions of its creation and use" (p. 28). The ones who use technology play an active role, as they are responsible for the way they use them and may alter their purpose, as is the case of the Internet. The author emphasised that characteristics such as efficiency and speed are not inherent to the technology but rather a relationship between technology and social norms. Thus, Wajcman (2015) stated that technology is intrinsic to society and shaped by society, which should be considered in any scientific and technological study.

1.2.2. Consequences of digital media usage

During the last two decades, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have changed at such a rapid pace that society did not even have sufficient time to adapt to them. Individuals are confronted with constant new releases and updates, forcing them to learn and adjust to new technologies at a hasty rhythm (Çoklar & Şahin, 2011). Even though

innovation aims to make individuals' lives easier, the unknown of novelty generates apprehension in the human being. Research on the impact of digital media on youth has alerted us to the detrimental effects of digital media on young generations (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020).

The pressure to keep up with the fast evolution of new technologies leads to technostress. Various authors have widely researched this concept and have tried to develop a consensual definition. In general, technostress consists of a specific type of stress that results from technology and the urge to adapt to them, affecting the human being physically and psychologically (Weil & Rosen, 1997, as cited in Çoklar & Şahin, 2011). In fact, Champion (1988) (as cited in Çoklar & Şahin, 2011) considers technostress a severe illness with various associated symptoms, such as techno-anxiety and mental fatigue, among many others.

The permanent presence of digital devices in individuals' daily lives and the constant upload of information has surpassed humans' capacity to assess, track, and process online data. This phenomenon is defined as technology overload, which signifies exceeding the optimal level between technology use and productivity. In a research project focused on organisation and workplace productivity, Karr-Wisniewski & Lu (2010) suggested three types of technology overload: information, communication, and system features.

First of all, information overload occurs when the amount of information exposed to an individual exceeds their cognitive capacity to process it. Communication overload differs from the previous because it involves a third party. In this case, ICTs or other individuals demand too much attention from another person, surpassing one's productivity or capacity of response. Finally, system feature overload happens when a particular technology is too complex for an individual to efficiently use due to the addition of new features and updates (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010; Lee et al., 2016).

Nowadays, social networking services (SNSs) play a central role in youngsters' daily routines. They are undoubtedly a vehicle of overwhelming volumes of information, captivating users' attention to stay connected and in constant interaction with other users. Hence, this obligation to keep track of social media feeds and respond to other individuals leads to inevitable consequences. SNS fatigue has become an everyday struggle faced by social media users. According to Lee et al.'s (2016) research, the three types of technology

overload, previously explained, are all stress-inducing causes of SNS fatigue and other negative consequences of SNS usage.

There is an imbalance between the demands of social media to assimilate new information and individuals' capacity to process the demands (Lee et al., 2016). This overload results in multiple adverse outcomes for the human being, such as stress, exhaustion and fatigue. Several studies have been conducted on SNS fatigue, defining it as a "subjective and self-evaluated feeling of tiredness from SNS usage" (Lee et al., 2016, p. 53). Social networks are content-based platforms where users share their own content, and other individuals react and comment. Users are confronted with never-ending information that generates a feeling of obligation to spend more time on these platforms to avoid losing any content (Tugtekin et al., 2020). Social networks become a place that heavily consumes time and leads to exhaustion and even lethargy (Lupinacci, 2020). Hence, SNS users reach a state of fatigue, which has been proven that is linked with detrimental consequences on the mental, psychosocial and physical well-being of social media users (Çoklar & Şahin, 2011; Dhir et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, various other problematic outcomes are related to digital media and social network usage among young generations. Fear of missing out (FOMO), problematic smartphone use (PSU), anxiety, and depression are a few examples of the possible dangers of new technologies and how people use them. Przybylski et al. (2013) have defined FOMO as a "pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" (p. 1841). As described, this feeling leads young social network users to be connected and attentive since these networks are the best instrument to know if something exciting and worth attention might happen (Lupinacci, 2020). Plus, adolescents' urge to be popular and connected with their friends through SNSs contributes to the fear of being absent from what their peers are doing (Tugtekin et al., 2020). Consequently, smartphones are the communication vehicle to connect to other people from everywhere and all the time. The easiness of carrying and accessing these devices contributes to their compulsive and excessive use. Hence, teenagers face another challenge – PSU, problematic smartphone use (Tugtekin et al., 2020).

Research has concluded that fear of missing out leads individuals to spend more time on social media, which in turn causes high levels of SNS fatigue in the users and triggers

problematic smartphone use (Tugtekin et al., 2020). Moreover, statistics show that social media fatigue is a significant predictor of anxiety and depression among adolescents (Dhir et al., 2018). The uneasy feeling of the infinite information shared on SNSs, the need to be continuously connected, and the possible eventfulness inevitably generate anxiety among its users (Lupinacci, 2020).

Physical and social interaction is fundamental for the human being. Numerous studies have been dedicated to researching its importance and beneficial impact on one's life. Notably, during the stage of adolescence, when social support and physical interaction are crucial for teenagers (Weeks & Asher, 2012). Although social networks offer an accessible vehicle for communicating with peers, they contribute to possible detachment from friends. Adolescents get accustomed to this type of interaction to the point of dependency, replacing face-to-face communication, which they consider richer and more beneficial to them (Barcelos & Rossi, 2014). Unfortunately, research suggests that there has been a shift in the leisure activities of teenagers, from nonscreen activities to screen-related ones. Twenge et al. (2017) concluded that screen activities are associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms, and suicide-related behaviours (Twenge et al., 2017). Moreover, while the time spent on digital media increases, there is a decline in in-person social interactions among adolescents, which turns into higher values of loneliness among teenagers. Overall, screen time is an escalating concern due to its implications on young people's physical and mental health (Twenge et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, even in copresent interactions occur, the presence of smartphones negatively impacts the communication quality. It is perceived as a neglecting behaviour when someone focuses their attention on one's phone instead of the physically present other. This behaviour is defined as *phubbing* (Schneider & Hitzfeld, 2019). The urge to be permanently online and permanently connected conflicts with existing social norms and *etiquette* on how to correctly use the mobile phone and in what circumstances. This portable device is regarded as a facilitator of daily communication for young individuals, creating a certain degree of dependency (Mihailidis, 2014).

Privacy is another growing concern in society regarding digital media. Adolescents are informed about the risks of sharing data online and fear the intrinsic vulnerability of being active online. As a response, users not only restrict their 'friends' list but consciously limit

the information shared as means of precaution (Hundley & Shyles, 2010). Nevertheless, adolescents report a certain duality about online privacy. They are eager to access other people's information, but they desire to protect their own data (Barcelos & Rossi, 2014).

Digital and social media users are confronted with ambivalent and conflicting reflections regarding their relationship with these devices and networks in their lives (Lupinacci, 2020; Tiidenberg et al., 2017). As Tiidenberg et al.'s (2017) research confirms, young people demonstrate contradictory discourses regarding their life with social networks. One of the narratives detected was "the internet is *the* social lifeworld" (p. 5), representing the permanently connected digital media facet. In order to be socially active and interact with others, individuals need to be online. However, the second narrative noticed is focused on social media and its addictive factor. The authors labelled this discourse "social media use is pathological and leads to (psychological) problems" (Tiidenberg et al., 2017, p. 6). Moreover, the following prevalent discourse clearly distinguishes the concept of 'true self' as the real one and the unauthentic self, which is displayed and edited on social networks. Finally, the last discourse showcases the procrastination-productivity duality of social media. On the one hand, social networks can be perceived as a tool to improve efficiency and productivity. On the other hand, they can be used as a lazy activity to enhance procrastination (Tiidenberg et al., 2017).

As previously mentioned, online gaming is a common activity among young adolescents. It has been to be beneficial due to its social character, cooperation and teamwork between players, and the experience of escapism from reality (Frostling-Henningsson, 2009). However, a growing concern about online video gaming has been present in recent studies, especially regarding their addictive behaviour. Rehbein et al.'s (2010) research has focused on the concept of video game dependency (VGD) and has reported high levels of psychological and social stress in video game-dependent adolescents. The study has highlighted the importance of clinical and therapeutic strategies to help adolescents manage their relationships with this online activity.

In conclusion, considerable research has been conducted on digital media's bright and dark sides, somehow opposing the two different discourses. Therefore, youth's relationship with digital media and social networks is a common concern for parents and teachers. The opposing discourses on new technologies alarm educators on how they can intervene in

adolescents' digital life to protect them from the possible downsides. From a different perspective, if educators embrace new media and learn to take advantage of the tools offered, different outcomes can be retrieved for the benefit of adolescents (Ahn, 2011).

However, some authors support the idea that the benefits and risks of new technologies for young generations are intertwined. As stated by Livingstone and Helsper (2010), “taking up online opportunities is proving, for many teenagers, an experience associated with some degree of risk” (p. 324). Hence, monitoring and limiting the Internet access of adolescents will inevitably restrict favourable outcomes as well. Furthermore, digital technologies are in the hands of individuals, who are responsible for the way they are used. The effects of digital media on youth are strongly influenced by the nature of its use (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020; Livingstone & Helsper, 2010).

CHAPTER 2: Emerging digital disconnection experiences

Today's society has been researched and studied thoroughly alongside the evolution of digital technology. Humanity has been characterised as constantly connected and with an always-on mentality, considering each individual as a 'user'. Nevertheless, the concept of 'user' entails in itself the idea of 'non-users' (Wyatt et al., 2002).

From an interesting perspective, Wyatt (2003) raises awareness about the individuals who detach themselves from the digital world, those who unplug from the overwhelming technologies and social networks – the so-called non-users. The author presents her personal life experience as someone who inhabits a world of drivers, who has the qualification to drive, but nonetheless, she has decided not to drive a car. Through this example, an analogy is presented in regard to the world of users and non-users of digital technologies.

Despite being poorly researched, people who disconnect from conventional infrastructures provide as much information about those systems as regular adopters. As the researcher portrays through the car analogy, individuals who decide not to use digital technologies despite having the possibility to do so enhance the importance of comprehending non-users (Wyatt, 2003).

“After all, what we have tried to show here is that non-use is not an absence or a gap; it is not negative space. Non-use is, often, active, meaningful, motivated, considered, structured, specific, nuanced, directed, and productive” (Satchell & Dourish, 2009, p. 15)

This chapter will dive deeper into this neglected yet fundamental behaviour, defined as digital disconnection. First and foremost, the concept will be explored from various researchers' perspectives, to reach a solid and unanimous definition. Afterwards, the motivations that drive the decision to disconnect from digital devices will be discussed and analysed. At last, an overview of the different behaviours and strategies adopted to disconnect will be displayed. This segment aims to dismantle the concept of digital disconnection and better comprehend its significance and importance.

2.1. Digital disconnection definition

The research field of digital disconnection has been growing exponentially over the last two decades. Several articles have been published on digital disconnection, some more focused on why people seek digital disconnection, others on how people disconnect, and the outcomes of that experience, among many others. However, a pivotal question remains – what does digital disconnection mean?

Does this behaviour imply that people deliberately decide to detach themselves from digital technologies? Or can individuals who are disconnected due to external factors also be included in the digitally disconnected realm? To be considered digital disconnection, must the decision to withdraw from the digital world be permanent? Or can it be for limited periods? Does it have to be from all digital technologies?

The first ever discussions on non-use arose from the early years of the digital age, around the 90s decade. Nonetheless, in the beginning, non-use was perceived as an issue of digital exclusion, an absence that must be overcome, and a problem that must be fixed (Selwyn, 2003; Satchell & Dourish, 2009; Hesselberth, 2018). During that time, the factors behind technology non-use were lack of access, lack of means to use, and lack of capability and skills to use the technologies. Moreover, some individuals took longer to adapt to these new trends, others did not want to take part in these new inventions (Hesselberth, 2018). The act of being disconnected was not, for the majority, a personal thought-through decision.

However, researchers realized that the non-users provided fundamental insights into society and its complex relationship with technology (Wyatt, 2003; Wyatt et al., 2002). Further on, research on this emerging behaviour increased, expanding the field of digital disconnection. In fact, according to Hesselberth (2018), the concept of digital disconnection is constantly evolving. Media refusal (Portwood-Stacer, 2013), non-usage of digital technologies (Selwyn, 2003; Neves et al., 2015), and digital detox (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020) are just a few examples of how broad and complex this behaviour is.

In 2013, Portwood-Stacer published an article on individuals who deliberately and actively decide to disconnect from Facebook. The author considers this behaviour a lifestyle practice, which she denominates as “media refusal” (Portwood-Stacer, 2013, p. 1042). First and

foremost, Portwood-Stacer (2013) clarifies that not all types of non-usage can be considered refusal. The difference relies on the reasoning behind the decision not to use certain platforms or media. This decision must be conscious and can be perceived as a social and political critique, it portrays the non-users' opinion, ideological position and dissatisfaction with something (Portwood-Stacer, 2013). From a similar viewpoint, Neves et al.'s (2015) research paper focuses on the non-usage of social networking sites among young people. Despite using different terms, Portwood-Stacer (2013) and Neves et al. (2015) share a common ground when discussing media refusal and non-use correspondingly. Both concepts define the disconnecting behaviour as a deliberate and active choice and not a result of lack of access or digital illiteracy.

Over the years, the rapid pace of society has not slowed down, leaving individuals overwhelmed and searching for ways to manage their life better and find balance. As a result, with the final goal of regaining an authentic and healthier lifestyle, the phenomenon of digital detox is born (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). In this case, the act of disconnecting from digital devices does not necessarily signify a total withdrawal from all technologies. Instead, it can be a reduction of the time spent on technologies. Plus, this experience is more likely to be associated with digital disconnection for limited periods of time (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020).

Considering all definitions, Nguyen et al. (2021) cleverly conclude that “in today’s digital age, disconnection is more complex than people simply leaving ICTs” (Nguyen et al., 2021, p. 307). An infinite number of factors are involved in detaching oneself from technology, making it demanding to sum up the act of disconnecting into a straightforward definition.

For the purposes of the present dissertation, previous well-researched and cited definitions of digital disconnection will be taken into account. To begin with, the definition suggested by Nguyen et al. (2021) will be the baseline for this research, which proclaims that digital disconnection refers to individuals who have utilized digital technologies in the past but have decided to reduce their usage or withdraw them completely, either permanently or for limited periods of time (Nguyen et al., 2021, p. 300). However, as the goal of this thesis is to correlate digital disconnection experiences with young people’s levels of well-being, disconnection experiences who have not been voluntary and consciously deliberated will also be considered, since these also may portray important information on the well-being of users.

2.2. Motivations to digitally disconnect

After grasping an overall understanding of digital disconnection, it is crucial to understand the reasoning and motivations behind the decision to disconnect from digital technologies. Throughout the years, several researchers have focused on searching for answers. Various authors have identified and labelled the motivations to disconnect from digital devices into specific categories, resulting in a considerable amount of data and different classifications. Hence, in chronological order, follows a representative sample of factors that leads to digital disconnection, according to some researchers.

As claimed by Wyatt et al. (2002), there is a “potential gap” between individuals’ perception and high expectations of the internet versus the reality of using it (p. 33). The delusion/deception that derives from misleading expectations may be one of the causes for disconnecting from the internet. Society has been sold the idea that the internet would revolutionise the world, making promises too high to reach. Unfortunately, the internet's growth, expansion and commercialisation have led to inevitable disappointments. Users are now confronted with overwhelming and unwanted information, from junk email to pop-up advertisements. Compared to what was promised to be a quick and easy access tool to all information needed, internet users are now frustrated with how much time is required in order to actually to access the information wanted. In addition, internet users are confronted with constant requests from site owners to collect their data, leading to insecurity and fear of misusing personal information. This is just a partial representation of the downfalls of the internet and, thus, possible motivations that lead users to unplug from the digital world.

Through a broader and summarised lens, Eynon and Geniets (2012) organise the main reasons behind the usage and non-usage of the Internet among younger generations suggested by several researchers up to that year. As a result, the authors present five major groups: psychological, cognitive, physical, socio-cultural, and material. Psychological reasons consist of young people's attitudes, motivations and agency toward the Internet. Regarding cognitive reasons, the authors explain that basic skills and the ability to use the Internet play an important role in the non-usage of the Internet. The physical constraints of accessing the Internet, or more accurate to today’s society, the quality of access, is another impactful aspect of individuals' relationship with the Internet. Moreover, people's social and cultural surroundings influence Internet usage, either one’s family, friends, or other

institutions in the young people's context. At last, Eynon and Geniets (2012) argue that young people in more advantageous positions in society, which can be associated with financial terms, educational terms or others, are more prone to use the Internet than individuals with fewer resources. To sum up, the researchers defined this reason as "material" (Eynon & Geniets, 2012, p. 11).

In 2013, Baumer et al. engaged in a deep investigation of Facebook use practices, particularly among users who have decided to stop using this social network. Therefore, in search of individuals' justifications for Facebook non-use, the researchers outline the following motivations: privacy, data use and misuse, banality, productivity, addiction, and external pressures. First and foremost, when referring to privacy, the interviewees demonstrated concerns about being on display and having their personal information available online for whoever to see. Regarding Facebook itself, respondents shared concerns about how it managed their personal data and potential misuse without their knowledge and consent. Another clear motivation that leads to disconnection is the banality of the social network, which is perceived as uninteresting and a waste of time. Contrastingly, others consider Facebook so engaging that it affects their productivity and focus on important academic and work tasks. Addiction represents another main motivation to withdraw from Facebook. The motivations described previously express personal concerns that lead to the deliberate decision to disconnect. However, the last reason relies on the pressure performed by external individuals or institutions to limit or stop using this social media (Baumer et al., 2013).

Focusing on social network sites, Neves et al.'s (2015) study gathered several reasons behind the decision to reject SNS specifically, which they organised into three main categories. The most common motivation to disconnect derives from the low level of perceived usefulness of SNS. According to the interviewees, social networks do not bring value and advantages to their lives, which is justified by their lack of interest, patience and "waste of time" (Neves et al., 2015, p. 123). Moreover, following a Bourdieusian approach, individuals are somehow conditioned by the social environment, which inevitably influences their actions and decisions. Hence, the second reason to reject SNS is defined as social practices, from which the authors specify four main reasons: "privacy practices", "gossip, social grooming, flirting, social voyeurism, and self-promotion", "internet displacement", and "context collapse"

(Neves et al., 2015, p. 124). Finally, self-presentation and identity represent additional reasons for SNS non-usage. The non-users categorize themselves as different from the mainstream, rebels, or even hipsters (Neves et al., 2015a).

Through a broader lens, Magee, Agosto and Forte (2017) aim to explore teenagers' motivations that impact their technology use. The researchers suggest four main factors that influence teens' technology habits, which may include an increase in use, though more prominently use reduction or non-use at all. Depending on the location, certain environments impose rules and restrictions on technology use, such as at school, at home, or others. Hence, depending on local policies, adolescents' technology use is affected. Affective factors are also impactful on technology use practices. When confronted with frustrating situations, teenagers opt to disconnect and take a break from the digital device in question. In addition, another key factor that influences technology engagement corresponds to teenagers' life stage and future goals. Depending on future aspirations, such as college and career opportunities, teenagers limit their technology use in favour of their goals and ambitions. The fourth and final factor is relationships, which directly impact teens' technology behaviours, either in dating relationships or negative interactions (Magee et al., 2017).

Resulting mainly from personal introspection, Syvertsen and Enli (2020) describe a feeling of overload shared by individuals in different areas of their lives. Some individuals found themselves imprisoned in the digital world, losing track of time and feeling permanently connected, which the authors entitled "temporal overload" (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020, p. 7); Another common perception of people's relationship with digital technologies is a sense of losing their space, having difficulties separating what is real, from what happens behind a screen; Ultimately, another concern shared by people regards their physical and mental wellness. As a result of the overwhelming interaction with technologies, some physical consequences include weight gain, unhealthy eating habits and lack of exercise, whereas mental symptoms refer depression, anxiety and stress, as some examples (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020).

Even though Nguyen et al. (2021) research's sample is focused on older adults, aged 59 years old or above, the authors have concluded that some of their motivations to disconnect from digital media correspond to similar reasons for younger users (which is of primary interest for the present dissertation). Nevertheless, by analysing these adult-focused

motivations to disconnect, one can further comprehend the overall process behind the decision to unplug from the digital world. Once again, the social environment plays a significant role in disconnection behaviour, which in this case relies mainly on children and family influences. In addition, disinterest in social media platforms and time constraints are directly related to the decision to disconnect. Plus, nowadays, people are confronted with many options to communicate and apps to use that ultimately make them seek convenience, disconnecting from certain alternatives and focusing on fewer ones. Finally, concerns with misusing private information, as well as technical difficulties in easily engaging with digital platforms lead to technology rejection (Nguyen et al., 2021).

The realm of news media is no exception when it comes to individuals' decisions to disconnect. Following Aharoni et al.'s (2021) study on news avoidance among young adults, the researchers have highlighted three main aspects that motivate news avoidance. First of all, the content of the news is a critical factor in the engagement or avoidance of news, either due to bias, negativity, extremism, the journalist in question or untrustworthiness of the information. The second dimension is related to the technological aspect of news consumption. The third and last dimension concerns the urge to reduce media consumption, or as the authors describe “a type of media detox” (Aharoni et al., 2021, p. 53). Interestingly, Aharoni et al. (2021) concluded that over-consumption and excessive interest in news, result in fear of addiction and too much time spent consuming news. Despite focusing on news media and reasons to avoid them, it is very much pertinent to apply this analysis to the world of digital technologies and their relationship with younger generations.

In order to summarise the literature presented on the factors that influence digital disconnection, the table below organizes the motivations according to their authors.

Motivations to disconnect (literature review)	
(Wyatt et al., 2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Misleading expectations - Unwanted information - Time consumption - Insecurity issues

(Eynon & Geniets, 2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychological - Cognitive - Physical - Socio-cultural - Material
(Baumer et al., 2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Privacy - Data misuse - Productivity - Banality - Addiction - External pressures
(Neves et al., 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived usefulness - Social practices - Self-presentation and identity
(Magee et al., 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local policies - Affective factors - Life stage and future goals - Relationships
(Syvertsen & Enli, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Temporal overload - Spatial overload - Body and mind
(Nguyen et al., 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social influence - Lack of interest - Convenience - Time constraints - Privacy concerns - Technical confusion
(Aharoni et al., 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Content avoidance - Medium avoidance - User-oriented avoidance

Table 1: Motivations to disconnect, according to literature review. Created by the author.

After overviewing a considerable volume of research on the possible motivations that encourage individuals to disconnect from digital devices, a common concern is shared by technology users. Despite not being an issue in the early days of the Internet, nowadays, privacy concerns play an unsettling worry in individuals' relationship with the digital world (Baumer et al., 2013; Nguyen et al., 2021; Wyatt et al., 2002). Even though people need to accept terms and responsibilities when using certain devices and platforms, a portion of private information is inevitably shared. Users are left with the perception that part of their

information is no longer in their control, which has been the case in hacking situations with social networking sites and shared data for advertisement purposes.

From a personal point of view, individuals have reflected on the impact of digital technologies in their lives. From this introspection, some concluded that these devices somehow negatively impact their lifestyle and wellness, leading to the decision to unplug from technology for limited or longer periods (Eynon & Geniets, 2012; Magee et al., 2017; Neves et al., 2015; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). A prevailing characteristic of digital devices mentioned by users regards their overwhelming presence and how much they consume people's time with unwelcome and unnecessary information (Wyatt et al., 2002; Baumer et al., 2013). Individuals seek solutions to make their lives easier and more efficient; however, some find technologies to do the exact opposite (Neves et al., 2015; Nguyen et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, the act of digitally disconnecting not only results from personal opinions. As it is possible to conclude from previous research, and as table 1 demonstrates, external pressures are another impactful factor. Some categorise this aspect as external pressures (Baumer et al., 2013), others as socio-cultural context (Eynon & Geniets, 2012), social practices (Neves et al., 2015), relationships (Magee et al., 2017), and even social environment (Nguyen et al., 2021). They all represent society and institutions' influence on people's relationships with technologies.

2.2.1. Addiction

In the past few years, addiction has been a controversial subject regarding the concept's association with individuals' relationship with digital technologies. Recent research has categorised technology use as an impulsive and unconscious act, defining individuals as dependent on digital devices (Aagaard, 2021). Hence, researchers stand in conflicting perspectives on whether society's relationship with technologies should be characterised as an addictive relationship or just as technology habits (Aagaard, 2021).

Some scholars consider technology-related behaviours to be in the realm of addictive behaviours. According to Aagaard (2021), the advocates of this opinion characterise technology use as neurobehavior, arguing that a behaviour's stimulus derives from its consequences. In other words, the greater the reward of the behaviour, the higher the

probability of repeating the same behaviour. More accurately, neurobehavioral defenders adopted the term ‘reinforcing’ instead of ‘rewarding’ since the latter conveys a sense of compensation, whereas a reinforcing consequence increases the response rate (Skinner, 1963). When applying this knowledge to addictive behaviour, dopamine plays a powerful reinforcer that stimulates our constant urge to use digital technologies. When one receives positive responses from using technologies, either ‘likes’ or compliments on their comments, dopamine is released into the individual’s brain, resulting in a ‘good feeling’. Consequently, individuals get caught up in these dopamine loops (Aagaard, 2021).

When analysing the adverse outcomes of digital technologies and their impact on users’ lives, addiction has been identified as a negative characteristic and as a potential reason for disconnecting experiences (Baumer et al., 2013; Tugtekin et al., 2020; Aharoni et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2021). Individuals shared a common struggle with tracking the time spent on digital devices and platforms, resulting in a feeling of resentment and frustration afterwards. This perception of dependency and lack of control may result in a desire to withdraw from these devices, an experience somehow similar to addictive behaviour.

Video games have been given special attention within the realm of computer and mobile phone problematic usage. In fact, video games appear to share various similar characteristics to gambling, especially regarding the reward experience associated with scores, points, and rankings (Rehbein et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, this research field has not yet agreed on whether technology use is indeed an addictive behaviour. Some argue that such powerful and prominent discourse “sensationalizes teens’ engagement with technology” (Tiidenberg et al., 2017, p. 3), when in fact people’s relationship with technology is more complex than simply labelling it as an addiction or even an illness. The lack of research and evidence that properly sustains this statement leads to hesitations when assuming technology use to be an addiction (Aagaard, 2021; Billieux et al., 2015; Panova & Carbonell, 2018).

Despite several studies concluding that there is not sufficient data that sustains the idea of technology use as addictive behaviour, it is crucial to bear in mind the personal concern and perception of one’s feeling addicted to digital devices, social networks, and video games.

Even though not empirically proven, further research and attention should be given to this ‘feeling of addiction’, since it leads to withdrawal and even psychological consequences.

2.3. Experiences of Digital Disconnection

Individuals' emerging urge to disconnect from digital devices arises from different motivations and needs. As previously illustrated, various aspects influence digital disconnection, from personal to external factors, the social context, privacy concerns and several others. Therefore, depending on each individual's context, conditions, and environment, the disconnection experience may differ accordingly. Through an exploratory overview of existing research, the following subchapter will outline various digital disconnection approaches and behaviours adopted by individuals.

In Rogers' book *Diffusion of Innovations* (1983), the author stated that “Not all individuals in a social system adopt an innovation at the same time” (Rogers, 1983, p. 241). Despite the benefits inherent to innovation, adopting novelty into one's life is not an immediate or instantaneous process. As a result, Rogers suggests five different adopter categories based on the level of innovativeness of individuals. Starting from those eager for new inventions, the first category is entitled innovators. A strong sense of adventure characterises this type of adopter, or as the authors' entitled venturesomeness.

Moreover, the following category is the early adopters, which corresponds to individuals who are seen as well-informed and role models for future adopters. Further on, the following categories are the early majority, the late majority and, last but not least, the laggards. The last category of adopters is distinct from the others due to their sceptical approach towards innovation and, hence, the slow process of adopting it (Rogers, 1983).

Rogers's (1983) categorisation of innovation adopters weighs significant relevance for future digital technology non-use behaviours research. In fact, his work is considered fundamental and the basis for Satchell and Dourish's research, conducted in 2009. The authors aim to explore the non-use behaviour of computers and the significance of this act. The first form of non-use corresponds to Rogers' category of laggards, defined as lagging adoption. Nevertheless, this behaviour characterises “people who do not use technology yet” (Satchell & Dourish, 2009, p. 10) and is not non-use per se. As the name describes itself, active

resistance corresponds to individuals who deliberately and purposely reject technology. Within the active resistance behaviour, another particular form of non-use represents individuals who evoke nostalgia as an impediment to accepting technology evolution and the inherent changes of this development in their lives. The authors denominated this behaviour disenchantment. The last three categories are disenfranchisement, which is related to the lack of availability and accessibility of technologies; displacement corresponds to contexts where people rely on another individual's technology; hence they do not own one; finally, disinterest (Satchell & Dourish, 2009). In order of growing adoption resistance, Augustin et al. (2020) suggest the following graphic representation of Satchell and Dourish's (2009) six forms of technology non-use of technology.

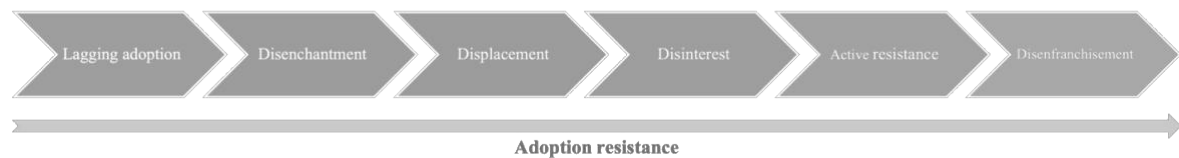


Figure 2: Satchell & Dourish's (2009) forms of non-use correlated with Augustin et al. (2020) adoption resistance level (p. 1858). Adapted by the author.

Wyatt, Thomas and Terranova (2002) challenge technology determinism theory, emphasising the complexity of the Internet and how its dynamism is shaped by society. According to the authors, the assumption that every individual is a potential Internet user is a deception of reality and neglects an essential group of individuals – the non-users. Referenced by many researchers, Wyatt et al. (2002) were pioneers in categorising the different types of non-user profiles, with the following taxonomy: resisters, rejecters, excluded and expelled.

The resisters' group consists of individuals who have never used the Internet because they deliberately decided to. Contrastingly, the second group includes those who have used the Internet in the past but voluntarily decided to stop. This decision may result from having other suitable sources of information and means of communication. Moreover, the third group comprises individuals who have never used the Internet because they do not have access, considered socially or technically excluded. Finally, the fourth group is denominated the expelled. As the name suggests, it consists of individuals who have involuntarily stopped

using the Internet due to external factors such as cost or loss of institutional access (Wyatt et al., 2002).

Despite Wyatt et al.'s (2002) taxonomy of non-user behaviours into four distinctive groups, a common trait assembles the different categorisations into two main clusters. As described above, both the resisters and the rejecters have made a conscious, deliberate decision not to use the Internet. On the other hand, the last two categories represent individuals who unwillingly do not have access to the Internet (Augustin et al., 2020). Hence, Wyatt (2003) denominates the first clusters the “want nots” and the second the “have nots”. Interestingly, in 1995, Bauer (cited in Wyatt, 2003) suggested that non-user behaviour may come from active resistance or passive avoidance, which perfectly complements Wyatt et al.'s (2002) taxonomy.

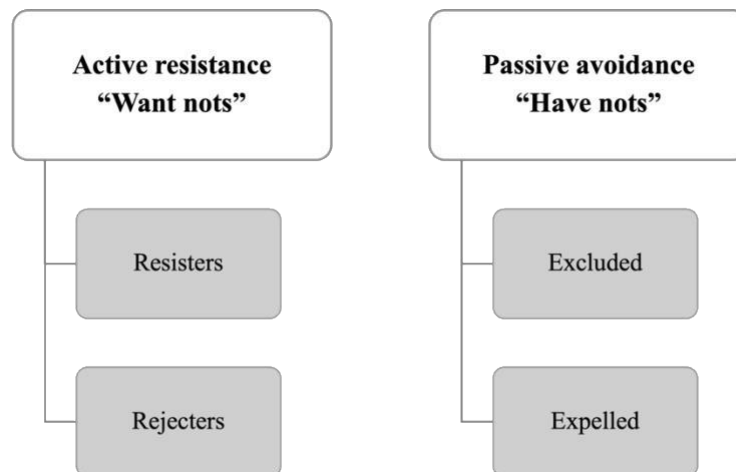


Figure 3: Wyatt, Thomas and Terranova's (2002) non-user taxonomy, correlated with Bauer's (1995) and Wyatt's (2003) categorizations. Graphic retrieved from Augustin et al. (2020, p. 1858). Adapted by the author.

Focusing on social networks' disconnection, Neves et al. (2015) conducted research on young people's rejection of SNSs, leading to an upgraded typology of non-users of social media, based on Wyatt et al.'s (2002) taxonomy. The resisters and rejecters categories represent two different behaviours of non-SNS use identified in the authors' study. However, the data collected led to new conclusions, originating two additional categories – surrogate users and potential converts. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that these new clusters are not exclusive and can simultaneously be included in the resisters or rejecters

categories. The surrogate users do not possess a personal SNS account but occasionally use other people's accounts for specific reasons. Lastly, the potential converts represent non-users who currently do not use social networks but are considering or reconsidering the pros and cons of either starting or reactivating their SNSs accounts (Neves et al., 2015).

In recent years, two Google employees working on the Android operating system conducted research on problematic smartphone use and disconnection behaviours from that device. Aranda and Baig (2018) presented an accurate and improved analysis of current society's relationship with technology through a curious approach. Considering two main influencing factors – level of control (from forced to voluntary disconnection) and duration of time (short to long term periods) – the Google researchers introduce four experiences of disconnection, presented in figure 4.

In the long-term voluntary quadrant, the disconnection experience is described as a lifestyle choice. Individuals consciously opt to change their phone usage habits, which does not imply a radical disconnection from technology. In this case, participants set limits to their phone activity and were satisfied with their decision. On the other hand, some people experience disconnection during extended periods without their deliberate consent. Aranda & Baig (2018) termed this scenario as infrastructure constraints, which may result from availability or accessibility restrictions. On the short-term side of the axis, digital disconnection may be voluntary, entitled short-break, or forced, defined as an unplanned outage. In a short-break situation, participants associated this behaviour with vacations, weekends, or periods of focus, where they schedule a specific time to be offline. Whereas, in unplanned outage experiences, individuals seek to find a solution to reconnect since it was not a deliberate decision to be disconnected. Examples of this situation are a dead phone battery or no data connection/Wi-Fi (Aranda & Baig, 2018).

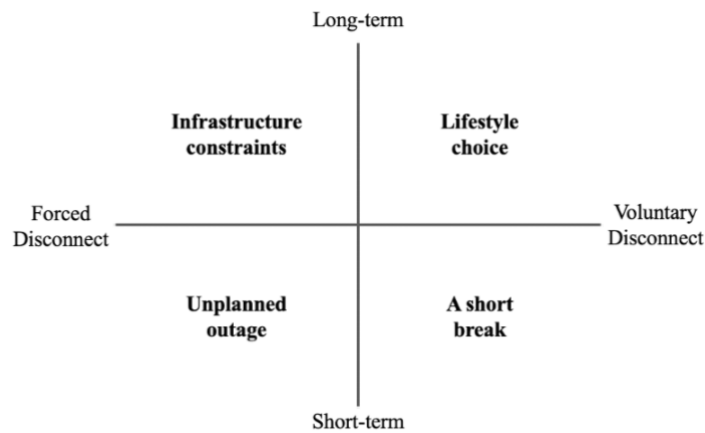


Figure 4: Graphic retrieved from Aranda & Baig (2018, p. 19:4). Adapted by the author.

After a thorough analysis of existing literature on digital disconnection and non-use behaviours, it is relevant to note some distinct conclusions among different contemporaneous researchers. A common point has been present across multiple authors despite several taxonomy suggestions. “Active resistance” (Bauer, 1995, cited in Wyatt, 2003; Satchell & Dourish, 2009), “resisters” (Wyatt et al., 2002), “want nots” (Wyatt, 2003), and “voluntary disconnection” (Aranda & Baig, 2018) are all different typologies to denominate deliberate and conscious digital disconnection. A clear distinction has been made between non-users who are obliged to disconnect, due to external non-controllable factors, versus intentional disconnection.

CHAPTER 3: Digital disconnection and well-being

The research conducted on the impact of digital media on individuals is vast. On the brighter side of this ongoing discussion, some researchers emphasize on the positive outcomes of interacting with modern technologies (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Hundley & Shyles, 2010; Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020), perhaps neglecting the harmful consequences of such relationships. However, on the other hand, some authors struggle to find a balance between the good and the bad of digital technologies, arguing that the digital world has invaded people's lives with such strength that it has been detrimental to human beings' mental health (Çoklar & Şahin, 2011; Dhir et al., 2018; Twenge et al., 2019; Lupinacci, 2020).

Despite numerous studies in this field, the predominance of contradictory results has made it challenging to determine whether or how the use of digital technology is connected to wellbeing (Sewall et al., 2020). In order to accurately assess this possible relation, it is crucial to comprehend the concept of well-being. Nonetheless, understanding the meaning of well-being is not equivalent to knowing how to measure well-being. Hence, a questionnaire will be presented and suggested as the assessment tool of individuals' levels of well-being for the present dissertation. Moreover, combining the growing awareness of individuals' well-being in a digitised world, the idea of digital well-being emerged, which will be further explored. Ultimately, after assimilating the concepts of digital disconnection and well-being, it is easier to analyse the possible outcomes of experiencing digital disconnection in individuals' well-being.

3.1. Definition of well-being

“A fundamental question in human life concerns how to achieve personal well-being.”

(Huta & Ryan, 2010, p. 736)

As Huta and Ryan (2010) clearly affirm, seeking and achieving well-being is vital in human life. Whether it is a continuous path or a state of wellness, the human being eagers to reach and find well-being during life. Therefore, it has been a concept of prime interest to psychology research, among various other fields of expertise. Measuring the well-being of people has been integrated as a key component in different areas of investigation, such as politics, economy, and sociology, among others (Martela & Sheldon, 2019). Nevertheless,

it has been difficult for researchers to find an agreement on how to define and measure this concept (Best et al., 2014).

Many philosophers and psychologists have dedicated their studies to defining happiness and well-being. In this ongoing research process, it is important to acknowledge two ancient philosophical approaches that have contributed significantly to characterising well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). One of the philosophies is entitled hedonism, and its theorists argue that well-being results from experiences of pleasure and happiness. To reach the highest level of well-being, the goal resides in maximising the amount or duration of positive feelings and minimising the amount or duration of unpleasant feelings (Henderson & Knight, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2001). According to hedonic philosophers, the ability to evaluate one's quality of life and well-being resides in the individual himself – “the individual is considered to be in the best position to determine how well they are” (Henderson & Knight, 2012, p. 197). Therefore, from a hedonic perspective, the measure to assess someone's well-being is characterised as subjective (Best et al., 2014). As the wise words of Marcus Aurelius state, “no man is happy who does not think himself so” (as cited in Diener, 1984). Nevertheless, psychology researchers suggested three key components as assessment measures of well-being – positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction (Diener, 1984; McCullough et al., 2000).

On the other hand, the eudaimonic approach states that an individual's well-being does not rely on one's happiness but on the pursuit of fulfilling one's true potential in life (Henderson & Knight, 2012). In contrast with hedonic theorists, eudaimonia believes that a good life is a path chasing one's goals and ambitions, with the final purpose of becoming a fully functioning person (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Hence, as a result of continuous research in this field, and considering the eudaimonia perspective as an integral part of well-being, Ryff (1989) suggests six dimensions of psychological well-being to accurately assess an individual's positive functioning in life – self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Each of these components represents challenges individuals face when striving to reach their full potential. Self-acceptance entails one's ability to feel good about themselves, even though being conscious of their own limitations. Additionally, as revealed by the name itself, positive relations with others regard individuals' challenge to establish and maintain wholesome

interpersonal relationships with others, as well as adapt one's surroundings to suit their needs and desires (environmental mastery). In order to keep one's personal identity in various social contexts, individuals seek self-determination and personal autonomy. Moreover, it is an essential endeavour for an individual to find and achieve one's purpose in life, amid life challenges, and last but not least, to achieve personal growth and realisation of one's full potential (Ryff, 1989; Ryff et al., 2021; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

According to Keyes (1998), up to that time, well-being has been portrayed as a "primarily private phenomenon" (p. 121). Initially, well-being has been classified as emotional, being framed as the self-perception of positive feelings (Diener, 1984), and, later on, labelled as psychological well-being, assessed by the individual effort to achieve positive functioning in life in a series of challenging personal dimensions (Ryff, 1989). However, all these concepts fail to acknowledge that people live in a society surrounded by social institutions and communities. Hence, Keyes (1998) proposed a social dimension of well-being that the author considers to be fundamental for one's positive functioning, which is defined as "the appraisal of one's circumstance and functioning in society" (p. 122). Similarly to Ryff's (1989) dimensions of psychological well-being, Keyes (1998) conveys five social challenges incorporated into social well-being – social integration (individuals feel they are part of society), social acceptance (individuals' acceptance of other people), social contribution (individuals' belief that they have social value, something to contribute to society), social actualisation (individuals' belief that humanity has potential to evolve), and social coherence (individuals' understanding of society).

There have been ongoing discussions and 'battles' on the hedonic versus eudaimonic philosophies and the different perspectives on the concept of well-being, either the emotional, psychological or even the social dimension. It is curious to wonder that despite the existence of several distinct approaches that may at first appear to be conflicting, these multiple theories do, in fact, intersect and complement each other (Ryan & Deci, 2001). As some authors argue (Henderson & Knight, 2012; Huta & Ryan, 2010), the highest level of well-being relies on the combination of both hedonic and eudaimonic perceptions. Interestingly, Keyes (1998, 2002) suggests a broader and more substantial definition of subjective well-being that considers previous extensive research on the subject and combines different approaches to the same concept. To summarise, at the beginning of this ongoing

search for defining and comprehending well-being, Diener (1984) argued that well-being was determined by an individual's subjective feelings and self-perception of life satisfaction. Afterwards, theorists such as Ryff (1989) and Ryan and Deci (2001) adopted an eudaimonic approach and believed well-being to be more than one's emotions. Therefore, the concept of psychological well-being emerged based on the life pursuit of positive functioning. However, according to Keyes (1998), analysing well-being only from a personal perspective neglected a vital dimension of an individual, the social dimension. Hence, Keyes (1998) argued that to assess one's well-being accurately, it was crucial to evaluate the well-being of an individual within the social realm – “Although the existing models emphasize private features of well-being, individuals remain embedded in social structures and communities, and face countless social tasks and challenges” (p. 122).

Taking this into consideration, Keyes claims that to evaluate the well-being of a person, it is essential to assess two dimensions, positive emotions and positive functioning. One must evaluate positive affect, happiness and life satisfaction to measure positive emotions. Regarding positive functioning, Ryff's (1989) psychological dimensions and Keyes's (1998) social well-being components should be considered.

As Keyes et al. (2008) explain, “Subjective well-being consists of two compatible traditions: one that focuses on feelings towards life (hedonic, emotional well-being) and another that focuses on functioning in life (eudaemonic well-being)” (p. 181). The table below clarifies the three dimensions considered when assessing subjective well-being.

Subjective Well-Being		
Positive feelings (hedonic)	Positive functioning (eudaimonic)	
Emotional well-being	Psychological well-being	Social well-being
Positive affect Happiness Life satisfaction	Self-acceptance Personal growth Purpose in life Environmental mastery Autonomy Positive relations with others	Social acceptance Social actualization Social contribution Social coherence Social integration

Table 2: Subjective well-being (Keyes, 2003, p. 299). Adapted by the author.

3.1.1. Measuring well-being

To comprehend the concept of well-being, it is not sufficient to merely find a definition. A definition is not applicable when studying society, which leads to a greater question – how is it possible to measure individuals' well-being?

Numerous attempts have been made to find the most suitable method to assess people's well-being and mental health. Some researchers have focused on evaluating a general sense of happiness, others on satisfaction with life, and others only on the psychological well-being of individuals. In order to have an overall glimpse of the research conducted, these are a few examples of techniques to assess well-being – Affectometer 2 (Kammann & Flett, 1983); Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985); The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (Diener et al., 2009, 2010); The Psychological Well-Being Scale (Diener et al., 2009, 2010); and The Positive Thinking Scale (Diener et al., 2009, 2010). Nevertheless, one single technique had to be selected for the current research project.

Keyes plays a fundamental role in the field of well-being research and is considered a great advocate of mental health. The researcher argues that mental health is not explained by the absence of mental illness (Keyes, 2002, 2006). According to Keyes (2002), mental health is defined as a “syndrome of symptoms of an individual's subjective well-being” (p. 208), which, as previously clarified, regards their perception and evaluation of positive emotions and positive functioning in life (psychological and social well-being).

Keyes developed the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF) to measure well-being, which was first instrumented in the national survey Child Development Supplement (CDS) in 2002. The CDS survey was conducted on young individuals aged 12 to 18 years old, where subjective well-being measures were added to validate psychological, social, and emotional well-being in youth (Keyes, 2005, 2006). This first attempt validated the three-factor structure of subjective well-being as the most efficient and appropriate model to assess youth's mental health. Due to the substantial and powerful approach to examining people's well-being, MHC-SF was considered the best method to be conducted in the data collection process of the present dissertation to complement the participants' information and gather a more complete profile.

The Mental Health Continuum – Short Form is defined by (Keyes et al., 2008) as “a clinical approach to the continuous assessment and categorical diagnosis of states of mental health as ‘something positive’ rather than merely the absence of psychopathology” (p. 181). The survey is guided by the main question, “during the past month, how many times did you feel...”. In total, 14 items must be answered following the main question, which aims to assess subjective well-being. For each item, the respondent has the following response options with the correspondent points: “never” (0), “once or twice” (1), “once or twice a week” (2), “two or three times a week” (3), “almost every day” (4), and “every day” (5).

The 14 items of subjective well-being are divided into emotional well-being items and positive functioning items, including psychological and social elements. Emotional well-being was evaluated through happiness, interest in life, and satisfaction. The social well-being items followed Keyes’s (1998) five-factors model – social contribution (“how many times did you feel that you had something important to contribute to society”), social integration (“how often did you feel that you belonged to a community, like a social group, your school, or your neighbourhood”), social actualisation (“how often did you feel that our society is becoming a better place”), social acceptance (“how often did you feel that people are basically good”), and social coherence (“how often did you feel that the way society works made sense to you”) (Keyes, 2005, p. 6). The last segment of the MHC-SF focuses on Ryff’s (1989) dimensions of psychological well-being. The first item corresponds to self-acceptance (“how often did you feel that you liked most of the characteristics of your personality”), followed by environmental mastery (“how often did you feel good at managing the responsibilities of your daily life”), positive relations with others (“how often did you feel that you have warm and trusting relationships with other kids”), personal growth (“how often did you feel that you have experiences that challenge you to grow or become a better person”), autonomy (“how often did you feel confident to think or express your own ideas and opinions”), and lastly, purpose in life (“how often did you feel that your life has purpose and direction”) (Keyes, 2005, p. 6).

To be in a complete state of mental health, one must be absent of any mental illness, as well as score high values of emotional, psychological and social well-being (Keyes, 2006). This maximum peak of mental health has been labelled by the researcher as flourishing, which entails an individual who lives a life with meaning and purpose, feels happy and has a

constructive and healthy approach to the world. To be diagnosed as flourishing, individuals must score highly on one of the three emotional well-being assessments and six out of the eleven positive functioning items. On the opposing side of the MHC-SF spectrum is a state of languishing, for which an individual must score poorly on at least one of the emotional well-being items, combined with at least six of the eleven positive functioning scales. In other words, to be categorised as languishing, an individual has no positive feelings about life, exhibits poor psychological or social functioning, and has not recently undergone depression. Accordingly, those who fall between the two extremes of the Mental Health Continuum – neither flourishing nor languishing – are considered to be in a moderately healthy state of mind (Keyes, 2002, 2006).

3.2. The outcomes of digital disconnection

The omnipresence of digital media in today's society has led individuals to dwell on the repercussions of digital technologies and mobile connectivity in their daily lives. While on the one hand, society values digital devices and the improvement of life's quality provided by mobile connectivity; on the other hand, some individuals struggle to balance the constant pressure of being connected (Vanden Abeele, 2021). This ambivalence towards digital technologies – denominated by Vanden Abeele (2021) as the "Mobile Connectivity Paradox" (p. 934) – has influenced several users to opt for digital disconnection behaviours, in order to achieve a healthier relationship with digital media, according to their personal standards.

As explained in the previous chapter, digital disconnection behaviours encompass complete abstinence from digital media, which may be from a specific device or platform, as well as reduction and self-management of the time spent on screens. Despite some adopting radical withdrawal approaches and others deciding to self-regulate the presence of digital media in their lives, both strategies entail some sort of digital disconnection (Nguyen et al., 2021). Bearing in mind this concept and recalling the motivations to disconnect digitally, it is relevant to analyse whether these strategies are indeed effective.

Individuals' digital media practices have been a central topic of interest among various social researchers. However, a considerable number of studies have characterized digital media usage as problematic and excessive, leading to dangerous outcomes for the user. Smartphone

usage has been linked to addictive behaviours, as well as to feelings of pressure to be connected and active in the digital world. Furthermore, it has been reported that social networks usage negatively impacts individuals' self-esteem and potentiates feelings of anxiety and depression. Hence, with the emergence of digital disconnection behaviours, research has aimed to explore its validity, and analyse whether these experiences may be a solution to improve individuals' life quality in a digitised era. Studies have focused on various dimensions of one's life where well-being may be enhanced by disconnecting, such as physical and psychological well-being, productivity, and social interactions, among many others (Radtke et al., 2022). Unfortunately, studies on the outcomes of digital disconnection are scarce and their findings have been mixed, which does not confirm whether digital disconnection beneficially impacts well-being or not. Nonetheless, reviewing existing literature on the possible effects of digital disconnection, either more optimistic results or inconclusive findings, entails in itself relevant information on the subject matter.

3.2.1. The bright side

An individual's decision to step back from regular digital habits enables users to reflect on their digital practices from a different perspective and thus be critical from an outside point of view. Periods of abstinence have proven to raise awareness of digital behaviours, which may be reflected in beneficial outcomes for one's well-being (Baym et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2021). Through this outside lens, one is more capable of deciding whether some habits should change or remain the same. Additionally, Nguyen's (2021) study has demonstrated that social networks' disconnection eliminates the burden of being constantly confronted with new information and the social pressure to respond and be permanently connected. Consequently, individuals experienced feelings of relief, peace and quietness. Moreover, the seven-day digital detox experience conducted by Brown and Kuss (2020) revealed an increase in mental well-being because withdrawing from social networks protects users from social comparison and detrimental online environments.

The usage of digital devices and stress levels have been thoroughly researched, aiming to understand if problematic use of mobile devices leads to stress on users due to the overwhelming presence of these devices and the overload of information shared by them. Using two objective measures, one to assess smartphone usage and the other to analyse stress levels, Anrijs et al. (2018) aimed to comprehend if, during periods of digital detox, one's

levels of stress were impacted (and, if yes, how). The results indicated a reduction in stress while experiencing digital disconnection, proving that digital detox is a successful mechanism to help manage this negative outcome. Corroborating these findings, short periods of abstinence from social networking reduce perceived stress, especially among people who report excessive SNS use (Turel et al., 2018). These findings have helped confirm the importance of finding mechanisms and strategies to reduce screen time, especially on social networks.

The time spent in front of mobile devices' screens and social networks has been argued to consume an excessive portion of people's daily lives. Besides being time-consuming, users have difficulties focusing on specific tasks due to a reduced concentration time span. Hence, when users disconnect from digital media and SNS, a portion of their daily routine is liberated from being in front of a screen, leaving room for engaging in new interests and hobbies that enhance their life quality (Nguyen, 2021). Adopting less radical behaviours, such as complete withdrawal from social media or even certain mobile devices, has been demonstrated to be an effective solution to help manage time and be more productive. For instance, limiting the time spent on social media and intentionally taking breaks from these platforms allows users to eliminate distractions and mindfully focus on specific tasks of greater significance (Roffarello & De Russis, 2019; Nguyen, 2021). In a two-study research project, Hirsch and Sheldon (2013) reported groundbreaking results that reducing or withdrawing from digital media for temporary periods decreased procrastination, which increased life satisfaction. Such desirable outcomes play a fundamental role in individuals' lifestyles, helping to consciously focus on priority tasks and, hence, improve general life well-being.

Monge Roffarello and De Russis (2019) emphasize the importance of digital well-being apps for users, perceived as useful tools to monitor time spent on digital devices and help manage daily tasks. These apps provide summaries and statistics of screen time, block notifications and specific apps considered to be distracting, with the common purpose of reducing distractions. Despite not promoting new healthier digital habits in the long run, these apps are beneficial for specific use cases, with special regard for studying and working.

Concerning physical health, Nguyen (2021) argues that individuals who embrace digital disconnection behaviours have demonstrated positive outcomes on their physical well-

being, specifically regarding sleep quality. Unplugging from social networks has decreased time spent on digital devices, and for individuals who abdicate from sleeping to scrolling on mobile devices, the quality of rest is improved.

Research has shown evidence that digital disconnection experiences and even screen time reduction have potential benefits for individuals. Taking a step back from the fast-paced digital world has been demonstrated to relieve people from the pressure to be connected, and from feeling stressed and overwhelmed. Additionally, by spending less time in front of screens, one is confronted with more free time to dedicate to activities that may enhance their lifestyle. Thus, if digital detox experiences have resulted in the slightest improvements in the psychological and physical well-being of individuals, there is indeed an optimistic future ahead for this type of behaviour.

3.2.2. The drawbacks

The outcomes of digital disconnection experiences presented above portray promising effects on the individual's relationship with digital media and potential benefits on well-being. Nevertheless, research is not unanimous, and the outcomes of disconnecting are diverse. Some studies reveal negative consequences, though most conclude that digital disconnection either has no effects or the results are ambivalent, which raises doubts about the successfulness of digital detox.

Digital media usage and social networks have been associated with addictive behaviours. However, research has not provided a final answer on the subject. To consider digital media usage an addictive behaviour, studies have analysed the consequent effects of abstinence and withdrawal experiences from digital technology. This is the case of Eide et al. (2018), who focused on examining smartphone restrictions and their respective outcomes. The results demonstrated increased withdrawal symptoms for individuals restricted from using their smartphones, similar to symptoms experienced in other addictive behaviours. Additional withdrawal symptoms were shared by the participants of Stieger and Lewetz's (2018) study, focusing on social media abstinence effects. Analog to smartphone restriction, social media abstinence also revealed addiction symptoms, such as craving and boredom. Wilcockson et al.'s (2019) findings corroborated previous craving symptoms while experiencing abstinence from smartphones, despite refusing the categorisation of technology-related behaviours with

addiction. According to these authors, to be considered addiction behaviour, one must experience other withdrawal symptoms besides craving, such as mood modification and increased anxiety, which are not portrayed in the experience.

Interestingly, digital disconnection behaviours have a stronger influence on the social dimension of one's life. Being absent and unavailable from the online world has led to feeling pressure to return to social networks. Although being able to communicate through different platforms or even meeting face to face, participants from Stieger and Lewetz's (2018) research shared the urge to reconnect to their social media. The restraint to being permanently connected generates a sense of restlessness, which is interrelated with negative psychological well-being. The individual is left wondering about what is happening in the online world and whether someone is trying to reach out (Nguyen, 2021). An increase in fear of missing out was a prevalent symptom across research (Eide et al., 2018; Stieger & Lewetz, 2018; Vally & D'Souza, 2019).

Smartphones and social networks do not replace physical and social interactions. Nevertheless, these tools have opened another dimension of social relationships. The possibility of being in permanent contact with other individuals and the ease and efficiency of conducting mundane activities, such as accessing news, listening to music and using the GPS, have turned these technologies into an extension of oneself (Eide et al., 2018). Even though online interactions are not comparable to in-person socialisation, digital devices and platforms have become essential to keep contact and maintain relationships (Vally & D'Souza, 2019), which became even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, according to existing research, abstinence from social media and detox from smartphones and other digital devices have demonstrated inconsistent findings. Some outcomes have been detrimental to users' well-being, especially regarding the social aspects. Transversal to various digital disconnection studies, is the agreement that there is still a lot to be explored, and further research should be conducted to promote and recommend these types of behaviours (Radtke et al., 2022; Vally & D'Souza, 2019).

3.3. Digital well-being

The utopian versus dystopian discourses surrounding digital media and their role in human being life have led to a growing interest in digital disconnectivity as a potential response for individuals on how to manage the overwhelming presence and fast-paced rhythm of the digital world. Nevertheless, researchers have again fallen into a dichotomy over the benefits of adopting technology withdrawal behaviours. In an inherently digitised society where technology has become part of it, perhaps the solution does not rely on abstinence. In contrast, it may depend on a “healthy balance between connectivity and disconnectivity” (Vanden Abeele, 2021, p. 933).

As a result of this quest for a healthy equilibrium, the concept of digital well-being emerged. In fact, a brand-new industry of digital well-being interventions is expanding intending to help users to be more conscious and in control of their interactions with technologies. Curiously, even big technology companies, such as Apple and Google, have developed a series of tools to help people regulate and track their screen time, through app timers incorporated in the operating systems, as well as reports and charts of the time spent on the digital devices (Monge Roffarello & De Russis, 2019; Vanden Abeele, 2021). Google is an interesting example of a self-proclaimed advocate of digital well-being – “Find a balance with technology that feel right for you. (...) We’re committed to giving everyone the tools they need to develop their own sense of digital wellbeing” (Google Digital Wellbeing, n.d.). The possibility of customising notifications, setting daily limits and timers for specific apps, and selecting bed time or do not disturb mode are a few examples of tools provided by Google. However, the variety of strategies to gain control over technology does not end with the big tech companies tools. Digital detox programmes, self-help literature, and various mobile apps (Forest, Freedom, Serene, and others) continue the list of this growing industry whose objective is to foster healthier digital media habits.

Vanden Abeele (2021) suggests the following definition of digital well-being, based on four fundamental considerations – avoiding medicalisation, acknowledging hedonic and eudemonic experiences, acknowledging temporal variability and person-specificity, and acknowledging ambivalence:

“Digital wellbeing is a subjective individual experience of optimal balance between the benefits and drawbacks obtained from mobile connectivity. This experiential state is comprised of affective and cognitive appraisals of the integration of digital connectivity into ordinary life. People achieve digital well-being by experiencing maximal controlled pleasure and functional support, with minimal loss of control and functional impairment.” (Vanden Abeele, 2021, p. 938)

To fully comprehend digital well-being, a series of aspects and perspectives should be highlighted regarding this emerging concept. Hence, the definition suggested above will be deconstructed into fundamental themes that one should bear in mind when confronted with this idea.

First of all, digital well-being is immediately associated with a “subjective individual experience” (Vanden Abeele, 2021). This subjective approach argues that the equilibrium between being ‘on’ or ‘off’ from the digital world results only from self-evaluation and personal introspection of what an individual perceives as a healthy interaction with digital media. Depending on multiple factors and conditions of one’s environment, the same relationship with digital devices may be beneficial for the well-being of an individual and detrimental to another (Büchi, 2021; Vanden Abeele, 2021).

Once again, from a subjective viewpoint, one must be in a position of control over digital technologies to achieve a level of digital well-being. What designates loss of control relies mostly on the individual self-perception of their autonomy over something, which in turn is influenced by a series of personal values and opinions. Cecchinato et al. (2019) frame this level of well-being as self-determination. The realisation of a lack of self-control and regulation over digital media will result in an urge to find solutions to resolve the problem, which in practical terms, entails individual tactics and strategies that may not be effective for everyone.

Despite the emphasis on the personal approach to digital well-being, the social context plays a strong role in the relationship with digital media. As it has been clarified throughout this project, digital media are omnipresent in today’s society. Depending on life circumstances, there are numerous environments in one’s life that require one to interact with digital media, either for work, for social interactions, or for personal motives among many other reasons. To drastically disconnect from digital media, or even moderately so, may result in alienation

from society, which does not correspond to a healthy and optimal equilibrium (Cecchinato et al., 2019).

The ultimate goal of research on digital media and society is to enhance individuals' relationship with technology to its optimal level, taking into consideration the well-being of people while helping users to make the most out of what these digital devices have to offer. Nevertheless, researchers still face a pivotal question on how to accomplish this optimal relationship and guide individuals to have autonomy over digital technologies. A practical response on how to best manage the role of digital media in society remains to be answered (Büchi, 2021; Cecchinato et al., 2019), and has been proven to be a challenging task.

The interaction between users and digital media is conditioned by the personal environment of the individual, as well as by various external factors, such as the social, cultural and economic environment. This relationship is most likely not the same between distinct individuals, which prevents research from finding a model that is suitable for everyone. Therefore, Büchi (2021) advises researchers to not be discouraged by “it depends” (p. 5) findings. Besides, Gui et al. (2017) share a surprising point of view, which goes beyond the assumption that digital well-being results from self-control. The authors argue that individuals should develop digital skills and competencies that enable them to cope with an always-on society, that is constantly confronted with new information and distractions that divert individuals' attention from their priorities and focus. Hence, the researchers identify this behaviour as a set of specific digital skills, entitled “21st century skills” (Gui et al., 2017, p. 157). The authors suggest the following definition,

“Digital well-being skills can be identified as the skills to achieve strategic attention focusing in daily life and to avoid the stress caused by the overwhelming flow of information, minimizing wastes of time and attention on irrelevant activities in the subject's perception” (p. 163)

Gui et al. (2017) highlight the importance of helping society manage the overwhelming digital world, by educating individuals on actual digital media practices and competencies. However, this skill is not only controlled by the individual dimension, the social environment also plays an important role. Regarding the individual dimension, the authors characterize this skill as both attentional and strategic or meta-cognitive. Attentional skills consist of one's cognitive ability to focus on a specific task, without being distracted.

Strategic skills entail the idea of learning how to prevent distractions, for example by using apps and timers, or by blocking one's notifications to help concentrate and eliminate distractions. Nevertheless, one's relationship with digital media is not only confined to the individual dimension. The authors enumerate three aspects of the social environment that influence one's ability to cope with the digital world. First, nowadays, online environments are designed to be the most appealing and attractive to their users. Besides, individuals are strongly influenced by social values and needs, feeling the need to be included and part of society. Lastly, the notion of well-being is subjective to individuals' social frame, traditions and values. Hence, when referring to digital well-being skills, it is fundamental to consider the social environment (Gui et al., 2017). In conclusion, digital well-being must be approached as a "double-layered issue" (Gui et al., 2017, p. 165), that entails an individual dimension, within a social environment.

Taking into consideration the research conducted on digital disconnection and more recently on the concept of digital well-being, the present dissertation aims to thoroughly explore digital disconnection experiences, starting from the decision process to engage in this behaviours, the strategies implemented, and, finally, the outcomes and impact on one's well-being. The ultimate goal is to better comprehend the disconnection behaviour and, hence, provide insightful information to help achieve an optimal equilibrium between the digital and physical world.

PART II – EMPIRICAL STUDY

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

Before diving deeper into the dissertation project, it is important to briefly introduce the Dis/Connect research project. The project is supported by EEA Grants, and Iceland Liechtenstein Norway Grants, and consists of a bilateral research between the University of Bergen and Oslo, and CRC-W (Católica Research Centre on Psychological, Social and Family Wellbeing) of Católica University. The project's main purpose is to conduct cross-national comparative research on disconnection experiences from digital technologies between Norway and Portugal. In February 2021, the author had the opportunity to participate as a research assistant in one of the studies, that focused on young individuals' digital practices and disconnection experiences in relation to their social background.

With this unique opportunity, the author was given the opportunity to conduct research on a specific subject of interest for her Masters' dissertation in articulation with the activities of the Dis/Connect project. Within this field of work, the author was interested in analyzing the potential impact of adolescents' digital disconnection experiences on their state of well-being. This interest arose from two main reasons. First of all, digital disconnection, detox, and withdrawal are just a few examples of this emerging phenomenon that society seeks as a response to the overwhelming digital world. Secondly, the youth of today is the generation of tomorrow and digital technologies play an enormous role in their lives. If these devices are to some extent harmful to adolescents, investigating strategies that might prevent this detrimental relationship is extremely relevant. Therefore, the scarcity of research on the role of digital disconnection behaviours on young Portuguese people's wellness leads to the present dissertation's goal of fostering future research and curiosity in this gap field.

4.1. Research questions

The possibility of comprehending more deeply the outcomes of digital disconnection behaviours and if these indeed impact individuals' lifestyle and well-being, especially adolescents, resulted in the following main research question, that guides the present dissertation – “How do digital disconnection experiences impact Portuguese young people's well-being?”.

A series of secondary research questions were defined to provide an accurate and authentic response to the dissertation's main question. Following a logical and gradual approach, the first phase focuses on the factors that influence young Portuguese people to disconnect from digital devices. Afterwards, the goal is to study the practical approaches and strategies implemented by adolescents to actually disconnect. Finally, to complete the process of research, the possible impact of digital disconnection on young people's well-being will be analyzed.

To summarize and clarify the goals of this research, the secondary research questions are:

- 1) What motivates Portuguese adolescents to disconnect from digital technologies?
- 2) How does this process of digital disconnection occur? What are their approaches and strategies?
- 3) How does digital disconnection impact their well-being?

4.2. Research design

This dissertation focuses on studying an emerging trend, still with much to uncover. Research on youth's relationship with digital devices is to some extent divided into different standpoints. Hence, regarding digital disconnection and detox, research is even further away from reaching a consensus. Taking into account the limited insights on this matter, an exploratory approach was adopted with the purpose of seeking new perspectives and findings (Saunders et al., 2007). Furthermore, the scientific positioning adopted is interpretivism, which argues that reality is not objective, instead, social, economic and cultural factors shape human experiences. Hence, in addition to existing literature, the goal is to "enter the social world of our research subjects and understand their world from their point of view" (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 107). This paradigm observes particular cases and analysis personal experiences with the final goal of reaching a better understanding of society.

In practical terms, a qualitative methodology will guide the research project, with a straightforward and simple research design, starting with one phase of the data collection process and followed by the data analysis. The data collection technique selected for this dissertation is in-depth semi-structured interviews, with the integration of a questionnaire to

obtain complementary data. Subsequently, a thematic analysis will be conducted as the data analysis technique. With this approach, data will be collected directly from individuals who have opinions and experiences in the field of study.

4.2.1. In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are one of the most common approaches to collecting data when using a qualitative approach due to their ability to gain insight into individuals' perspectives and experiences on the subject under research (Busetto et al., 2020). This technique provides the opportunity to engage in an informal conversation with the participants, with the intent of exploring a specific subject. The researcher has the possibility of interacting directly with the person being interviewed, which allows for a relationship of confidence and security to be built. Consequently, the interviewer will feel more comfortable, leading to more involvement and interest in sharing during the interview (Heyink & Tymstra, 1993). Considering that the target group of this dissertation is adolescents between 15 to 18 years old, this qualitative method is therefore a very suited technique.

A semi-structured interview is based on an open-ended question script, incorporating the main and most relevant topics to guide the discussion (Busetto et al., 2020). This relatively loose format is characterised as accessible and flexible, allowing the interviewee "to provide responses in their own term and in the way they think and use language" (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 246). This method allows a better understanding of the interviewee's opinion and insights, giving room for different and new themes to emerge.

4.2.2. Questionnaire

At the end of each interview, the respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire titled "Well-being levels during digital disconnection periods", following the *Mental Health Continuum – Short Form* questionnaire model (Keyes, 2002, 2005; Keyes et al., 2008). This survey (presented in Appendix 3) will serve as complementary data for each adolescents' research profile regarding sociodemographic data.

Despite the immediate association of quantitative methods with surveys, it is important to clarify why this study is still used within a qualitative approach. First of all, the primary goal of this dissertation is to explore the impact of digital disconnection experiences on

Portuguese adolescents' well-being. The priority relies on finding participants who are willing to share their experiences openly and deeply, gathering as much data on this phenomenon as possible. This is the exact opposite of quantitative research, where the objective is to collect as many participants as possible. As mentioned previously, this dissertation follows an exploratory approach, where words are more important than numbers (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saunders et al., 2007). Using a survey was a strategy to facilitate the use of the *Mental Health Continuum – Short Form* questionnaire model (Keyes, 2002, 2005; Keyes et al., 2008), which would be difficult to tackle in conversation mode, and also to collect relevant data without making the interview too long and tiresome.

4.3. Sample and sampling

The primary objective of this dissertation is to investigate the impact of digital disconnection experiences on teenagers' well-being. Hence, this research's selected sample group comprises young Portuguese individuals between 15 and 18 years old. Within this limited yet broad category of people, the aimed sample should be able to provide insights into digital disconnections experiences. To respond to these criteria, it is implied that these teenagers have had to actively interact with digital devices and, at some point in their lives, engage in some sort of disconnection behaviours. The age group, nationality and digital technologies (dis)engagement are considered the eliminatory criteria for selecting a relevant sample. However, within this limited group, it was also important to gather a balanced and diverse set of respondents regarding age within the considered range, gender (half female, half male respondents), and socioeconomic status (SES). Regarding the adolescents' socioeconomic status, the participants were never directly asked about their household income, in order not to be intrusive, plus some participants may not hold this information leaving the sample data incomplete. Therefore, the SES analysis was not objective and was assessed based on a series of factors, such as the number of household members, parents' jobs, the type of school attended, and others. Overall, the final goal was to gather a total of 20 participants who met these requirements in order to build a purposive sample. Information about the final sample is presented in the table below.

Sample		Values	Total
Gender	Female	10	20
	Male	10	
Age	15	2	20
	16	7	
	17	5	
	18	6	
Socioeconomic Status	Low	6	20
	Medium	7	
	High	7	

Table 3: Information about the final sample.

As described above, the method best suited for this research was purposive sampling. This strategy allows gathering a sample under pre-established criteria, which in this case consist of age, nationality, and digital disconnection experiences (as eliminatory criteria), and for diversification requirements, age variety, gender, and SES. Finding individuals in such specific scenarios is impossible to do randomly. In fact, in a qualitative study, it is quite common to use this strategy since the priority is to find information-rich participants capable of providing an insightful and in-depth view of the research topic, instead of a considerable number of participants who do not have experience on the matter (Patton, 2002; Campbell et al., 2020)

In order to identify the relevant participants for this dissertation, the sampling procedures began by looking for volunteers interested in sharing their digital disconnection experiences and within the criteria intended through existing contacts of the researchers and the University's traditional and digital channels, as well as relevant partners. From this initial approach, the first round of individuals was selected, each from various groups and activities, such as the Scouts, a youth sports club, a non-profit organisation for underprivileged youth, and, lastly, an advocate contact for healthier digital media habits.

Finding adolescents who have somehow experienced periods of disconnection from digital devices and social networks is not as easy as finding daily users of these devices. In other

words, collecting a sample with knowledge and experience of the phenomenon of interest was particularly challenging (Etikan et al., 2016). Therefore, the answer relies on using the initially recruited participants as the “insiders to locate people who suit the study” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). As the explanation reveals by itself, this method is called chain referral sampling, or snowball sampling and was used to find more teenagers who fit the profile of the sample study. Hence, the second sampling approach consisted of referrals of the first participants that were carefully selected.

Once all the contact resources were depleted and bearing in mind the initial requirements, a social media post/flyer was shared to reach a more specific target, according to the gaps missing from the intended sample group.

The final sample is presented in table 4, with the details regarding each participant.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Perceived SES	Parents' occupation
Andreia	16	F	Medium	Entrepreneur
António	18	M	High	Consultant Consultant
Bárbara	17	F	Medium	Commercial assistant Electrical Engineer
Clara	16	F	Medium	Nurse Electrician
Davi	18	M	Medium	Banker Engineer
Filipa	17	F	Low	Housekeeper Retired
Inês	17	F	High	University Professor
Isabel	15	F	Medium	Psychologist Mechanical Engineer
Januário	16	M	Low	Operational assistant Mechanic
Madalena	18	F	High	Pharmacist University Professor
Manel	17	M	Low	Teacher Police officer
Margarida	15	F	High	Pharmacist Psychologist

Matilde	16	F	Low	Teacher Unemployed
Pedro	16	M	High	Teacher Computer engineer
Raul	16	M	Low	Elderly caregiver
Rogério	18	M	High	Banker Manager
Sherek	18	M	Medium	Teacher Banker
Sofia	16	F	Low	Unemployed Unemployed
Tintin	17	M	High	Nurse Entrepreneur
Tomás	18	M	Medium	Interpreter

Table 4: Participants' profile information.

4.4. Data collection

The data collection process was conducted in the Spring and Summer of 2021 and consisted of in-depth interviews that lasted between 40 minutes to one hour. Despite following a semi-structured script, the interview length depended on the participants' engagement and interest in sharing their experiences and opinions. Initially, the interviews were planned to take place physically, however, due to Covid-19 restrictions, these were carried out digitally through video conference platforms.

Before proceeding with the interviews, participants were carefully informed about the research project's purpose and what to expect from the interviews. An informed consent form was given to the potential interviewees (Appendix A), clarifying the study and requesting authorisation to be recorded for further analysis. All the data was properly collected, keeping every individual's information confidential (more details in subchapter 4.6. Ethical Considerations). Once the consent form was duly signed, the interviews were scheduled.

The interview script is semi-structured, which, as previously clarified, consists of a script with the main topics to be covered to help guide the interview. The questions were designed to be open-ended to allow participants to freely share their points of view (Busetto et al., 2020). The interview script addressed three main topics – personal context and SES

background; digital media practices and perceptions; and digital disconnection experiences. The first section focused on the participant's background and personal information. The goal was to understand the surroundings of the adolescent, and their personal and social context, such as their age, field of study, family situation and social environment. With this first approach, the participant would feel more comfortable proceeding with the remaining questions. The objective of the second section was to examine the individual's relationship with digital media and their opinions on digital technologies and social media. The interviewee was asked to explain a regular day in their lives, what digital media they use, and their overall view of digital devices and social networks. After grasping a general scenario of this relationship, the next and final part of the interview script dives into the potential digital disconnection experiences. The interview followed different paths in this last section according to participants' responses. The first question was, "Did you ever consider reducing time spent on digital devices or even disconnecting from them? This may include your smartphone, social media, or other devices you mentioned earlier". If the respondent answers 'yes', the following questions aim to explore the practical strategies implemented by the young individuals to disconnect and the outcomes of this experience. Nevertheless, the last segment of the script is applicable either way, independently of answering 'yes' or 'no' to the previous question. Table 5 provides a brief overview of how the script was built, according to the existing literature on the subject.

Research Question	Interview Questions	Theoretical References
<p>RQ1: What motivates Portuguese teenagers to disconnect from digital devices?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What do you see as positive and negative about social media? – What do you think about your use of social media? – Have you ever thought about turning off or reducing your use of digital media? – Have you ever been able to turn off or reduce your use of digital media? If so, why did you want to do so? – Do you feel that being connected brings you closer or further away from the people around you? – Do you know anyone who has disconnected from digital media, or at least tried to? – Do you see this topic of disconnecting from digital media talked about on social media, for example, by influencers? 	<p>(Wyatt et al., 2002) (Eynon & Geniets, 2012) (Baumer et al., 2013) (Neves et al., 2015) (Magee et al., 2017) (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020) (Nguyen et al., 2021) (Aharoni et al., 2021)</p>
<p>RQ2: How does this process of digital disconnection occur?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What specific strategy have you used, or are you using, to disconnect/reduce your use of digital media? – Which digital platforms did you disconnect from? – What time limits have you set for yourself when using digital media? – Can you keep to the limits you set for yourself? – How long did this period last, or when did it start? 	<p>(Rogers, 1983) (Wyatt et al., 2002) (Wyatt, 2003) (Satchell & Dourish, 2009) (Neves et al., 2015) (Aranda & Baig, 2018) (Augustin et al., 2020)</p>

<p>RQ3: How does digital disconnection impact their well-being?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What advantages or benefits do you recognize in your experiences of going digital? – And what difficulties or barriers did you face? – What results and effects did this disconnection have afterwards? 	<p>(Keyes, 1998) (Keyes, 2005) (Keyes et al., 2008) (Matos et al., 2010) (Sewall et al., 2020) (Büchi, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2001)</p>
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Table 5: Methodological approach of interviews’ script.

Before finalising the conversation with the participants, each one was asked to participate in a survey on well-being levels during periods of digital disconnection, based on Keyes (2005)’s measurement scale of well-being, entitled the *Mental Health Continuum – Short Form*, presented in Table 6. For each of the 14 questions, the participant was given the following response options: *never, once or twice, about once or twice a week, two or three times a week, almost every day, and every day*. Nevertheless, further details and explanations are provided in the literature review *3.1.1. Measuring well-being*. Due to the pandemic restrictions, the form could not be filled out physically while in the interview. Hence it was presented via Google Forms. This questionnaire was collected as complementary to the data collected in the discussion. To conclude this process, the respondents were asked if they had any further information they would like to share or any questions to clarify. The final interview script used as the data collection technique is presented in Appendix B for further comprehension.

Well-being levels during periods of digital disconnection		
Item	Question	Type of well-being
1	“happy”	Emotional well-being
2	“interested in life”	
3	“satisfied”	
4	“that you had something important to contribute to society”	Social well-being

5	“that you belonged to a community (like a social group, your school, your school, or your neighborhood)”		
6	“that our society is becoming a better place for people like you”		
7	“that people are essentially good”		
8	“that the way our society works makes sense to you”		
9	“that you liked most parts of your society”		Psychological well-being
10	“good at managing the responsibilities of your daily life”		
11	“that you had warm and trusting relationships with people your age”		
12	“that you had experiences that allowed you to grow and become a better person”		
13	"confident to think and express your own opinions and ideas"		
14	“that your life has meaning or direction”		

Table 6: MHC-SF adapted to the dissertation research project (Keyes, 2002, 2005; Keyes et al., 2008).

4.5. Data analysis

The 20 interviews were conducted, and the corresponding audio records were collected, which concludes the data collection process. Consequently, the data analysis phase was ready to initiate. In this stage, the objective relies on “moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2009, p. 183). The data analysis process followed a thematic analysis technique through the step below, some suggested by Creswell (2009) and Braun and Clarke (2006).

First and foremost, after gathering all the data, this must be organised and prepared. Hence, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed to allow the researcher to reflect on the participants’ data properly and to prepare the data for the subsequent analysis. Once the interviews are put into words, a preliminary reading of the interviews takes place, which gives a general sense of the information collected. This phase is fundamental when analysing

data because the researcher gets familiarised with the content of the interviews and with the participants' behaviours. Summaries of each interview were produced to create profiles of the interviewees and associate raw themes with each participant.

Once the data was organized and the researcher has an overall view of the interviews, the next phase focused on generating initial codes. This process consists of labelling and tagging important topics into groups, turning raw data into sortable data (Busetto et al., 2020). Additionally, a codebook was constructed, based on the research questions that guide the study – motivations to digitally disconnect (RQ1), disconnection processes (RQ2), and disconnection outcomes (RQ3). Table 7 displays the thematic categories and subcategories used in the thematic analysis. Moreover, to help with the coding processing, the transcriptions were uploaded into a qualitative computer software program named MaxQDA.

After the first round of coding, a second reading of the data collected was performed. In this second approach, new themes and subthemes were identified, adding new relevant topics that were not initially included in the codebook (Table 7). Despite following certain research questions, the subject under analysis is emergent and there are multiple fields that are still being explored, hence this additional reading enabled the research to be more substantial. The second round of coding was then conducted.

1st round of coding		2nd round of coding
Categories	Subcategories	Subcategories
Motivations to disconnect	Negative perceptions about digital media	Excessive use
	Parents' pressure	Addiction
	Influencers' pressure	Anxiety
	Peer pressure	Dissatisfaction with self-image and/or lifestyle
	Media pressure	
Disconnection process	Procedures	Radical
	Difficulties	Progressive
		Self-regulatory
Disconnection outcomes	Positive for well-being	
	Negative for well-being	

Table 7: Thematic coding categories and subcategories used.

Regarding the questionnaire filled out by the participants at the end of each interview, the results were calculated according to the original proceedings of the *Mental Health Continuum – Short Form* (Keyes, 2005, 2006; Keyes et al., 2008). According to Keyes, the adolescent can be categorized into three possible states of well-being, depending on the answer and the final score of the questionnaire. It is important to recall that for each of the questions, there are six response options, ranging from 0, which corresponds to the answer *never*, to 5, which corresponds to *always*.

The adolescent is considered in a *flourishing* state if the individual responds:

- *almost every day* (4) or *every day* (5) in at least one of the emotional well-being items (1, 2, 3);
- and *almost every day* (4) or *every day* (5) in at least six items out of the remaining 11, that relate to social and psychological well-being.

To be considered in a languishing state, the adolescent must have answered:

- *never* (0) or *once or twice* (1) in at least one of the emotional well-being items (1, 2, 3);
- and *never* (0) or *once or twice* (1) in at least six of the 11 items of social and psychological well-being.

Those whose score does not match the requirements to be qualified neither flourishing nor languishing, are diagnosed as moderately mentally healthy. The final results of the questionnaire were used as complementary data to each participant's information, with the final goal of having richer and more substantial data.

4.6. Ethical considerations

During the design study, several ethical questions may arise. Therefore, it is essential to anticipate and consider ethical issues when conducting any kind of research (Creswell, 2009). The sample in this dissertation comprises young individuals aged 15 to 18 years old, which, to be more precise, includes individuals under the age of full legal responsibility. Thus, measures have been taken to guarantee that ethical considerations were respected to protect the research project and, above all, the participants.

Before the interview, each individual was given an informed consent form (Appendix 1), where the research project was thoroughly explained to clarify the purpose and intent of the interviews. Moreover, it was explained how the procedure of interviews would occur and what it would imply, for example, the estimated length of the interview and the need to record the conversation. The form also acknowledges that participants' rights and personal data would be protected and confidential, asking each individual to provide a pseudonym that was used when analysing the data collected. Participation in the study is voluntary and should only be done willingly, emphasising the possibility of leaving the project whenever needed. To finalise, the consent form provided the contact of a member of the research project was given, in case of further questions.

In the end, the participants were asked to sign the form if they agreed to participate in the research project, and if they were under 18 years old, the adolescent must submit the document signed by their legal guardians. The interviews would only take place in the presence of the informed consent form by their legal guardian.

When the first interaction occurred between the researcher and the participant, and before proceeding with the actual interview, the researcher aimed to create a safe space for the interviewee. It was emphasised that the interview should be seen as an open conversation, and there were no wrong answers. The objective was for the participant to be able to share their personal experience with no constraints and that each individual's story was important for the study. Furthermore, it was reinforced that the participant was free to withdraw at any time if not comfortable with any questions.

CHAPTER 5: Findings and Discussion

The interviews have been conducted and carefully organised, concluding the data collection process. The present chapter will proceed with the analysis of the interviews and corresponding data, following a logical sequence guided by the research questions that have directed the dissertation. The most relevant findings will be presented and discussed in correlation with existing literature on the subject, in order to draw the main conclusions.

The study's main purpose is to assess if digital disconnection experiences impact individuals' well-being. Hence, the first approach is to understand the 'why' behind digital disconnection and the motivations that propel the decision to adopt disconnecting behaviours. After assembling the most significant motivations, the 'how' phase is set in motion. The goal here is to analyse the strategies applied by individuals to be digitally disconnected. Lastly, one aims to discover the outcomes of these experiences, whether positive or negative. By answering these three research questions, the author seeks to gather important and relevant data that respond to the primary goal of this dissertation.

5.1. Analyzing Research Question 1 – Motivations to disconnect

Research Question 1: What motivates Portuguese adolescents to disconnect from digital technologies?

Of the adolescents who have participated in the research project, not all of them have experienced digital disconnection experiences deliberately and consciously, data that will be further explored in the next subchapter. Therefore, when analysing the first research question, the answer relied mainly on the interviews provided by half of the sample (10 participants), which corresponds to those who consciously and deliberately adopted these behaviours, or at least have reflected on the subject since they shed more light on the motivations behind the decision to disconnect.

The reasons that motivated and drove the participants to disconnect from digital media were organised into the suggested categories based on the common themes shared in the interviews.

a. Better use of time

One of the most prevailing reasons behind participants' decision to change their digital media habits regards the perception of wasting time, which was described by 8 out of 20 participants. Throughout the adolescents' discourses, the presence of social media in their digital practices was the most common and the one that consumed most of their time. All participants reported having social media accounts sometime in their lives, with the exception of Isabel (15 years old) who was not allowed to due to her parents restrictions. It has become a substantial part of adolescents' daily routine to be in front of a screen, scrolling through social networks' feeds, and watching publications of people who are usually no more than acquaintances at the very least. Participants shared this self-awareness of how poorly they managed their day and how detrimental this behaviour was for them. As clearly stated by António (18 years old), "I realised I was wasting my time", and by Madalena (18 years old), "I was feeling really bad. Instagram was controlling my life. My time was not being well-used".

Some perceive digital devices as a refuge when feeling bored. It may be inevitable to relate these moments of boredom with periods where the adolescents had nothing to occupy their time with. Thus, digital devices and social media come as an entertainment solution. Interestingly, this was not the most usual scenario. Mobile phones, computers, and social networks were an escape to avoid doing important daily tasks that required time, focus and attention from young individuals. These situations are evident in some participants' discourses, such as "But it was just a source of entertainment that I used, that I turned to when I was genuinely bored or had things to do that I didn't like, like studying." (Madalena, 18 years old). In addition, Davi (18 years old) also describes moments of feeling guilty for neglecting his obligations as a student, "While when I use a lot of time, I will feel a little guilty for having spent a lot of time that I could have spent on other things. And also for not having studied as much as I should."

Nevertheless, digital media are not only a hideaway from important responsibilities or a means to spend time. Participants realised they could use time more wisely for themselves and their personal interests. As Margarida (15 years old) says, "the wasted time that we could be doing other things.". These "other things" may encompass activities that are beneficial

for themselves, for instance, quality time with loved ones, hobbies and even just going outside.

“I always realised that I spent a lot of time on Instagram and spent precious time that I ended up not using for other important things, like being with my friends, or with my family, or doing what I really liked” (Madalena, 18 years old)

“As I said, they end up taking time out of my day. So it was also to have more time available to do other things, I don't know. It's to have more time and also because I know it has an impact on health, on people's health. Spend a lot of time sitting down and stuff. If I did (use less digital media), I'd leave the house more, I don't know.” (Matilde, 16 years old)

“I felt that I spent so much time there that I ended up not enjoying my time doing other things and, instead of focusing on my life, being happy living my life and doing things outside of the Internet, it was always there and so that was it.” (Filipa, 17 years old)

Despite being aware of how time-consuming digital media are and being dissatisfied with how they manage their daily routine, participants struggled to keep track of the time spent connected. Digital media is seen as an absorbing environment, especially regarding social networks, where one loses the sense of time – “I think it's been 15 minutes, but I've been there looking at things for almost an hour. It is also more difficult to control time. I do not know.” (Matilde, 16 years old).

“Applications are made a little bit for that, to hold us. And so I ended up losing myself and was in a loop for a while. When I realised I'd already spent maybe half an hour on Instagram and it had been a bit of a waste.” (Rogério, 18 years old)

“No, because it goes by in an instant when I'm at the computer. I look at the clock and it's six o'clock, I'm on the computer. However, it feels like 5 minutes, after what it's not 5 minutes later, my mom “F*****”, come to dinner”, and it's 8 o'clock, wow.” (Isabel, 15 years old)

When reflecting on their digital habits and routines, the young participants realised that digital media and social networks consume an excessive portion of their day. They recognised the detrimental effects of the overwhelming digital environment on their lifestyle and how they could use that time more productively and efficiently. This is the case of Madalena (18 years old), who understood the importance of managing her time and prioritising her educational responsibilities, “so I'm in my freshman year of college, and in January, I had my first exam season. And I started skating on some chairs there, and I thought, maybe it's good, maybe we better organise our time here, because otherwise, this is

going to be a lot of crap.”. Nonetheless, adopting changes in their behaviours was not as straightforward as they wished due to their dependency and lack of control over these technologies, mainly regarding social networks. The next motivation describes this self-perception of not being in control, which some associate with addictive behaviours.

b. Self-perception of being *addicted*

In some cases, the perception of excessive use of digital media and the uncontrollable urge to be connected to the online world has led participants to categorise themselves as addicts. Their relationship with digital technologies was not considered healthy, in fact, it was seen as the exact opposite. The participants described relationships where they depended on these devices and shared an insatiable craving to consume more social media content. As explained by Filipa (17 years old),

“I have been trying to do that (turning off or reducing the use of digital media) and trying to find a way to put in quotes “let go of the addiction a little bit”, which is not quite an addiction, but it still counts – social networks.”

In a segment of the interview, the participants were asked to reflect on social media. They were invited to share their opinion on social networks in general, as well as how they perceived their relationship with these platforms. Many young individuals described social media as harmful environments that negatively impact their lives. The following examples illustrate some of the participants’ reflections on this matter:

“Negative points: they (social media) consume a lot of time, sometimes we don't even realise the amount of time they consume, and even if we don't want to, I think we are all a little dependent on social networks, even though trying our best not to be. Or not realising that we are. I think those are the two downsides: time consumption and addiction.” (Davi, 18 years old)

“Interviewer: (...) If I talk to you about social media, what are the first three words that come to your mind.

Tintin: Addictive, which also makes me a little miserable psychologically. Man, it was really bad. I was, I was really bad just being on Instagram and then I felt a little obliged to continue the fitness account, to be researching more and giving more. I was already in a state of mind, in a place, like, really, really bad.” (Tintin, 17 years old)

Of the various social networking sites (SNS) mentioned by the participants, Instagram stood out as the most used app. Since it was considered the most engaging and appealing, it was

the most addictive platform. António (18 years old) shares his own experience with the app, “Instagram, I was forced to uninstall it, because it was an addiction, I mean, I think it was a very, very big addiction. I spent one and a half hours a day, and I think one and a half hours a day is absurd.”. Besides, the adolescents presented common knowledge about the algorithms of social networks. They were aware of how their feeds were built to be the most appealing and personalised for each user – “The fact that they are addictive and created to...with an algorithm to captivate us.” (Clara, 16 years old). This algorithm is the reason why users struggle to be in control of the time they spend scrolling. As Sofia (16 years old) says, “Instagram’s algorithm is so well designed that it showed me exactly what I like to see, so I stayed online for very long periods without even realising time was going by”. Plus, Tintin (17 years old) also describes the following experience:

“Every time I was on Instagram it was to feel bad about myself, but as it was so addictive, that is, the content was so close, so for me. In other words, the Instagram algorithm was so well programmed that the content they put in front of me was really me, it was really of my tastes, my interests and, therefore, I could stay there for a long time and not even I noticed as time went by.”

For 7 out of 20 participants, perceiving themselves as addicts was a defining moment in which they realised that they had to change their relationship with digital media. For instance, Davi (18 years old) describes how this realisation motivated him to step back and shift his lifestyle, “Before, time went by so fast. I was an addict who always wanted more, one more video, one more post, more and more. Now I don’t. Now that time goes by more slowly, I can observe what is around me and appreciate life”.

c. Social pressure (anxiety, FOMO, social comparison)

Adolescents’ relationship with digital technologies is strongly influenced by the social aspect inherent to the fast pace and overly connected world. The young individuals who participated in the present study are no exception. Throughout the interviews, they shared numerous experiences where their presence and interaction with digital platforms were challenging and, to some extent, damaging to themselves.

First and foremost, there was a general sense of feeling pressured to be connected, be active and create content online. Posting content on social media relied mainly on the pressure to be seen, to be relevant, and to keep up with what others were doing. However, those who

post do it sometimes because of peer pressure or validation. Sometimes the posts are a reflection of one's anxiety to avoid not being left out. This is showcased in Madalena's (18 years old) personal experiences with social media,

“In other words, I remember perfectly that I said to myself, “Ah, I'm not going to publish photographs, I can't publish photographs alone”. But then, that is, all the photographs I published were always with friends next to me, who said to me “Go, go! Post it, post it! You're cute! Go, post it! You will have a lot of likes!”

However, social pressure does not end when one posts content online. Participants sought to be approved by others, and the approval was seen through likes and comments – “Before, I was always seeking the attention and approval of others on Instagram. And I felt really bad when I didn't get it”. (Inês, 17 years old). This urge for validation could be very stressful and a source of anxiety. The outcomes of being active on the Internet could have harmful results on one's self-esteem, as said by Isabel (15 years old), “having few likes, or not, can affect people's minds, lower self-esteem”.

Being constantly connected and constantly consuming new information is overwhelming for any human being, even more for adolescents. Nowadays, as demonstrated by the interviews, young individuals live part of their lives through a screen. They stay connected with the world through digital devices and social networks. The never-ending publications become a source of anxiety and a strong contributor to social comparison. For example, Filipa (17 years old) describes this misconception of seeing social media as the actual reality of the mundane world – “(...) we start to see those people and their lives, because people there only put the good side, and we compare our lives a lot. ‘Why am I not like this? Why don't I have these things?’. And then we end up seeing a reality that maybe isn't even that linear, and we think our life should be like that too.”. Additionally, Madalena (18 years old) shares how these toxic environments can be extremely detrimental for people – “That was the part of the comparison that really affected me a lot, because I felt like I wasn't doing anything right with my life, I felt useless because I wasn't doing things as good as other people...”

From a psychological point of view, participants described feeling sad and downcast when confronted with other friends' posts engaging in activities they were not invited to. They end up feeling neglected and undermined. The following interview segments shared by Tintin (17 years old) and Matilde (16 years old) exemplify these experiences.

“On a mental level, it was almost torturous being on Instagram and then comparing myself to other people. Even if I was unconscious, but “Oh, this guy went out”, man, I didn't go out man, maybe I wasn't invited or they didn't even want me there. And I compared myself to others and I was always putting myself down.”. (Tintin, 17 years old)

“Mentally, being on Instagram was torture because I was always comparing myself to others. If some of my friends went out and seemed to be having fun, I would feel bad because I was not having fun, or I would feel sad because I was not invited. I compared myself to others, and I always felt worse.” (Matilde, 16 years old)

In these examples, another relevant factor should be highlighted regarding social media influencers and celebrities. These personalities have enormous platforms where they portray glamorous and desirable lifestyles through social media. Hence, some participants expressed feeling anxious and miserable because they felt incapable of upholding these superficial yet embellished lifestyles. In the words of Matilde (16 years old), “I would see influencers leading dream lives, and I was just at school. And then I felt miserable all day”, and in the words of Tintin (17 years old), “(...) I wasn't one to follow very famous people, but when I did research on someone, some movie star, or someone very important and I saw that they were on vacation or that they were living their dream life and that I wasn't. I was here at school in Lisbon. And that I was nobody and this caused me a lot of suffering and made me miserable during the day.”.

The social comparison inherent to social media also affects young people's confidence about their physical appearance. The infinite number of photographs and videos shared created certain standards concerning body type and physical characteristics. Consequently, adolescents feel ashamed about their body and image if it doesn't meet the standards developed by these platforms. For instance, as shown by Filipa (17 years old), “Yes, because sometimes we, especially in terms of physical appearance, see other people and think ‘Ah, I wish I was beautiful like her’ and then we end up not seeing the good parts of being so focused on what others have.”.

Despite struggling with social comparison, the respondents have developed a critical view of these online environments and became aware of the lack of authenticity and the intrinsic superficiality of the carefully curated and constructed content displayed on social networks. In the interviews, participants referred to Instagram as the main source of fake appearances. For example, Tintin (17 years old) and António (18 years old) state:

“Instagram is an illusion. People only post their best photos, they build a perfect image of themselves, so different from what is beneath it. Most people don’t realize this. Girls feel so bad about their bodies, and boys as well. It’s awful. Friends have asked me for help because they were afraid, they would become anorectic or bulimic trying to be like other girls on Instagram” (Tintin, 17 years old)

“But Instagram was one of the most egregious things to get me to uninstall, because it's terrible. We think we know that person and, deep down, we're going to talk to him and it's nothing like that. Terrible false appearances” (António, 18 years old)

In fact, António (18 years old) narrated a personal situation where he had met someone online and was extremely disappointed when confronted with the reality of this person, which did not match what has been falsely portrayed through social media. This experience was fundamental to António’s decision to disconnect from social networks – “It came as a shock to me to realise that this person was nothing like that after all. And therefore, this clearly made me after change, change my mind.” (António, 18 years old)

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) was also present in the adolescents' interaction with digital technologies. Participants shared situations where they were confronted with posts from friends engaging in leisure activities and having fun, which above all, represented events that did not include them. They ended up feeling left out, experiencing feelings of envy and low self-esteem. Tintin (17 years old) and Madalena (18 years old) described feeling bad about themselves, as shown in the quotes below.

“Sometimes I’m home and my friends post an Instastory of someone falling off their bike, or a fight at a club, and they are laughing, they seem to be having so much fun. I feel bad for missing it. And they message me inviting me to meet them because they are having so much fun, so I feel social pressure”. (Tintin, 17 years old)

“FOMO happened more when, for example, I saw friends, my friends arranging things and I, who had been invited, couldn't, couldn't go because I had something. And I felt genuinely bad, like fire they must be really having fun, they're having fun without me, ready maybe they're even talking bad about me” (Madalena, 18 years old)

d. Toxic social networks’ environment

Social networks stood out as toxic and harmful environments. These platforms were strongly criticised as sources of fake news, conflict, and hate narratives. Participants struggled to cope with the digital world's downsides, ultimately leading them to withdraw from certain platforms, which most commonly included Twitter and Instagram. According to Filipa (17

years old), “And then also on Twitter, I see a lot of people arguing and a lot of negativity and that's it. That's the bad side.”. Similarly, Pedro adds, “On Twitter, there is always some mess going on”.

Furthermore, as argued by some adolescents, the hostile atmosphere that characterises social media has become overwhelming and detrimental to the well-being of users. The online platforms that could be a source of entertainment and leisure have become a burden from which some users opt to disconnect. When asked why they decided to withdraw from certain social networks, Manel (17 years old) responded, “Because, on the one hand, I got tired of people from Alcácer complaining about things that don't make sense and that's why I stopped using them.”. Additionally, Sofia (16 years old) noted, “(...) Either I was upset with someone, or I didn't feel like talking, or I don't know... I could be upset, have a bad mood and I felt like uninstalling. And uninstalled.” (Sofia, 16 years old). And finally, from the point of view of Margarida (15 years old), the negative and hateful environment of social media motivated her to unplug,

“I was also already seeing that the environment, sometimes it gets toxic, when we see those little conversations and then it comes from one side and pulls from the other and, sometimes, it's not always the reality. And so that I don't get involved too, so that I don't get into a fight, or make things worse, I said ‘enough’. I'll be back here in a few days, it may be that the matter has already passed.” (Margarida, 15 years old)

Unfortunately, down the line, social networks were pointed out to be a source of cyberbullying and psychological issues. Margarida (15 years old) remarked being bullied online, ultimately leaving her no choice but to withdraw from social networks for a while.

“We put a picture criticize everything and, the so-called acquaintance, I don't know if I can say cyberbullying, but they sometimes criticize minimal things. (...) And the person has to suffer psychological problems, or something like that, in relation to social networks, that cyberbullying is very present. Disconnecting is the best option.” (Margarida, 15 years old)

5.1.1. Discussion of the results

In conclusion, participants' discourses revealed several factors influencing their decision to change digital media habits. Although the strategies adopted to build healthier practices differed, the reasons behind the final decision were transversal. Therefore, regarding the first research question, the main findings were organised into four fundamental motivations that

prompt digital disconnection: better use of time (a), self-perception of being *addicted* (b), social pressure (c), and finally, detrimental social media environments (d).

Overall, participants shared a common dissatisfaction with how they manage their time. Digital devices and social media platforms have grown to be a substantial portion of their daily routines, realising that they are wasting their time. Similarly, Baumer et al. (2013) concluded that banality is one of the main reasons individuals change their digital media habits. In other words, the perception of engaging in an activity that does not bring any beneficial value to their well-being, such as spending time scrolling on social media, was seen as a misuse of time. Despite adopting different terms, Neves et al. (2015) and Nguyen et al. (2021) share the same point of view, categorising social networks as uninterest and with low perceived usefulness levels. In their research, participants saw these platforms as tedious and lacked the patience to spend time using them. In the end, participants shared how these digital media routines were harmful and how they could take advantage of that time and create new habits. Performing physical activities, such as sports, meeting with friends and family face-to-face, and investing time in hobbies are examples of activities that were neglected due to the time spent on digital media.

Moreover, there is a general sense of losing track of time when in front of digital devices, which is associated with Syvertsen and Enli's (2020) concept of temporal overload. Nowadays, society is absorbed in these overly connected digital environments, struggling to unplug. One's ability to pay attention and focus on one activity has become a challenge, affecting their productivity and capacity to complete academic tasks successfully. This struggle was present throughout the interviews as a key motivation to disconnect from digital technologies, a finding also argued by Baumer et al. (2013). Besides, participants described feeling anxious and stressed when realising how much digital media was consuming their lives and how detrimental it was to their mental and physical health. In addition, participants' life situation was also a strong motivation to disconnect. The ambition to perform well in academic responsibilities, and institutions, such as school or university, were driving forces for one's decision to reduce their activity on digital devices and prioritise their aspirations and goals. The same motivation has been concluded by Magee et al. (2017), denominated as "life stage and future goals" (p. 517).

Furthermore, some participants concluded that their digital habits were unhealthy, even comparing themselves with addicts. The vocabulary and behaviours adopted by certain adolescents were similar to an addict's withdrawal journey. Addiction, craving, and abuse are a few examples of words present in their discourses. Once they consider themselves addicts, they adopt measures to withdraw or control their digital media usage. Baumer et al. (2013) also shared the same findings, considering the addiction aspect of digital media as a key component influencing one's decision to disconnect digitally.

A considerable number of adolescents remarked social pressure as one of the reasons to unplug from digital devices. They experienced several situations where they felt anxious and FOMO (fear of missing out) when confronted with friends' plans that did not include them. In addition, social media was described as a source of low self-esteem and confidence due to the overwhelming number of posts and photographs shared by other users. And last but not least, social networks' toxic and hateful environments were another pivotal driving force to take a step back from digital technologies. As argued by Magee et al. (2017), emotions impact one's disengagement with digital devices and platforms. In situations where one feels frustrated and angry, disconnecting comes as a solution to manage these emotions. As demonstrated above, some participants deleted specific social networks due to their detrimental environments that provoked negative feelings.

According to Neves et al. (2015) research, one of the reasons for young individuals to stop using social networks was denominated "self-presentation, self-categorization, and identity" (Neves et al., 2015, p. 125). Interestingly, the same behaviour was present in this study. Some participants displayed a desire to portray themselves to others as these advocates of behaviours that do not correspond to the mainstream, trying to manage their own identity and how others saw it. Whether this was performed consciously or not, they were aware of their 'difference' and aimed to stand out from the conventional adolescent identity.

In terms of the participants' sociodemographic data, it is relevant to highlight that older participants have demonstrated to have thoroughly reflected on their digital media practices, versus younger adolescents who portrayed to be less concerned with the harmful consequences of excessive digital media usage. Besides, the younger ones appeared to be less critical of the time they spent in front of screens, even when being clearly excessive, justifying their screen time to be a source of entertainment when bored. Whereas, during the

interviews, the older adolescents demonstrated interest in sharing their opinions and perspectives on digital technologies in more detail, and as a result of their introspection, they aim to change their digital habits.

Considerable research has been conducted on motivations influencing individuals to engage in digital disconnection behaviours. Although the findings of the present dissertation substantiate what has already been concluded, new conclusions can be withdrawn. Privacy concerns, data misuse, technical boundaries and material constraints were not present in the participants' digital disconnection discourses. However, time management, addictiveness, social pressure, and detrimental environments were extensively described as the main incentives to reflect on digital media habits and unplug from the digital world.

5.2. Analyzing Research Question 2 – The process of digital disconnection

Research Question 2: How does this process of digital disconnection occur? What are their approaches and strategies?

Moving forward to the second research question of the dissertation, and after grasping an overall understanding of the factors that incentive digital disconnection, the focus is now transferred to the processes implemented by the participants to withdraw or reduce their digital media usage. During the analysis of the interviews, the young individuals were invited to share their experiences with digital technologies and how they approach digital disconnection. An interesting aspect was that the driving forces of disconnection were reflected in the strategies adopted by the participants to change their behaviours. In other words, the tactics selected to disconnect from digital devices depended on the necessities and goals sought by the user.

Throughout the conversations with the respondents regarding their digital disconnection experiences, it was evident how the behaviours of certain individuals were significantly similar to other participants' experiences. Therefore, in order to organise and make sense of the data collected, analogue behaviours were categorised into groups. The figure below (Figure 5) represents a taxonomy suggested by the author on the different strategies adopted by the participants to unplug from digital media and control their screen time.

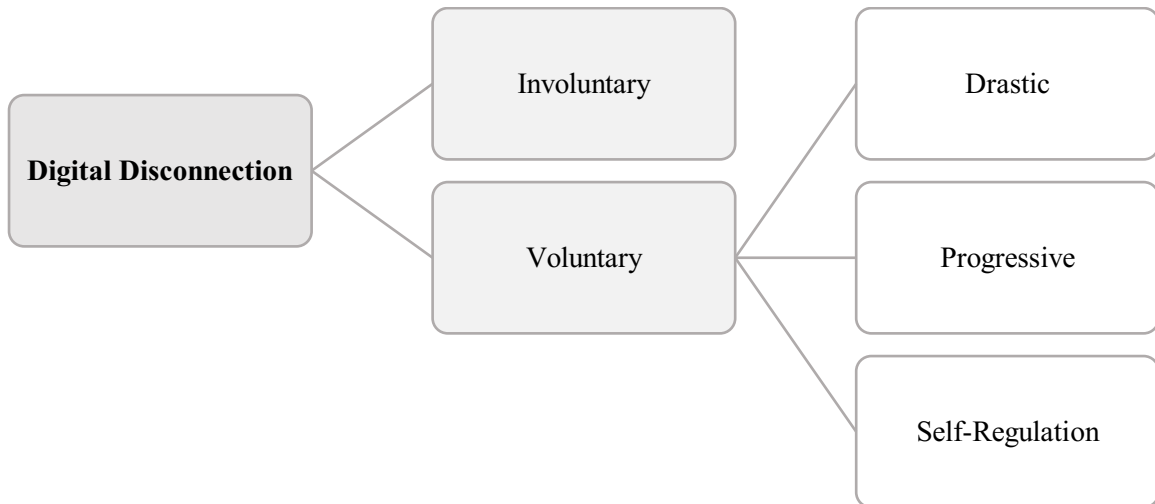


Figure 5: Digital disconnection taxonomy, according to the participants' experiences.

Created by the author.

Before diving deeper into the digital disconnection strategies, it is important to explain the involuntary digital disconnection experiences presented in figure 5. What differentiates involuntary from voluntary experiences is the decision process. Not all the participants have experienced life without digital devices due to their conscious choice. Some participants have reported circumstances where they could not connect because of external factors. One of the situations where the digital disconnection experience was defined as involuntary was the case of adolescents who participated in Scouts camps, where they were not able or allowed to use their digital devices. The other situation was regarding participants who had spent time in locations with no Internet connection. As it is possible to conclude, in both cases, the adolescents did not deliberately implement strategies to disconnect, whereas they were obliged to live offline due to uncontrollable factors. However, despite not being a deliberate decision, these participants have had the opportunity to experience digital disconnection, providing valuable data for the present dissertation.

Two main trends were identified from the participants' experiences: disconnecting drastically or self-regulating their digital practices. Those who disconnect drastically abandon specific digital practices they have realised to be detrimental to them. Some participants reported making a radical decision to abruptly eliminate certain digital habits, defined as the 'cold turkey' approach. The second digital disconnection behaviour identified was self-regulation, which focuses on finding an equilibrium in the relationship with the

digital world by reducing time spent online and not erasing these devices completely. Nevertheless, a third behaviour was reported, where a gradual strategy to reduce their digital connection was adopted, defined as the progressive approach. Independently of the category, all groups find it challenging to stick to their decisions, face setbacks, and struggle with contradictions and impulses.

In our sample, there were four participants who never experienced digital disconnection. Of those who have already been disconnected from digital media, there were six (6) who stopped using digital technologies due to mandatory factors and ten (10) who deliberately decided to disconnect. Within these, there are four (4) drastic disconnectors – all boys; one (1) progressive disconnector – one girl; and lastly, five (5) self-regulators – two boys and three girls. The average age of the disconnectors tends to be slightly higher compared to self-regulators.

a. Drastic disconnectors

As previously mentioned, the strategies implemented by young users to disconnect from digital media depend on what each individual considers to be the most effective approach for themselves. One of the common disconnection methods among participants was to reflect on the source of anxiety and addiction in their lives and consciously decide what should be erased from their lives to improve their well-being. For this dissertation, this approach will be defined as drastic disconnection.

“So, for me, this doesn't work, it's to cut everything and it has to be and it's a lot easier. Because if not, I'm always reminding myself that I'm trying to stop, but I come back, I'm trying to stop, but I came back, I'm trying to come back later. So, what I did was I cut everything out.” (Tomás, 18 years old)

Overall, social media were considered by many adolescents as the cause of uneasiness and depressing feelings in their lifestyle, followed by pornography and online multi-player gaming with less impact. This is represented in several participants, which is the case of Tomás (18 years old), “So I stopped watching porn, or trying to stop watching porn and then stopped having Instagram. (...) I left Instagram, then Twitter I also left and that's it.”. In some situations, participants start their digital disconnection journey with dares and ‘challenges’. In Tintin's (17 years old) words, “At first it was just to try it out, so because I

was already a bit unhappy, a bit sad from always using it and it was causing me a lot of stress and anxiety. So, I thought, F***** gave me this challenge and I accepted.”.

Initially, these ‘challenges’ might have been the driving forces to withdraw from social platforms. However, after experiencing disconnection, these behaviours became more than just a dare and were adopted as a digital lifestyle. António (18 years old) and Rogério (18 years old) describe starting their journey with a one-month challenge and implementing the temporary changes for longer periods. As Rogério (18 years old) stated, “I remember doing 30 days of challenge, but then I continued because I liked being without Instagram. I continued without Instagram, maybe for another two months.”. António (18 years old) reveals a similar experience, “So, it almost became that trend of, let's try to uninstall Instagram for a month, without social networks, I don't know what. So I got into that trend a little bit and I loved it, and then, even when I uninstalled it, I started to see all the advantages it had.”.

Nevertheless, some participants felt the urge to disconnect drastically from online environments due to specific situations that made them sad and angry. These behaviours can be characterised as more impulsive and momentary decisions to take a step back from digital platforms and resettle. Once feeling better and ready to confront the online world again, these adolescents would reconnect. Sofia (16 years old) commented that her mood was the reason for disconnecting, “I've already uninstalled Insta, once or twice. But it was because I was either upset about something or something. (...) It wasn't that much. Two days, three. Then re-install, then uninstall again. Depends on how I was.”. However, for Margarida (15 years old), bullying was what triggered disconnection, “I already uninstalled it. There was that phase, when I was younger, I was bullied, so to speak. So there were a few days there where I said, “OK, I'm going to hang up. I will think of myself, only of me. I don't care about other people's opinions. If anyone wants to talk to me important, they have my number”. And sometimes, it's even good to disconnect for ourselves”.

One of the methodologies applied by the participants to drastically disconnect from digital media was to approach the decision radically. Some individuals argued that the best way to effectively change their digital media habits and thus experience a better lifestyle was to completely remove the presence of specific digital technologies. For instance, some opt to uninstall the social media appl from their smartphones, while others even delete the social

media profiles to prevent any craving to reinstall the apps again. Despite being depicted as a demanding tactic, it has also been claimed to be the most efficient one. Inspired by the expression of one of the participants, this approach has been named the “cold turkey” approach – “So basically what happened was, when I was, when I quit, I quit, I tried to do cold turkey and everything. Instagram, that's all I had, Instagram worked, porn didn't work so well, but I think it's the best method.” (Tomás, 18 years old).

Although assuming a drastic approach towards digital disconnection, erasing social media platforms had its own disadvantages. The most crucial function of these networks is to facilitate communication between people, especially among adolescents who are permanently in contact with their friends. While Instagram was one of the first apps to be deleted from participants’ smartphones, it implied abandoning group chats from that app. Therefore, despite adopting a ‘cold turkey’ approach, some individuals had to adapt their decision and find solutions to remain in contact with close friends. António (18 years old) says,

“Because there was a phase where I completely uninstalled Instagram and completely cut myself off from this social network. But there came a time when my friends sometimes arranged some things and I stayed aside (...) And, as they were great friends of mine, I decided, I decided to install again, but the much more condensed version, which basically only has the direct ones, which is Threads.”

b. Progressive disconnectors

For certain participants, the ‘cold turkey’ approach was not the most realistic and reasonable to actually build healthier digital media habits. Madalena (18 years old) had difficulties focusing on studying, which ultimately led her to uninstall Instagram. Unfortunately, she would eventually start to use the social network again, which ended up being ineffective for her goals. The following segment portrays Madalena’s struggle.

“So, what I got, my way of dealing with it was to uninstall Instagram. But then I only lasted like two hours, because I would study and then I would go back to the classroom and then I would be there for a little while, right? And then uninstall it again. And my friends were like ‘So you're uninstalling, installing... Control yourself M*****!’”

Consequently, other participants preferred to gradually reduce their digital media activity, particularly on social media, until they finally felt capable of withdrawing completely. This

process commonly consisted of setting progressive goals, such as starting with one-hour limits, then reducing to 45 minutes, half an hour, and so on, until ready to uninstall the apps intended.

“And so what I set myself to do was during the final exams period I was all day without my phone, social networks, etc. and at night I did everything I had to do, I kept up with everything, messages day. That was it. And then I was inspired by that, because it went well and I ended up challenging myself a little bit more every day, every day challenging myself a little bit more. And so I ended up uninstalling Instagram from the phone” (Madalena, 18 years old)

“Instagram, I remember I've been thinking about this for a while, this uninstalling stuff, maybe two years ago. I remember the time I decided two years ago that I had to at least cut back. I remember going to the daily activity that Instagram has. It averaged maybe 3 hours. Man, that was an absurd thing, and it gradually reduced.” (Rogério, 18 years old)

c. Self-regulators

In addition, the other main digital disconnection behaviour identified throughout the interviews was defined as self-regulation. As the concept reveals itself, this approach entails the idea of setting rules and techniques to help control the excessive usage of digital media. The ultimate objective of this behaviour is to reach an equilibrium between the digital world's pros and cons. In other words, find a balance where the advantages of the digital are harvested while simultaneously coping with the inherent risks. Therefore, instead of drastically eliminating digital platforms, one aims to maintain a healthy relationship by managing digital media habits. Interestingly, the self-regulators have demonstrated a more encouraging and brighter perspective on what the digital world has to offer and the hopefulness of attaining this equilibrium.

“Yes, I think what I'm using is mostly calls, messages and occasionally going to Instagram, so... I think it's good, because, I don't know, I think if I disconnect even more I think I'm also going to be a little lost in some aspects. (...) Yes, because technology is not only against things, it also has its pros.” (Manel, 17 years old)

Plus, even though some participants consider certain social media platforms to be superfluous in their lives, other online networks are seen as inevitable and important tools in their lives. Hence, according to advocates of self-regulation, eradicating digital media from someone's life is not doable and, above all, is not a realistic approach to today's society.

Davi (18 years old) clearly shares his point of view on his presence in the digital world, stating that he has obligation to be connected, despite having his own techniques to control his screen time,

“WhatsApp, for example, or something, then I feel like I have to go there. Then I already said, I have a girlfriend, that's it, I'm going to talk to her. I think I have, it's not really pressure. I naturally want to be there too, but I feel like I can't go a whole day without using my cell phone without saying anything to anyone. I also have some responsibility to speak with...show signs of life.” (Davi, 18 years old)

In practical terms, participants resort to specific techniques to help them regulate the time spent on digital media. Some adolescents argue that placing their mobile phones where they can't easily reach them is helpful. In order to focus, Madalena (18 years old) describes the following strategy, “WhatsApp and cell phone are always at the other end of the room, hidden in a drawer. Always the furthest, farthest away, to see if I focus. (...) But I really try to, as much as possible, turn off the phone, put it in flight mode, move as far away as possible.”.

Another strategy claimed to be useful is to turn off notifications on digital devices or social media apps. If there are no notifications, one is not as easily attracted to reach for the device and to respond. Margarida (15 years old) explains various situations where turning off notifications allowed her to be less pressured to be connected – “(...) And when I say turn off, sometimes, on WhatsApp, I silence conversations so I don't have them.... ok, when I feel like going there, I will. I don't need to be under that pressure of getting notifications and I have to go respond. So I think it's manageable.”.

Deleting social media apps from the main screen was also helpful to prevent the urge to be constantly checking on new information – “(...) I also went to my main screen and removed the social media icons. So to get there I have to go looking and then it's more difficult. And so I have more time to control myself.” (Filipa, 17 years old). Additionally, other strategies exposed in the interviews were using specific applications that prevented from using the mobile phone or simply turning off the Internet connection – “I used to use an application that, for example, does not let us enter the cell phone, it blocks our cell phone. But I always try to abstract myself, or turn off the internet on my cell phone so I don't have the tendency to receive a notification and go check it out.” (Margarida, 15 years old)

Similarly to the progressive disconnectors process, self-regulators also use timers to help reduce and control their screen time. However, the difference between the progressive disconnectors and the self-regulators relies on the final goal of this behaviour. In self-regulation strategies, the objective is not to completely disconnect but use digital devices for amounts of time considered acceptable and appropriate for a healthy lifestyle. In this case, the role of timers is to help manage digital media usage in order to take advantage of what being online entails and then to help limit that time to prevent potential risks. For example, Davi (18 years old) reports discovering timers and implementing the strategy, “I was the one who thought, I did some introspection and thought I should reduce the time. This about the limits, the timers, was something I discovered, therefore, on my phone, as I was going through the settings. And and I found out and I thought “this is a good opportunity, something to take advantage of to spend less time” and I took advantage of it and put it.”. Moreover, Filipa (17 years old) also shares “I think it's too much, so much so that I even went to my phone's settings to change, to put that time control, something like that, a limit (...)”.

When sharing their digital disconnection journeys, the participants' discourse was vividly characterised by the presence of addiction-related vocabulary. Words such as “dopamine rush”, “withdrawal”, “relapses”, “failure”, and “guilt” were present throughout the narratives of individuals, particularly those who conducted more drastic approaches toward digital disconnection. Tintin (17 years old) described his first attempt to disconnect as if he was an addict trying to withdraw from an addictive behaviour – “It started with just accepting, okay, fine, 30 days isn't going to be that hard. The first week was horrible, I was always entering the phone, clicking on the Instagram button that was no longer there, to enter the application.” Furthermore, Tomás (18 years old) also portrayed his attitude towards drastic digital disconnection through the lens of someone who considers himself addicted and with a complete lack of self-control.

“(...) I can't rely on my willpower alone, because I can't trust myself. I can't stick a donut in here and say, I'm not going to eat it. So I don't put the donut here. I'm as far away from these things as possible. I go into my mental cubicle, say “okay, this, this, this, and this” and walk away from other things. And try to create as much resistance as possible.”

Interestingly, those who experienced digital disconnection simultaneously as other friends were lucky to share the journey with the right companions. They were able to reach for these friends as a source of motivation and help since they could comprehend the struggles and challenges more easily. This union of friends on the same path could be seen as a support group, a safe space to discuss concerns, guilt, difficulties, and solutions. António (18 years old) shared his experience,

This process was also easier because I had several people with whom I could also talk about this, because I think it is sometimes a bit complicated. And because we're far from people, or imagine that we want to, maybe, debate an issue, or talk about the difficulties we're having, it's much easier if we're doing all this together, than if we're alone and, suddenly, I don't even know if this is normal, if what I'm feeling is normal or not and it's quite complicated.

“WhatsApp, for example, or something, then I feel like I have to go there. Then I already said, I have a girlfriend, that's it, I'm going to talk to her. I think I have, it's not really pressure. I naturally want to be there too, but I feel like I can't go a whole day without using my cell phone without saying anything to anyone. I also have some responsibility to speak with...show signs of life.” (Davi, 18 years old)

However, on the other hand, if one's circle of friends does not share the same urge to disconnect or hasn't experienced digital disconnection, the process becomes more challenging and harder to last. The same occurs with parents, teachers or professionals. Some adolescents see adults struggling with the same addiction and are even less aware of its dangers than younger individuals. For example, Tintin (17 years old) describes his household in the following way,

“My parents are also addicted to digital media. They spend so much time on their smartphones! Sometimes I am watching a soccer game with my dad on TV, and he is on Facebook, instead of paying attention to the game. My mum texts while she is watching her favorite soap opera. And my sister is the worst! She is always on TikTok”.

5.2.1. Discussion of the results

Participants' experiences with digital disconnection have been categorised in figure 7, presented above. Bearing in mind the second research question, the objective is to analyse the strategies implemented by the research's adolescents to withdraw or reduce their digital media usage. As it is possible to conclude, some participants engaged in digital disconnection experiences due to their conscious and deliberate decision – deliberate digital

disconnection, whereas others were confronted with situations where they had to be disconnected from digital devices – mandatory disconnection. Existing literature has already clearly highlighted this distinction, though different terms were used. According to Wyatt (2003), the ‘want nots’ designate those who actively disengage with digital media, which corresponds to deliberate disconnection, and the ‘have nots’ refer to mandatory experiences. The latter entails situations where external factors are responsible for being disconnected, and the individual’s will is not a factor to be considered. The adolescents categorized into the mandatory disconnection taxonomy either attended Scouts camps, where digital devices were not welcomed, or spent limited periods in locations where the Internet service was poor.

For the present dissertation, to analyse voluntary digital disconnection, it was essential to consider those who have previously engaged with digital media and only decided to withdraw or reduce their presence in the online world after. Wyatt et al. (2002) labelled this specific group of disconnectors as rejecters – “those who have stopped using the internet voluntarily, perhaps because they find it boring or expensive, or because they have perfectly adequate alternative sources of information and communication” (p. 36).

Within the deliberate disconnectors, adolescents' approaches toward digital disconnection differed according to their needs, their perspectives on technology, and what each of them considered viable for their lifestyle. Aranda & Baig (2018) suggest two factors that define the type of digital disconnection approach, which are the duration of time and level of control. Interestingly, the same factors were displayed in this research findings with the addition of an extra aspect – the final objective. Taking this into consideration, within the deliberate disconnectors, three approaches were identified, the drastic disconnectors, the progressive disconnectors, and finally, the self-regulators. The differentiating factor of the drastic disconnectors is their radical approach toward digital disconnection. For them, the best method to disconnect is to select the digital devices and platforms they consider detrimental to them and remove their connections to them completely. These behaviours occurred mostly for long periods, though there were some participants who drastically disconnected for a limited time. Regarding progressive disconnectors, the final purpose is also to eliminate specific digital platforms. However, the approach selected is to gradually reduce digital media usage, until ready to eliminate them. Since this behaviour requires time,

it is usually embraced for long periods. Lastly, the self-regulators main difference is their objective. They aim to reach an equilibrium between the offline and online world, and not eradicate digital media completely. Several specific strategies were adopted to help control screen time and balance the presence of digital media in their lifestyle. Some examples are timers, turning off notifications, and using apps to help unplug.

A summary of each profile is presented in the table below.

	Time		Level of control		Final goal
	Long-run	Short periods	Radical	Gradual	
Drastic disconnectors	X	X	X		Eliminate
Progressive disconnectors	X			X	Eliminate
Self-regulators	X			X	Healthy balance

Table 8: Deliberate disconnectors’ profiles, according to three factors – time, level of control, and final goal. Created by the author.

5.3. Analyzing Research Question 3 – Outcomes of digital disconnection

Research Question 3: How does digital disconnection impact their well-being?

What leads Portuguese adolescents to disconnect from the digital world, as well as their approaches to conduct this behaviour, have now been clarified. However, the research's final and central question remains – how do digital disconnection behaviours impact the well-being of Portuguese adolescents?

After thoroughly analysing the discourses and experiences of the participants, it was possible to conclude an interesting finding. The participants demonstrate a clear upgrade and improvement in their lifestyle after adopting strategies to withdraw or reduce their digital media usage. Nevertheless, assuming this statement as the final result of the study is misleading. Although the final results have shown to be beneficial, the process of digital disconnection is not as immediate as the participants expected. From the moment they decide to implement disconnection strategies until those strategies become part of their lifestyle,

there is a journey that requires time and effort to surpass the challenges encountered. The immediate effect of this new behaviour has been revealed to be negative and demanding for adolescents, and the improvements were only felt in the long run. As Tomás's (18 years old) view on his digital disconnection journey demonstrates, "from then on, it got better, it didn't, I mean at an objective level it got better, (...) it got infinitely better".

The first impact when commencing to live a life disengaged from digital devices or even just less engaged is quite challenging. Even though some friends and peers may be experiencing the same shift in their lives, this is not a common scenario in today's society. In fact, society is not slowing down despite one's effort to take a step back from the overwhelming digital world. Digital devices have become a fundamental tool to maintain relationships and connect with others, not only in the online realm but also outside of it. From Tintin's (17 years old) perspective, social networks are vehicles to engage with people in the physical world. Through these platforms, one can keep up with what is happening in the world and, hence, connect with friends.

"One thing I miss, which is seeing what people are doing, (...) that is, outside of life from college, what do they do? Are they interesting people? What are their tastes? What do you do with their free time? And that I have no idea what they are doing. I used this tool to try to have something in common, as a topic of conversation with these people, to try to connect more with them." (Tintin, 17 years old)

Social networks were not only seen as tools to help connect with people but also as tools to be informed about other peers' lives. Through these platforms, one is able to share with the 'world' the newest updates, replacing the need to communicate the news directly in one-to-one conversations. Therefore, as remarked by António (18 years old), being away from social media was difficult and led to a feeling of 'hunger' from what is going on in the digital world, "What was hard was, maybe, seeing other people using it and, 'Ah, this one is here!', or 'This one is here', or 'I haven't seen this person in a long time', and the other person says 'Ah I don't know what, he has a girlfriend, I've seen it on Instagram.'".

Nowadays, assuming someone is present in the social media world is almost inevitable. Hence, it is difficult for others to understand one's decision to take a step back from digital technologies. Curiously, several participants described situations where they were asked for their Instagram accounts and were confronted with puzzled and intrigued reactions when the

answer was “Oh, I don't have one” (Matilde, 16 years old), which Matilde reported being to deal with these situations. Also, Tomás (18 years old) stated that people's first reactions were always very surprised, “What? Don't you have Instagram?”. In some cases, participants even avoided assuming they did not have Instagram and invented excuses not to give explanations – “When they ask me “Oh, you haven't been on Instagram in so long” or something, but I just say I was busy and that's it, so no one bothers me.” (Filipa, 17 years old).

However, the challenge is not only being misunderstood about their personal decisions to disconnect. The expectation of friends to be in constant contact has made certain people upset and frustrated for trying to reach out and being left with no response. Margarida (15 years old) has difficulties managing her personal needs with what her friends expect from her – “You weren't online, you didn't answer me. I sent you 40 messages and you didn't reply. What are you doing? You should have answered me, I needed you!”.

Moreover, participants shared difficulties dealing with situations where they have no obligations and tasks to complete and have cut out their digital media usage. Previously, in these scenarios, the immediate reaction was to overcome boredom by spending time in front of a digital device. From the moment these easy-access tools were eliminated, participants faced a new challenge – how to deal with boredom. In the case of Matilde (18 years old), once she deleted Instagram from her smartphone, her first reaction was to overcome boredom by watching YouTube videos. Consequently, YouTube became another problem which she now has to deal with.

“And now I don't have Instagram, I sometimes get bored, I don't know what I do with my cell phone, sometimes I'm just going through the pictures, like I don't really know what I'm doing here, But ready. And so I started turning to YouTube, which is now a problem that I now have to deal with. Because really sometimes I'm not seeing anything special, so it's kind of becoming a "problem". But that's it, I didn't use it before, but now I have to control this one too.”

However, in the case of Tomás (18 years old), the participant highlights his new capacity to manage boredom just by passing the time without feeling the urge to grab his mobile phone.

“Now, there's always that, what happens is that I go in my pocket, for example, my mother is at the supermarket and I sit on some bench waiting, I go to my pocket and there's nothing there. You get fire, man, now I'll have to look at people walking on the

Continent, for 10 minutes. And the problem is, the problem is, the big problem I see, is that, man. Not being able to stand still for 10 minutes and that's it. But with training, with everything, with training it easily goes back to normal and that's it, and I can be more bored than I was before.”

Another inevitable outcome faced by the participants at the start of their digital disconnection journey is the challenge of managing how they will keep in contact with their friends when the main communication vehicle is through online platforms. Some have reported feeling excluded from invitations and plans made exclusively online. António (18 years old) states, “Because there was a phase where I completely uninstalled Instagram and completely cut myself off from this social network. But there came a time when my friends sometimes arranged some things and I stayed aside, because that's it, they didn't... we had the WhatsApp group and I was apart from these groups.”. However, losing these opportunities of spending time with friends because of social media was also detrimental to maintaining friendships. Thus, some participants searched for solutions where they could keep their presence in the group chats of their close friends while abandoning the social media aspects they did not appreciate. Consequently, António (18 years old) adds, “And, as they were great friends of mine, I decided, I decided to install again, but the much more condensed version, which basically only has the direct ones, which is Threads”.

Despite the demanding process of digital disconnection, the participants eventually started to embrace these new digital media habits into their daily routines. This new approach towards digital devices became part of their day-to-day basis and part of their lifestyles. Once they had become more comfortable with this new behaviour and its consequences, the participants began a path of self-discovery in several dimensions of their lives. As Tintin (17 years old) and António (18 years old) describe, the initial phase of digital disconnection was filled with challenges and difficulties, whereas in the long run, that behaviour became part of who they are. One of them says, “And then it started to become a habit, because I saw what I could do with my spare time.” (Tintin, 17 years old), and the other “But deep down it was completely irrational, it was just a feeling of wanting to see, I don't have that anymore a long time ago and now it was a routine.” (António, 18 years old).

Reducing or eliminating completely digital technologies from what was once a substantial part of someone's daily routine results in a considerable increase in free time throughout the day. Participants were confronted with moments where they had nothing to do or at least

moments they were accustomed to spending in front of screens, mindlessly scrolling. As explained above, at the beginning of their journeys, adolescents struggled to deal with boredom and reported not knowing how to entertain themselves. However, after reflecting on the potential outcomes of this spare time, they realised how beneficial this routine could be. From António's (18 years old) point of view, "Advantages, suddenly, I had one more hour a day, which is when, when you are an athlete and a student, it makes an incredible difference. One hour is everything". In addition, Davi (18 years old) adds,

"The more time you spend on the phone, the more likely we are to spend even more time. I don't know if it makes sense. And I think that's how it is, I think it helps a lot not to use it because not only will we feel less likely to use it, but we'll actually have more time for other things."

Previously, participants would spend their days postponing their responsibilities and neglecting using their time for activities and hobbies that could benefit their well-being. Once they started to reduce their screen time, they began to enjoy their time properly. Davi (18 years old) observed that "I enjoy my time much better than if I were procrastinating and doing nothing on my cell phone". Other participants even shared how this shift in their digital behaviour impacted their perception of time, emphasising the difference between their previous lifestyle versus their current routine,

"Or before I had one thing, brain fog, I had a lot of brain fog, that is, I couldn't concentrate on anything at all. It was, it was just there, my thoughts controlled me. And not now, now I can concentrate in class, no problem. In the past, time passed very quickly, he seemed like an addict who always wanted more, some more video, some more publication, more and more and more and not now. Now time passes slowly." (Tintin, 17 years old)

This new challenge of enjoying their time better was overcome by dedicating the newly released time to activities they were avoiding, such as studying and gaining motivation to pursue forsaken projects and goals, such as starting a new sport, reading, and meditating. The participants described how their daily routines changed once they embraced their 'less connected lifestyle', and how they invested in building new habits. For example, António (18 years old) shared, "But one of the habits I tried to reinforce was clearly reading. As I was saying on that eReader, I played a lot of sports with F*****, among others. I started going for a run (...)". Tomás (18 years old) also described his new daily routine with the

following activities, “I started doing meditation, right? I started doing it, I started training, I started going to the gym, I started reading”. Lastly, Madalena (18 years old) said,

“I think I ended up using my time more to do things that I hadn't done in a long time, such as painting. I always loved to paint and I would always say I don't have time, I can't organize my day to be able to paint. Or for example training, it was always the excuse "I don't have time, I can't, I can't take 20 minutes to go running in the park". Only then I would spend two hours on Instagram. So, I ended up doing more activities that I always wanted to do and said I didn't have time. And that was basically it was more, more around.”

Furthermore, participants agreed that undergoing their digital disconnection journey impacted their circle of friends. After unplugging from social networks and being less active in certain group chats, keeping in contact with peers and maintaining certain relationships became harder. Curiously, this challenge resulted in two outcomes. On the one hand, some relationships drifted apart because the easy online connection was no longer available. The participants interpreted these lost ‘friendships’ as people who were not that close and important to them, and vice versa. On the other hand, other relationships were reinforced, which resulted in a smaller group of friends. However, the remaining friendships were considered true friendships since they were not based only on online relationships.

“But that’s it, I haven’t felt that much desire because I used to give an excuse of “I only use Instagram to talk to people and talk to my friends”, but then I thought, if these people are really my friends and if they are really important people and have important things to say to me, they will probably find a way to get my number to talk on WhatsApp.”
(Madalena, 18 years old)

In the end, participants benefited from these experiences since they became aware of who was their genuine friends, leading to a smaller yet more genuine circle of peers. António (18 years old) even described this shift in his relationships as “magical” and significantly impacted his life.

“Undoubtedly, that is, getting closer to the important ones, getting closer to the people, without a doubt, with whom I really get along. We ended up having conversations, it's almost magical. We ended up having completely different and much deeper conversations. And, no doubt, disconnecting with people I spoke to like that on time, responded to the story, or something. These people have completely lost contact, which is not very serious, because, if I don't call them, or if I don't send them WhatsApp messages to arrange, it's because they aren't very important to me, or because they never were. And at this point it is positive, because I end up gaining time and realizing who

my friends really are, the real ones. And that made an incredible difference for me, too.” (António, 18 years old)

“So, I think that in terms of the effect it has on me, it ends up being reflected in my relationships with others, because I'm also a little lighter. That's it, I'm more present at the moment and therefore this is reflected in my relationship with my friends.” (Rogério, 18 years old)

Additionally, and particularly from the experiences of female participants, reducing their presence on social networks improved their self-esteem and self-acceptance of their image. The excessive usage of social media became overwhelming, and the constant confrontation with other users' posts hampered one's ability to embrace and be confident in their own beauty and body image. By distancing themselves from these platforms, some participants stopped comparing themselves to others and questioning their worth.

“I saw other girls on Instagram, and I thought ‘I wish I was as pretty as her’, and I felt unhappy about my physical appearance. Now I realized I was focusing just on the positive aspects of others and on the negative aspects of myself. Now I try to enjoy my life offline, and I feel happier” (Filipa, 17 years old)

“Often in social networks, there are those opinions of others, that is, we put a picture criticizing everything and, the so-called acquaintance, I don't know if I can say cyberbullying, but sometimes they criticize minimal things. And we start to wonder if that's true, and then we wonder, maybe I really have this, or that, or my hair was crooked, it must be straight. So, sometimes, we turn off a little bit, we see who we really are and that things are not, it's not reality, everyone is as they are. And that we don't have to be caring about those opinions, because it's us.” (Margarida, 15 years old)

The positive outcomes of embracing digital disconnection described so far represent a journey of self-discovery and self-improvement. The participants emphasise strong feelings of satisfaction for achieving goals they have set for themselves, despite the difficulties encountered throughout the process. As Davi (18 years old) describes, “I feel like I'm fulfilling my commitment, so to speak. (...) Using the phone less helps not only to waste less time, but also to feel good about myself”. In addition, Rogério also reflects on the outcomes of his new digital media habits,

“I spend more time with my friends. I spend more time doing the things that interest me. I think I'm more aware of what's going on around me. I really like going out on the street. On the street, I never like to be holding my cell phone and looking down. I like to always be looking around me and understanding things around me (...).”

In the long run, participants concluded that they had become the best version of themselves. They learned more about their personalities, their priorities, what they enjoyed doing, and who were the right people to be surrounded with. For Tomás (18 years old), his digital disconnection journey was pivotal for his growth and well-being.

“I can say that I'm a person now, right? Because I know what I like and I don't like what others like, because that's what appeared on Instagram. And then, well, my conversations started to get better, I started to feel more connected to people, I started to explore deeper themes, my conversations started to get deeper. I created the best bonds. I found M*****, basically, that's when we started to like each other.”

The realisation of how powerful digital disconnection experiences can be in someone's life encouraged several adolescents to inform others about the positive outcomes and tried to influence them to embrace the same behaviour. For instance, Margarida (15 years old) is committed to being a good example for her younger siblings and helping them reach a healthy relationship with digital technologies. Moreover, António (18 years old) defines himself as a “messenger” who aims to help others improve their lives. He even shares his lifelong ambition to build projects and organisations where he can share his experiences and positively impact others.

“And so, I'm that messenger, deep down, and I really like it, I love it. I love being this messenger, this counselor, because I think it's needed, and we at our ages then, people really like to do what others do, and like me I take advantage again of this difference and this interest of mine in strange things, to try to change other people's habits for the better.” (António, 18 years old)

Overall, the in-depth interviews revealed that the initial phase of adaptation to the digital disconnection journey is characterised by immediate negative impacts on the well-being of those who adopted this new behaviour. Nevertheless, those capable of overcoming the earlier stage of the process experience significant improvements in their lives and well-being. In the words of Tintin (17 years old),

“As in any addiction, quitting has its setbacks. At first, I felt low, in a bad mood, sad, and I got tired really easily. Then, as time went by, my energy levels improved and my life became less stressful, I was less anxious, and I stopped comparing to others, to their achievements. Now I can focus on myself, I stopped worrying about what I don't want to do [being online] and started to focus on what I want to do with my time and feeling good about being able to control it”.

The participants who experienced digital disconnection due to external factors and not their deliberate decision were also asked to share their insights of how they felt during those moments. Interestingly, their perspectives were positive, and they enjoyed being disconnected. The adolescents who participated in Scouts camps, where they could not use their mobile phones, shared a common feeling of being distracted and always occupied with activities. Thus, the absence of digital devices was not a problem, and they would not even consider them. Regarding Inês's (17 years old) and Matilde's (16 years old) experiences, where they spent limited periods in locations where there was no Internet connection, both described spending their time on different activities and being entertained with new routines that did not include being on social media and watching series and movies on streaming platforms.

“I don't know, you have more time for other things, like... I had more time to be with my nephews and to spend the whole day with them. And I arrived at night so tired that I didn't even think about watching any series. It was more like that, I was always busy.” (Inês, 17 years old)

“Yes, these weeks are good, especially because I'm in a different place with closer beaches. I also have other things to fill the time with, but it's good, yes. I even have a schedule that is a little more aligned, when I sleep, than I have on vacation when I'm at home. It's good, I like it.” (Matilde, 16 years old)

In a complementary approach, each participant responded to the Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (Appendix 3), suggested by Corey Keyes and adapted to the present dissertation's purpose. The results gathered from the questionnaire enhanced the profiles of the research adolescents, providing further information on their well-being during periods of digital disconnection. As presented in the table below (Table 9), the majority of the results reveal that the participants were characterized by the utmost level of mental health, labelled as flourishing. This data supports the conclusion that digital disconnection is associated with an overall positive experience for young individuals, and also reveals a beneficial impact on their mental health.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	MHC-SF Results
Andreia	16	F	Moderate
António	18	M	Flourishing
Bárbara	17	F	Moderate
Clara	16	F	Flourishing

Davi	18	M	Moderate
Filipa	17	F	Flourishing
Inês	17	F	Flourishing
Isabel	15	F	Flourishing
Januário	16	M	Flourishing
Madalena	18	F	Moderate
Manel	17	M	Flourishing
Margarida	15	F	Flourishing
Matilde	16	F	Moderate
Pedro	16	M	Moderate
Raul	16	M	Flourishing
Rogério	18	M	Flourishing
Sherek	18	M	Flourishing
Sofia	16	F	Flourishing
Tintin	17	M	Flourishing
Tomás	18	M	Flourishing

Table 9: Mental Health Continuum – Short Form results. The participants highlighted in grey (Andreia, Pedro, Raul, and Sherek) correspond to adolescents who have not experienced digital disconnection. Created by the author.

Of the 16 adolescents who have engaged in some sort of digital disconnection experience, either voluntary or involuntary, 12 were identified as flourishing, corresponding to the maximum well-being state. Therefore, based on the questionnaire results, digital disconnection experiences may be indicative of contributing to the improvement of adolescents' well-being. Moreover, it is interesting to highlight that 2 out of the 4 participants considered moderately mentally healthy experienced digital disconnection in involuntary situations. In both cases, the answers regarding the social well-being section (from the fourth to the eighth item) were mostly lower than the responses about emotional and psychological well-being.

Although the author does not possess the competence to explore the MHC – SF questionnaire results in more detail, the conclusions presented here reveal an opportunity to further study this possible linkage between digital disconnection and well-being.

5.3.1. Discussion of the results

The duality of the existing literature on the outcomes of digital disconnection is similarly present throughout participants' discourses on their digital disconnection experiences. Nevertheless, the innovative finding relies on how the outcomes evolve during the disconnection. In the initial phase of the process, it has shown to be common to face more challenges that question individuals' willpower to overcome these difficulties. Time elapses, and individuals start to embrace this new attitude towards the digital world, becoming more comfortable and accustomed to their different routines.

Participants shared a desire to reconnect as an immediate reaction toward digital disconnection, more specifically, social networks. Being absent from the online world is perceived as a barrier to their friends and acquaintances. They are no longer aware of what is happening with others, which is even reflected in their difficulties in socialising physically. This feeling of restlessness for not being able to keep up with social networks has also been proved by Stieger and Lewetz (2018) and Nguyen (2021). Additionally, disconnectors also feel they were left out from plans scheduled via online platforms, increasing the fear of missing out (FOMO), which has also been demonstrated by Eide et al. (2018), Stieger and Lewetz (2018), and Vally and D'Souza (2019).

The craving to reconnect with social platforms is accompanied by boredom and a poor ability to deal with the spare time that was once occupied with screen time. Participants are unfamiliar with this new behaviour and are still used to their previous habits. However, after reflecting on this behaviour shift and the consequences implied, individuals began to adopt a different posture towards free time. New routines were built, new activities were embraced, and new habits were introduced to their daily lives. Subsequently, participants became more productive, reducing procrastination and focusing better on academic responsibilities. Similar findings were proven by Monge Roffarello and de Russis (2019) and Nguyen (2021).

The positive outcomes all lead up to a journey of self-discovery and self-improvement. Individuals experience a life with less stress, as stated by Anrijs et al. (2018) and Turel et al. (2018), as well as a more peaceful and wholesome life, which Nguyen 2021 also testifies. Stepping out of environments of social comparison and hateful narratives leads to better self-esteem and, ultimately, an improvement in well-being.

The influence of peers in the digital disconnection process plays a significant role in the outcomes associated. In other words, participants with friends who engage in digital disconnection experiences simultaneously, describe a feeling of support and motivation to continue on this path, in spite of the challenges encountered. In situations where one feels the urge to reconnect with social networks, for instance, having peers who comprehend and share the same difficulties is a strong encouragement to not give up. However, those who adopt digital disconnection behaviours despite their friends remaining connected do not share the same experience. In an environment where all friends remained connected, with the exception of an individual, specifically regarding social media environments, the ‘outsider’ describes feeling misunderstood and frustrated. The one who disconnects is alone in the journey of disconnection, having difficulty to share the struggles with friends and find support in them.

In the end, a fundamental finding should be highlighted and reflected on. Indeed, digital disconnection behaviours encompass both challenging and rewarding outcomes. The question relies on one’s ability to cope with the obstacles throughout the process. In the long run, the outcomes have demonstrated to compensate for the effort, which should be the main focus of the disconnectors adopters.

CONCLUSION

Digital evolution has been characterised by tremendous growth at a pace that surpasses human capacity to process and keep the same rhythm. As a result of the overwhelming and fast-paced digital world, digital disconnection and detox behaviours have arisen as possible solutions to help mediate and regulate the presence of these digital devices and platforms in individuals' daily lives. Hence, this emergent urge of society to find balance in their relationship with digital technologies has led to considerable research on the role of digital media in people's lives, their potential impact, and even on the advent of recent concepts such as digital well-being. The present dissertation is no exception.

The main objective of this research is to analyse the impact of digital disconnection experiences on adolescents' well-being. Do young individuals who adopt digital disconnection behaviours notice improvements in their lives and well-being? Through a national-focused approach, this study aimed to find answers as well as raise future questions/curiosity regarding this subject. However, in order to accurately comprehend whether digital disconnection positively influences adolescents' well-being, other topics should be first approached. It was considered fundamental to explore the motivations that lead one's decision to unplug and, consequently, the strategies implemented to practically execute this decision/disconnect from digital technologies. The qualitative methodology selected to conduct this research, more specifically the open-ended interview technique, has proven to be the most effective. Participants were given space to freely express their opinions on digital technologies and share their digital disconnection journeys in detail.

When first assessing the reasons behind the decision to disconnect from digital media, or as previously referred to as the 'why' phase, the motivations identified have corroborated the existing literature on this subject. The dystopian versus utopian narratives regarding the digital world are similarly present in the participants' discourses. Even though through an optimistic lens, digital devices and platforms are argued to connect the world and promised to help facilitate one's life, their downside aspects have to some extent outweigh the advantages. This duality of the good and bad results in a complex and challenging relationship between the physical and the digital world. Older participants have demonstrated to be the most aware and concerned about their relationship with digital media, reflecting on their daily habits and the role of digital devices in their routines. The notion of

time stood out, due to the adolescents' perception of how time-consuming these devices and platforms are. One of the key motivations to disconnect relied on the desire to achieve a healthier and more productive lifestyle, which according to participants' perspectives, included dedicating time to invest in personal interests and academic responsibilities. In specific scenarios, some participants perceived themselves as addicts, leading to the desire to withdraw from digital platforms. Moreover, the social pressure to be online and connected, as well as the hateful environments of social networks were other major motivations to take a step back from the online world.

Throughout the interviews, the presence of social media was pivotal when referring to digital technologies. These online platforms were evidently portrayed as the main source of screen time, being characterized as the most attractive activity online, as well as the hardest to control and use consciously. With exception of one participant, all the other adolescents have at least one social media profile that they are currently active on or at least have been prior to disconnecting. Overall, SNS (social networking sites) have been described as the most impactful and overwhelming platforms, from which participants emphasized having an unhealthy relationship, and thus opting to either regulate or eliminate them completely.

The process of digital disconnection is fully determined by participants' introspection and reflection about their relationship with digital technologies. The approach toward digital disconnection is a result of one's needs and concerns, therefore depending on what each individual seeks for the strategy aims to respond to those needs. However, it was possible to notice similarities between the strategies and categorize them according to three aspects: duration of time, level of control, and final purpose of the disconnection. Those who deliberately decided to unplug from certain digital devices, or more commonly from social networks, were labelled as drastic disconnectors, progressive disconnectors, and last but not least, self-regulators.

Although the following insight may at first appear to be paradoxical from the main purpose of the present dissertation, it is even more relevant to highlight its importance. According to some participants, the idea of disconnecting is conceived as 'impossible' and unrealistic. Rejecting the digital world is, to some extent rejecting today's society and its natural evolution. Therefore, and as argued by some, one must find an equilibrium between the two

realms, a balance between the advantages of being online while managing and controlling the overwhelming outcomes of that relationship for his or her own well-being.

The findings collected from the first research questions allowed this research to move forward into its final and primary interest with an in-depth background of the digital disconnection process. The immediate reaction to this shift has been characterized by difficulties and negative outcomes. For instance, individuals felt an urge to reconnect and feel included by those who remained connected and were misunderstood by peers and friends. However, those who are able to overcome these challenges and incorporate this new behaviour as part of their daily routines experienced a general sense of self-improvement and self-discovery in the long run. Adolescents described an upgrade in their lifestyle, being capable of focusing more easily and dedicating time to more enriching activities. They became more confident with themselves by rejecting social media as a source of social comparison and even became more aware of their true circle of friends and genuine relationships. In conclusion, to answer the main research goal, the outcomes of either reducing or withdrawing digital technologies or platforms did demonstrate to have a positive impact on adolescents' well-being.

Expanding the research on digital disconnection behaviours and experiences, mainly its impact on individuals' well-being and life quality, has already been proven to be important, and this dissertation has reinforced its significance. Although one should not generalise the findings of this study, relevant results were identified and should not be ignored. Digital disconnection experiences are a growing trend, and Portuguese adolescents are no exception. Awareness of this possible need to take a step back from the digital world and being informed of this emerging behaviour is extremely important for adolescents, parents, and educators to comprehend better and support those who engage in these experiences. Moreover, this exploratory study is also relevant to the digital disconnection and well-being research field, especially to psychologists, who can explore the well-being aspect more deeply.

Future research

If, to some extent, digital disconnection behaviours are associated with positive well-being outcomes in young individuals, independently of the dimension of this project, future studies

should be conducted. Social networks were a clear concern when reflecting on the negative consequences of being connected and the main motivator to unplug from the digital world. Hence, other studies could focus on these platforms specifically, and therefore more precise results could be concluded. Additionally, if further studies with considerable dimensions were conducted, significant results on the importance of digital well-being would be emphasised. Consequently, it would be possible to educate adolescents on how to reach an optimal balance between the online and offline worlds.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Informed consent



Pedido de participação no projeto de investigação DIS/CONNECT

Convidamos-te a dar-nos o teu consentimento para participar no projeto de investigação DIS/CONNECT.

Contexto e objetivo

Este projeto analisa dilemas nos meios de comunicação atuais e o modo como os utilizadores experienciam os meios digitais no seu dia-a-dia. O projeto visa estudar como a utilização dos meios de comunicação é regulada e em que medida os meios digitais podem ser vistos como intrusivos em diferentes contextos. O projeto investiga até que ponto os meios digitais de comunicação são vistos como um problema social através do estudo de vários interesses sociais.

O projeto é coordenado pelo Centro de Investigação em Comunicação Aplicada, Cultura e Novas Tecnologias da Universidade Lusófona, em parceria com o Católica Research Centre for Psychological, Family and Social Wellbeing, e parceiros noruegueses do projeto Digitox, liderado pelas Universidades de Oslo e de Bergen.

O projeto é financiado pelo Fundo de Relações Bilaterais dos EEA Grants. Mais informação sobre o DIS/CONNECT pode ser consultada em <https://cicant.ulusofona.pt/our-projects/dis-connect/>

O que implica a participação no estudo?

A tua participação no projeto é muito importante, dada a tua experiência de vida.

Um dos membros do projeto irá entrevistar-te pessoalmente, por telefone ou por videoconferência online. A entrevista durará uma estimativa de entre 30 a 60 minutos, e será feita após agendamento consoante a tua conveniência. Será feita uma gravação de áudio da entrevista, com a finalidade de produzir uma transcrição. A gravação será armazenada num sistema seguro do CICANT. Poderemos necessitar de falar contigo novamente, durante o projeto.

O que acontecerá às tuas informações pessoais?

Todos os dados pessoais serão tratados confidencialmente. Só a equipa do projeto tem acesso aos dados pessoais. A tua participação será identificada com um pseudónimo (que pedimos que indiques no final desta ficha). Solicitamos ainda autorização para identificar a tua participação com a idade e o género nas publicações científicas do projeto, se relevante.

Participação voluntária

A participação no estudo é voluntária e podes, a qualquer momento, anular o teu consentimento sem dar nenhuma justificação, tendo apenas de contactar qualquer investigador do projeto. Se preferires sair do estudo, todas as informações que te digam respeito serão anonimizadas, a menos que já tenham sido incluídas em publicações do projeto.

Onde posso obter mais informações?

Se tiveres alguma dúvida sobre o estudo, contacta o CICANT, ao cuidado de Ana Jorge, e-mail: ana.jorge@ulusofona.pt

Consentimento para participar no estudo

Recebi informações sobre o estudo e estou disposta/o a participar, concordando em ser entrevistado(a) e em fornecer informações que serão utilizadas em publicações do projeto de investigação DIS/CONNECT e por investigadores que fazem parte do projeto. Entendo que posso ser citado pelo meu nome e identificado em publicações do projeto.

Pseudónimo pelo qual pretendo ser identificada/o: _____

Nome: _____

Assinatura: _____

Data: _____

Appendix 2 – Interview script

Instruções

A entrevista está dividida em diferentes temas, com questões principais associadas a cada um deles. Em cada uma das questões principais, existem várias alternativas de perguntas de acompanhamento. Há que responder às questões principais, ao passo que as perguntas de acompanhamento se destinam a obter descrições complementares, se houver necessidade de aprofundar o tema. Em algumas das questões principais, o propósito da questão será brevemente descrito em itálico. Trata-se de um lembrete para entrevistas em que a questão principal está interligada às perguntas de acompanhamento mais abrangentes, tais como: 1) O que caracteriza os jovens que querem e/ou escolhem fazer uma desintoxicação digital?; e 2) A que estratégias recorrem os jovens que querem e/ou escolhem fazer uma desintoxicação digital?).

Introdução

Obrigado por aceites participar nesta entrevista.

Estou a trabalhar num projeto de investigação e tenho todo o interesse em conversar com jovens, de diferentes origens e contextos, sobre o seu uso de meios digitais, bem como sobre o seu desejo e/ou a sua decisão de se desconectarem dos meios digitais. O objetivo da entrevista de hoje é entender como é a tua vida no que concerne aos meios digitais, e quais as tuas experiências no que diz respeito à desconexão digital.

Para obter as informações necessárias, vamos falar, durante esta entrevista, sobre muitas coisas diferentes. Tenho a certeza que também vais notar que te vou fazer várias perguntas. No entanto, gostaria que falasses livremente sobre as tuas experiências. Irás certamente reconhecer alguns dos temas que iremos abordar, e até os acharás relevantes e quererás falar deles, mas também teremos casos em que não irás reconhecer. Nesses casos, talvez não me consigas dar uma resposta. As coisas são mesmo assim, acontece o mesmo com toda a gente, e não há problema nenhum. Terei todo o gosto em responder às tuas perguntas se tiveres dúvidas durante a entrevista.

Se não vires nenhum inconveniente nisso, gostaria de gravar a entrevista, para assim conseguir registar todas as informações. As informações que me forneceres nesta entrevista — o que inclui as tuas informações pessoais — serão tratadas confidencialmente. Ou seja, não serás identificado por terceiros. Até nos podes sugerir o nome que gostarias que usássemos para nos referirmos aos teus contributos, se quiseres, quando trabalharmos no nosso projeto. A participação no estudo é completamente voluntária, e podes, a qualquer momento, sem apresentar um motivo, interromper a entrevista.

Contexto pessoal e estatuto socioeconómico subjetivo

Podes falar-me um pouco sobre ti?

- Em que área estás a estudar?
- O que achas da escola?
- Como é o ambiente na tua turma? Dás-te bem na tua turma e na escola?
- Com quem moras?
- Em que concelho moras?
- O que fazem os teus pais?
- O que achas da tua casa?
- Como é a relação com a tua família?
- O que gostas de fazer nos teus tempos livres?
- Tens passatempos ou atividades de ocupação dos tempos livres?
- Há alguma atividade ou hobby que gostasses de fazer mas não fazes?

Esta última pergunta, em contraste com as anteriores, tem como objetivo aferir o estatuto socioeconómico do entrevistado, compreendendo se há limitações financeiras que influenciem o seu estilo de vida.

Tenta, neste ponto, criar uma transição natural, para assim suscitar a experiência do estatuto socioeconómico subjetivo e do estatuto socioeconómico relativo (o modo como o entrevistado vê o seu próprio estatuto social em comparação com outros dos seus pares).

- Até que ponto achas que há pressão (por exemplo, no estilo de roupa) na escola e fora da escola?

Esta pergunta tem como objetivo perceber se o entrevistado sente pressão para usar roupas de marca, e como é que o entrevistado sente e encara essa pressão. Esta pergunta pode revelar o que o entrevistado pensa sobre o seu contexto social, ou seja, se este afeta e limita ou se promove as suas possibilidades de escolha.

Uso dos meios digitais

Gostaria que me descrevesse um dia comum para ti.

Diz-me o que fazes no teu dia a dia, tendo em conta os diferentes meios digitais que utilizas durante o dia.

Esta questão é crucial, porque nos dá uma porta de entrada para se perceber qual o contexto socioeconómico em que o entrevistado se insere, assim como o modo como encara o seu uso de meios digitais. Repare se o entrevistado enfatiza os meios digitais na sua descrição e, em caso afirmativo, quais. Repare também se menciona a televisão, e práticas como binge-watching e jogos online.

- Para que usas (meio que o entrevistado já mencionou)?
- Dizes que usas o meio X: podes explicar-me um pouco mais o que é que isso significa para ti?
- Há regras na tua casa relativamente ao uso da televisão, por exemplo?
- E há regras para o uso da internet ou do telemóvel?
 - E de outros meios digitais? Podes dar-me alguns exemplos?
 - Essas regras que existem agora foram sempre assim? Mudaram – e se sim, como – à medida que foste crescendo?
- O que achas dessas regras? São impostas pelos pais ou negociadas contigo?
- Referiste o teu smartphone: podes falar-me um pouco mais da importância que o smartphone tem no teu dia a dia?
- Como reagirias se te esquecesses do smartphone em casa? Ou se já te aconteceu...
- Diz-me, por favor, quais as três palavras que te ocorrem de imediato quando ouves falar em «redes sociais».

Neste ponto, tenta fazer com que o entrevistado reflita sobre os aspetos positivos e negativos das redes sociais, e qual o impacto que estes aspetos têm sobre ele/ela.

- O que representam para ti as redes sociais?
(avaliar atitudes para voltar mais adiante)
- O que vês de positivo nas redes sociais? *(pontos a referir para que o entrevistado desenvolva a sua resposta - positivo: contato com amigos, estar ao corrente de eventos sociais; negativo: busca da perfeição, comparação social, falta de privacidade)*
- E o que vês nelas de negativo?
- O que achas do teu uso das redes sociais que me referiste? *(aqui há que focar as redes sociais que o entrevistado mencionou antes)*
- Quantas horas por dia, aproximadamente, costumavas passar nas redes sociais?
 - Achas que isso é considerado muito, normal, ou pouco?
- Com que tipo de pessoas manténs ligação através das redes sociais?

Referiste os meios digitais x, y e z. Consideras que há mais meios digitais além desses, mesmo que não uses?

- Há alguma razão para não usares esse(s) meio(s)?
- Como é que a pandemia Covid-19 afetou a tua relação com os meios digitais?
 - Em relação ao tipo de atividades que fazes
 - Em relação ao tempo que passas online
 - Em relação ao tipo de regras que criou

O objetivo é compreender se, durante a pandemia, o entrevistado alterou as suas práticas digitais, e se esta situação veio interromper comportamentos de desconexão digital prévios, e como o entrevistado se sente relativamente a isso.

Desconexão

NOTA: Nesta parte da entrevista, é importante seguir o guião consoante as respostas do entrevistado. Deste modo, as perguntas estarão adequadas à experiência vivida pelo entrevistado.

- Tendo em conta as tuas experiências, podes falar-me um pouco sobre se pensaste alguma vez desligar-te ou reduzir a tua utilização dos meios digitais, seja redes sociais, seja o telemóvel, ou outro dos meios que referiste?

Em seguida, há que formular as perguntas de acordo com a resposta do entrevistado, ou seja, caso tenha respondido “SIM”, seguir para a parte A., caso tenha respondido “NÃO”, saltar a parte A e seguir diretamente para a parte B.

PARTE A

Aplicável apenas a quem responde SIM.

- E alguma vez conseguiste desligar-te de algum desses meios?

Caso tenha respondido “SIM”, seguir a opção i., caso tenha respondido “NÃO”, seguir opção ii..

i. Se sim

- Podes dizer-me porque quiseste desligar-te dos meios digitais?
- Que estratégia concreta utilizaste, ou utilizas, para te desconectares?
- De que plataformas digitais te desligaste?
- Durante quanto tempo?
- Dirias que tiveste influência de alguém para optares por essas estratégias?

O objetivo é identificar estratégias concretas de desconexão, com o objetivo de identificar se são mais radicais e profundas, ou temporárias, ou se é uma autorregulação dinâmica. Uma vez identificado este tipo de estratégia, seguir o guião de entrevista apropriado.

1) Experiências de desconexão (prolongada ou temporária)

- Que vantagens ou benefícios reconheces nas tuas experiências de te desligares do digital?
- E que dificuldades ou barreiras enfrentaste?
- Que resultados e efeitos esta desconexão teve posteriormente?
- A tua desconexão teve algum impacto ou influenciou alguém que te rodeia a mudar os seus hábitos?

Caso o período de desconexão já tenha terminado, seguir para as próximas questões.

- Porque é que sentiste a necessidade de te voltares a ligar ao mundo digital?
- Quando retomaste a tua vida habitual, como ficou a tua relação com os meios digitais?

2) Autorregulação

- Que tipo de estratégias é que implementaste para controlar ou reduzir a utilização dos meios digitais que escolheste?
- Qual o limite de tempo que impuseste no uso dos meios digitais, redes sociais ou telemóvel? Ou tens outras estratégias, como por exemplo não usar algumas plataformas?
- Que vantagens ou benefícios reconheces nas tuas experiências de te desligares do digital?
- E que dificuldades ou barreiras enfrentaste?
- Consegues manter os limites que estipulaste para ti próprio, ou a tua utilização varia?
- Que resultados e efeitos é que esta redução do uso de tecnologias digitais teve posteriormente?

Independentemente dos caminhos 1) ou 2), no final desta parte deve ser pedido aos entrevistados que viveram experiências de desconexão (mais prolongadas ou mais curtas, com ou sem sucesso), que respondam a um questionário relacionado com o seu bem-estar durante esse(s) período(s).

- Durante o período de desconexão que viveste, por favor indica como te sentiste através do seguinte link, e, por favor, indica o nome alternativo ao teu que escolheste no início da entrevista. Este questionário não se destina a ser partilhado, e será analisado em anonimato. <https://bit.ly/3v4vJ6T>

ii. Se, não

- Podes dizer-me porque pensaste em desligar-te dos meios digitais?
- O que leva a que não te consigas desligar, embora o queiras fazer?

- Conta-nos uma experiência em que tenhas tentado desligar-te ou reduzir o uso de algum meio digital, rede social, ou mesmo do telemóvel e não tenhas conseguido. Qual era o meio? O que tentaste fazer?
- Que resultados e efeitos é que estas experiências tiveram posteriormente?
- Porque é que sentiste a necessidade de te voltares a ligar ao mundo digital?
- Quando retomaste a tua vida habitual, como ficou a tua relação com os meios digitais?

PARTE B

Aplicável a TODOS os entrevistados

O seguinte conjunto de questões deve ser feito ao entrevistado independentemente do caminho seguido na parte anterior do guião.

- Até que ponto sentes pressão para estares ligado ao digital?
- Esse é um tema de conversa entre os teus amigos?
 - E na família
- Sentes que estar conectado (usar meios digitais) te aproxima ou afasta das pessoas que te rodeiam?
- Conheces alguém que se tenha desligado dos meios digitais, ou pelo menos tentado?
 - Pais ou família?
 - Amigos?
- Vês este tema de desligar dos meios digitais falado nas redes sociais, por exemplo, por influenciadores?
- Mencionaste no início que... (*ambiente sentido na turma e na escola, bem como o ambiente familiar*) – de que modo é que isso influenciou a tua tentativa / iniciativa de te desligares dos meios digitais?
- Como vês o teu futuro daqui a 10 anos?

O objetivo desta pergunta é entrar na fase final da entrevista, e compreender até que ponto é que o entrevistado vê os meios digitais integrados no seu futuro.

Fim e comentários de conclusão

Obrigado por me teres dispensado o teu tempo e por participares na entrevista.

- Para além de tudo aquilo que abordámos, há mais alguma coisa que consideres importante e que queiras acrescentar ao que já foi dito?

Appendix 3 – Well-being questionnaire

Questionário - Níveis de bem-estar durante período de desconexão

MHC-SF

(Keyes, C. L. M., 2008; trad. e adap. de Cherpe, S.; Matos, A. P.; André, R. S., 2009)

Instruções

Por favor, responde às questões seguintes relativamente à forma como te sentiste durante um período de desconexão que tenhas vivido. Selecciona a opção que melhor representa quantas vezes experienciaste ou sentiste o seguinte, numa escala entre "Nunca" e "Todos os dias".

É importante saberes que não existem respostas corretas. Por isso, tenta responder de forma sincera e honesta. As respostas são confidenciais.

Por favor, indica o pseudónimo que escolheste no início da entrevista: _____

Durante o período de desconexão, quantas vezes (te) sentiste:	Nunca	1 ou 2 vezes	Cerca de 1 a 2 vezes por semana	Cerca de 2 a 3 vezes por semana	Quase todos os dias	Todos os dias
1. Feliz						
2. Interessado pela vida						
3. Satisfeito						
4. Que tinhas alguma coisa importante para contribuir para a sociedade						
5. Que pertencias a uma comunidade (como a um grupo social, à tua escola ou ao teu bairro)						
6. Que a nossa sociedade se está a tornar num lugar melhor para pessoas como tu						
7. Que as pessoas são essencialmente boas						
8. Que a forma como a nossa sociedade funciona te faz sentido						
9. Que gostavas da maior parte das características da tua personalidade						
10. Que geriste bem as responsabilidades da tua vida diária						
11. Que tiveste relações calorosas e de confiança com pessoas da tua idade						

12. Que tiveste experiências que te permitiram crescer e tornares-te numa pessoas melhor						
13. Confiante para pensar ou exprimir as tuas próprias ideias e opiniões						
14. Que a tua vida tem uma direcção ou significado						