Digital detox: Resisting media and regaining authentic life

Introduction

A yearning for authenticity is a dominating trend in our contemporary society, as the fascination for the 'real', 'genuine' and 'original' is manifested in everything from consumer trends and political communication, to self-help literature and the mindfulness movement (Baudrillard 2008; Banet-Weiser 2012; Dillard 2016; Euromonitor 2017; Enli 2015, 2017). The question of what is means to live an authentic life has become increasingly complicated, not least because of digital media and tools for online communication that have altered the ways we relate to time, space and ourselves (Feenberg and Barney (eds.) 2004).

Digital detox is a phenomenon accentuating the dilemmas of what it means to be authentically human in the age of online interactions, faceless communication, and artificial intelligence. Authenticity is often associated with normative ideals, and digital media and online communication accordingly tend to be perceived as a barrier against authentic life. Digital detox is the encouragement and desire to disconnect from online or digital media for a longer or shorter period. Although the motivation is rarely to disconnect permanently, digital detox is a sign that constant connectivity is experienced as negative and worth resisting. Rather than celebrating the opportunities of new media technologies, the digital detox trend is characterized by nostalgia for a past where people had more time on their hands, a more defined space, and a less stressful lifestyle. Digital detox stands in a tradition of media and technological resistance and resembles reactions against for example the

telephone (Kline 2003), cinema (Grieveson 2004), television (Kcrmar 2009) and many other communication technologies (see Syvertsen 2017 for overview). Yet, there are also novelties and differences, which will be explored in this article.

By studying digital detox, we unpack the multifaceted reception of digital media, as well as the options open to citizens who resist. Ubiquitous media and internet pose new challenges for audiences, not just in terms of using the new media actively and critically, but also in terms of organising daily life. Drawing on textual analysis of self-help literature and corporate websites, the paper discusses three main research questions. First, how do digital detox texts describe the main *problems* caused by digital media overload? We point to three aspects critical to authenticity: humans' sense of time, space and mind/body? Second, what are the main *strategies* suggested to reduce potential damage caused by digital media overload? We elicit both practical and more existential advice. Third, how can digital detox be understood in a wider cultural and political context? In the final section we discuss digital detox as a symptom of societal responsibilization, self-optimization and commodification. We argue that digital detox illuminates the transition to a self-regulation society, where individuals are expected to balance an increasingly complex set of (mediated) pressures on everyday life, including the pressure to constantly improve, and that the detox market provide viable business opportunities.

Digital detox: The term

Digital detox is a relatively new concept, appearing on websites around 2010.[1] From 2013, the concept is included in the Oxford dictionary:

> informal: A period of time during which a person refrains from using electronic devices such as smartphones or computers, regarded as an opportunity to reduce stress or focus on social interaction in the physical world. Example: 'break free of your devices and go on a digital detox.'[2]

The concepts of digital detox and media detox are not precise; sometimes they are used to describe definite periods of media or digital abstention and sometimes a more gradual process of reduction and reorganisation. In self-help books (see, for example Zahariades 2016, Price 2018), digital detox measures vary from spending an hour or two without a mobile phone to a long-term break or digital detox holiday. The media aspect is also varying; while digital detox inevitably includes refraining from using online and social media, such as checking Facebook and online news sources and playing online games, it may also imply refraining from other media such as television, and/or other digital services, including work related tools and programs. What is common to all descriptions, however, is the presumption that online media and work tools are invasive, and that current patterns of usage is dangerous and unhealthy. As such, the term digital detox stands in a long line of metaphors related to toxicity, infections and health used by media critics and resisters (Syvertsen 2017, 121 ff). From early on, popular media was likened to infections, trash, sewage and poison (see, for example, Sutter 2003), and bodily metaphors continued with expressions such as 'couch potato' for describing TV-induced passivity, and 'a juggler's brain' for online-induced hyperactivity (Carr 2010, 115). Hence, a digital detox can be a metaphorical 'cure' for the damage done by cumulative waves of media and online services.

Etymologically, the concept of digital detox is derived from the medical term detoxification; getting rid of substances such as alcohol, nicotine or other real or presumed toxins from the body. Detoxing can, on one hand, mean a specific medical process, but it also encompasses a wider range of measures to achieve well-being and a healthy balance in life. There is a self-help tradition of detox building on the legacy from the 12-step programme for Alcoholics Anonymous, to later efforts to control dangerous and behavioural

impulses (Madsen 2010, 2014, Illouz 2008 and McGee 2005). From its origins in religious practices, fasting and self-denial of food have for long been a measure of purification; from the 1920s, dieting was on the rise (Giddens 1991, 104). Digital detoxing and media fasting are newer elements in a catalogue of abstinence and consciousness-raising programmes. As such, digital detox fits well with individual and corporate lifestyle trends such as mindfulness, healthy eating and new age forms of self-improvement (Sutton 2017). From the early 2010s, holiday packages emerged with a digital detox label, clearly spin-offs from other 'healthy holiday' concepts emphasizing beauty, exercise or mindfulness.[3] Nevertheless, digital detox is also grounded in consumer activism and popular resistance against commercial media. For example, *Adbusters*, the Canadian-based worldwide network of 'culture jammers' organised what could be the first 'digital detox week' in April 2010.[4] In this paper, we explore how detox-texts express the need for, and benefits of, taking a break from online media and other digital services.

Media resistance and the yearning for authenticity

Although texts promoting digital detox rarely encourage permanent abstention, they urge reduction, restraint and a more conscious use of online media and platforms. As noted above, this is both a reaction to communication overload and a yearning for authenticity. In this paper, we draw on studies of media resistance and non-use as well as studies of authenticity and existentialism to discuss the texts promoting digital detox. Several studies investigate media resistance and non-use as a way of criticising and rejecting media platforms, functions, genres and user patterns. Winn (1980) and Kcrmar (2009) discuss the experiences of television resisters and show how non-viewing can be a powerful expression of alternative identities and values. Sutton (2017) observes life in a Californian detox camp

and discusses motivations and ideologies. Studies explore ambivalence to and withdrawal from services such as Facebook (Portwood-Stacer 2012, Baumer et al. 2013), Twitter (Schoenebeck 2014), the dating app Grindr (Brubaker et al. 2016), online news (Woodstock 2013) and social network sites more generally (Light 2015, Woodstock 2014). Syversen (2017) charts media resistance historically and argues that rejection of mass and digital media is grounded in shared values such as morality, culture, enlightenment, democracy, community and health. She observes that there are fewer political protests and more emphasis on self-regulation with social and online media, arguing that mobility and ubiquity has made it more difficult to organise grassroot movements and protests (92ff, see also Karlsen & Syvertsen 2016, Gomes et al. 2018).

Related to media resistance are studies exploring the motivations of those who refuse to go online. Although the rationale of such studies is often to discover barriers to be overcome, respondents present value-based answers to why they prefer offline communications akin to those found in detox literature (Helsper and Reisdorff, 2013, van Deursen and Helsper 2015). Studies show that users of different generations perceive social and online media to be superficial, narcissistic and alienating, and describe how they avoid genres that are deemed invasive and disturbing (Lüders & Brandtzæg 2014, Helgerud 2017). A key dilemma is the tension between impression management pressures and the desire to present an authentic sense of self (Ellison et al. 2006, 414, Lüders & Brandtzæg 2014).

Drawing on cross-disciplinary research literature, Enli (2015) defines suggests two definitions of authenticity in mediated contexts: First, authenticity is about being 'original', as opposed to manufactured, a definition which implies a degree of nostalgia where aspects of pre-modern societies are idealized; commercial products are for example regarded as

inauthentic while non-commercial alternatives are authentic (Banet-Weiser 2012). A second meaning of authenticity draws on philosophy and existentialism, and the idea of being 'real', and 'true to one's inner self', which emerged in the late eighteenth century and arose out of experiences with the first wave of modernization in the West (Berman 2009).

Concerns about authenticity are endemic to the reception of new media; paralleling the dawn of writing, the emergence of digital communication evokes questions about what it means to be authentically human (Ickes 1993; Ellison, Heino and Gibbs 2006; Baym 2010). From the start, online communication was associated with threats to authentic human relations; fears for cynical relations, emotional deception, and fake personas flourished in scenarios for interactions in cyberspace (see Reingold 1991; Turkle 1995). More recently, an emerging body of research pinpoint that there are blurring boundaries between our offline and online identities, and that digital communication might also be experienced as authentic (Palfrey and Gasser 2008; Baym 2010; Lobinger and Brantner 2015). According to Nancy Baym (2010, 89) "new media do not offer inauthentic simulations that distracts from or substitute for real engagement", because "what happens through mediations are interwoven, not juxtaposed, with everything else". Several scholars argue that digital communication has imposed a shift; where social life has become a 'cyberlife' characterized by a confessional culture (Bauman 2007, 2-3), and that we live a 'media life' in which online interactions and confessional behaviours are equally meaningful as its offline versions (Deuze 2012, 92). Studies of online-self presentations even argue that selfies might empower users to experience an "authentic sense of self" (Ellison et al 2006, 415; Barry et. al 2015, 2). Despite these more positive approaches to digital interactions, the question of what it means to be authentic in the context of digital connections and media invasion

continues to be dilemmatic, and people become increasingly oriented towards finding strategies to preserve authenticity in human connections and of ourselves (Baym 2010, 155). Detox is an interesting case to discuss considering how technological disruption not only creates a yearning for authenticity, but also redefines what it means to be authentically human.

Sources and material

The emprical sources are self-help literature and corporate websites. Self-help literature promoting detox adhere to traditional characteristics of the genre with a mixture of personal experiences and advice for self-regulation (e.g. Snow 2017; Huffington 2014). They stand in a traditions of literature aiding users in handling new technology. For example, at the advent of printing there were discussions on how to handle "the multitude of books", radio brought advice on how not to be overwhelmed but to listen carefully and avoid multitasking.

Many books on this topic are simple self-help manuals, downloadable for a low price; others are more accomplished and available from mainstream publishing houses. Specifically, we have chosen eleven books, published between 2010 and 2018, of which seven are manuals, with elements of memoirs and reflection: Talks' *A to Z of Digital Detoxing: A practical family guide* (2013); Fielding's *Unplugged: The Essential Digital Detox Plan* (2014) Formica's *Digital detox: 7 Steps to find your inner balance* (2015); Zahariades' *Digital detox: Unplug to reclaim your life* (2016), Goodin's *Off: Your Digital Detox for a Better Life* (2017), Snow's *Log Off: How to Stay Connected after Disconnecting* (2017) and Price's *How to Break up With Your Phone: The 30-day Plan to Take Back Your Life* (2018). Furthermore, we include five memoirs, addressing digital overload and digital detox:

Maushart's *The Winter of Our Disconnect: How Three Totally Wired Teenagers (and a*

Mother Who Slept with Her iPhone) Pulled the Plug on Their Technology and Lived to Tell the

Tale (2010), Huffington's *Thrive. The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a*

Happier Life (2014), Ravatn's *Operation self-discipline* (2014), and Bratsberg and Moen's *Log*

off (2015).[5] Reflecting the international outspread of the digital detox phenomenon, the

selected texts are written by authors based United States, Australia, Europe, and the Nordic

region. In spite of different national cultures, these are societies with a high level of Internet

usage.

The second primary source is websites by businesses promoting detox camps, coaching,

consultancy and merchandise. The sample include websites with digital detox in the title or

as a main purpose, including *Digital Detox*[6], the *Digital detox company*[7], *Digital Detoxing*[8]

and Thrive Global[9]. In addition to the primary sources, the above services and texts generate

substantial secondary source material such as journalistic pieces, commentaries and

personal testimonials. The self-help books and the corporate websites are supplementing

each other, but they are also to partly overlapping sources because many authors also have

financial interests in detox trips and advertise their book on the corporate website and vice

versa (e.g. Talks 2013; Goodin 2017). Both genres to a large degree contains confessions,

essential in cyberlife (Bauman 2007) and a key authenticity marker (Enli 2015, 91). The tech

entrepreneur Arianna Huffington for example set up the health and wellness platform

Thrive global[10] in 2016 after a dramatic personal burnout. "[A]fter lying in her own pool of

blood, she began to question how overworking and stress had overtaken her life". [11] The

now deceased Levi Felix, co-founder of the trademark site Digital detox®[12] describes how he

was "enthralled with the internet" at the age of 24, but health concerns led him to leave his

job at a thriving start-up "to take a sabbatical from his "always-on," constantly tethered, digitally enthralled reality." The digital detox-authors' main authority is based on their own experiences and confessions, not least because their mentions of research, statistics, and scientific studies are, with a few exceptions, unspecified, unreferenced and anecdotical.

The analysis is explorative and bottom-up: we look for statements describing problems motivating individuals to detox, as well as descriptions of strategies to combat the problems. The analysis is structured around three dimensions emerging in the material, which are strongly related to authenticity. First, we examine problems of temporal overload, the experience of 24/7 connectivity and the desire for non-mediated periods and improved time-management. Second, we examine statements describing space invasion and the difficulty of being present just where you are. Third, we examine statements describing potential damage to body and mind resulting from constant connectivity and intense use of social and online media. The, afterwards, we turn to a discussion of implications.

Temporal overload: No sense of time

Digital detox texts are based on presumptions of temporal overload; digital tools and media occupy too much time and distract us from what is valuable and essential for a good life. The descriptions of online time waste flourish, such as: "You're probably wasting at least a few hours every day" (Zahariades 2016), "Our time is precious and limited, and yet we're wasting so much of it every day (Goodin 2017) " (..) despite our wide use of digital tools, we are grasping for more time now than ever before" (Formica 2015), and "We're living a life of time famine" (Huffington 2014).

Digital media disrupts our perception of time, our very 'sense of time', according to the self-help literature: "The addict experiences this loss of time on a regular basis. Because she spends so much time in isolation staring at her phone, tablet, or computer screen, she often has no idea what time it is" (Zahariades 2016), and "I often picked up my phone "just to check", only to resurface an hour later wondering where the time had gone" (Price 2018). Some texts describe an overwhelming sensation of being constantly connected, all days and all hours, such as the website of The Digital Detox Company: [13]

> We are drowning under an electronic avalanche of incoming emails, texts and instant messaging. We are struggling with the effects of this continuous deluge of digital data and are becoming aware of the impact that being "on" 24/7 is having on every aspect of our lives. …. However, that same technology that enables us to be connected digitally may actually be responsible for disconnecting us from our *real lives*" (authors italic).

Detox-promoting texts describe situations ranging from serious addictions to mild invasion – but in all cases the root of the problem is that there is just too much; your life and the lives of those around you are invaded and out of control. Although some authors explicitly distance themselves from nostalgia (see, for example, Maushart 2010, 8), the texts reveal a longing for a less complicated time, when people could live authentically in the moment. The premise of temporal overload is often built on a difference between 'then' and 'now':

> Thirty years ago, information came to us in the form of a stream. We had newspapers, magazines, and a handful of television programs. We visited the library if we needed to research something. It was manageable. Today, information comes to at us in the form of a flood… We are drowning in information. We're being overwhelmed by a continuous torrent of content (Zahariades, 2016).

Media and cultural history provide ample documentation that we are not the first generation to feel overloaded by new media. Anthropologists describe how humans invent measures to «save time», but end up feeling that they have less time than before (see, for example, Hylland-Eriksen 2001). In the sixteenth century, «the multitude of books» prompted warnings that literary overload could lead to a "barbarous" future unless effective

reading strategies were adopted to manage the overwhelming influx of material (Blair 2003, 11). If we look back thirty years, in a time described as peaceful and 'manageable' in the above quote, the debate about the influx of new television channels in fact prompted use of the same metaphors: "tide", "flood" and "storm" (Syvertsen 1992, 217). Yet, despite the familiarity of the arguments, the cumulative impact of digital media, and the convergence between different networks and platforms, clearly require new management strategies and greater effort to carve out time slots that are not media-centred.

Digital detox texts offer numerous tips on how to handle temporal overload. The advice can be divided into two categories, of which the first are practical advice for time management and self-control. Examples include wearing a wristwatch and purchasing an old-fashioned alarm clock, rather than using the mobile phone (Zahariades 2016; Goodin 2017), hiding your smartphone (Ravatn 2014; Bratsberg and Moen 2015; Goodin 2017), screen free time-zones (Goodin 2017; Price 2018), or installing apps such as "Moment" to restrict interruptions (Talks 2013; Formica 2015). Several texts also advice detox periods, for example characterized as 'digital sabbath' (Price 2018) or 'digital fasting' (Goodin 2017), which can be a day a week, a whole week or a vacation. Some authors invite readers to meet them 'for real' by participating in a digital detox event organized by their own company (Talks 2013). An increasing number of companies offer customers help to regain control over time, both by confiscating their digital devices to make it easier to be present in the moment, and to implement a rule that it is not allowed to talk about time, to increase spontaneity and immediacy.[14]

The second type of advice is more existentialist, such as reflecting on the meaninglessness of trivial online activities in a life-death perspective (Ravatn 2014,74),

striving to experience the moment by watching the sunset or connecting with strangers (Zahariades 2016), and being more present in everyday life: "Don't miss the moment!" (Huffington 2014)[15] The point is to anchor the digital detox more deeply in personal values: "if you do not know your purpose, time management tips and tools will not be effective because you could be engaged in activities that are not in alignment with what you truly want" (Formica 2015). Accordingly, the strategies to regain control over time through digital detox are connected to ideals of living an authentic life, where our time is prioritized in accordance with our genuine needs rather than external expectations.

Spatial overload: No sense of place

In addition to loss of control over time, texts promoting detox present dire descriptions of spatial overload, and digital hybrid living, where individuals are trapped in between the 'real' and the 'virtual'. Joshua Meyrowitz' (1985) term 'no sense of place' describe how TV "decreased the significance of physical presence in the experience of people and events. One can now be an audience to a social phenomenon without being physically present; one can communicate directly with others without meeting in the same place" (vii).

Digital technologies accelerate a radical dislocation of our experience of both space and time (Barney 2005: 33). The self-help literature diagnoses the problem as a devaluation of our real-life encounters and face-to-face meetings, because almost everyone is distracted by activities in online environments: "People are more concerned with what's happening online than what is happening right in front of them" (Snow 2017). Typically, the digital detox texts provide metaphors to describe how digital hybrid living harms your offline relationships: "screen wall" and "screen jealousy" are concepts that describe feelings of being shut out or put on hold because your partner or friend is being too preoccupied with a

screen (Bratsberg and Moen 2015, 65 ff). Other terms are "screen invasion, "the ecosystem of interruption technologies", "attention management", and "interruption Science" (Brabazon 2012; Helding, 2011, 200-201, see also Webb and Wasilick 2015). These metaphors pinpoint how the persuasive design of social and online media not only interrupt us temporally, but also distracts us from being present in a certain spatial and relational context.

Digital detox books describes in detail the implications of digital hybrid living, often with examples of distractions in their own lives, making a turning-point in their use of digital media: For example, Moen, describes a pivotal moment of recognition when he missed his child's goal at a soccer match because he was busy surfing the net on his smartphone: "The next day I went to the store and bought a dumb phone instead" (Bratsberg and Moen 2015, 12). Likewise, Maushart initiated a detox after being worried about how the media "began to function as a force field separating my children from what my son, only half ironically, called RL (Real Life)" (2010, vi-vii). In line with the notion of being «alone together», as coined by Turkle (2011), the author describes a longing for more authentic connection with her family, in what she defined as "a real space and time":

> [W]e had ceased to function as a family. We were just a collection of individuals who were very connected outwards – to friends, business, school and sources of entertainment and information. But we simply weren't connecting with one another in real space and time in any sort of authentic way.[16]

Digital detox texts suggest two main strategies for handling challenges of spatial overload and digital hybrid living. The first strategy is to reconnect with nature. Rather than living in artificial environments, readers are recommended to seek unspoiled nature, in line with the widespread notion that simple rural life reduces stress and enhances harmony: "Spend

more time in the nature, take a walk in the park or go hiking in the forest. Fresh air and wonderful Norwegian nature is good medicine" (Bratsberg and Moen 2015, 182).

A general feature of digital detox texts is that they promote outdoors activities, and to connect with nature (Fielding 2014; Snow 2017; Goodin 2017; Price 2018). Moreover, some texts underline the need for connecting physically with the nature, as a strategy to escape the stressful duality of modern hybrid living:

> Most of us live in urban environments, and have gradually disconnected from nature. You see, humans have lived on earth for at least 200,000 years, always in contact and symbiosis with nature. The disconnect that we experience now from nature is likely to have significant and unprecedented consequences on our inner balance …. Recently, is has been scientifically demonstrated that having a direct contact with the earth has healing power …. It is particularly important to be in direct contact with dirt, grass, or any type of soil, daily (Formica 2015).

> "Sit right down on the grass, not on a rock or a bench or a chair. Feel the grass under your hands and feet" (Goodin 2017)

Precisely this notion of a space dedicated to connecting with nature and disconnecting from online media is at the hearth of what is offered by digital detox businesses. These companies capitalize on the demand for non-mediated space by offering nature- and wildlife-based retreats to help customers disconnect from digital distractions. CNN refers to a hotel detox package that includes "a detox survival kit", containing "a board game, a walking map, a tree-planting kit, and other reminders that life exists beyond the confines of an iPad". [17] Locations are often exotic and remote; *Samatahiti yoga and surf retreat* invites customers to sleep in a hut in the jungle, as a "way to immerse yourself in nature and take yourself out of the digital world".[18] The retreat *Montagne Alternative* promise that a stay at the renovated ruined stone and timber buildings in a remote village amid hiking paths and open spaces will have a positive effect[19]: "The peace and quiet, the authentic and beautiful surroundings, will unleash positive emotions and strengthen relationships. You will leave the village full of inspiration and happiness!"[20]

The second strategy for regaining a sense of place is what the text define as real human connections; face-to-face interactions without interruptions from digital media.[21] In the digital detox literature, the authors define physical co-presence as a precondition for as authentic human relationships:

> The single most important factor for living a good life is good relationships … Relations are based on interpersonal values and feelings. They must be experienced in real life. No emoticon in the world can replace a face. A face you see right in front of you. You notice every little detail. … Real relations happen in real life (Bratsberg and Moen 2015, 143-44).

In particular, the point about physical eye contact is repeated by many of the self-help texts: "If you're going to make meaningful connections with people, you must look at them and the life in front of us in the eye" (Snow 2018). The challenging aspects of looking people in the eye, and making contact with strangers, and even your own family and friends, is also addressed in the digital detox texts. However, the point is to overcome shyness and social anxiety, such as Snow's (2017, 64) self-challenge to dear being present in public: "when in public, I make a point never to use my phone as a social anxiety blanket", and Zahariades' (2016) advise to be social and present: "Strike up a conversation with a stranger: If you're at a coffee-shop, lean over to the person sitting next to you and comment on the shop's food". Being present in the same space, rather than being distracted by online media and digital communication was one of the key rewards from the digital detox experience reported on by Susan Maushart (2010); After the six-month media pause, Maushart (2010) and her family "found – among other things – each other":

> We hung out on each other's beds, and on the couch in front of the fire. We lingered for no good reason over dinner. We invaded each other's space. Whereas before we'd scurry to our separate corners, we now found excuses to bond together and stay there (322).

Body and mind: No sense of self

A third major concern in the digital detox texts is physical and mental ailments because of digital media overload. Our bodies and minds are suffering because of heavy use of communication technologies. The physical symptoms described include lack of exercise, weight gain, unhealthy eating and muscular pain. Digital detox books typically offer diagnoses, and describe conditions such as "text claw", "smartphone elbow", "text neck", and "computer vision syndrome" (Huffington 2014; Formica 2015; Bratsberg and Moen 2015; Price 2018).

Furthermore, the digital and media detox texts describe mental symptoms such as depression, fear, anxiety, and stress, and loneliness (Formica 2015; Zahariades 2016; Goodin 2017; Price 2018). Social media is particularly argued to cause negative self-image because users are comparing themselves to others: "feelings of inadequacy are stirred up by witnessing our friends 'perfect' lives online" (Goodin 2017), and "Exposure to carefully curated images from others' lives leads to negative self-comparison, concluded a recent study from Harvard university, a.k.a. the birthplace of Facebook" (Snow 2017, 33). The self-help books moreover pinpoint that we seek solace in technology and distractions "because we are unwilling or uncomfortable confronting our own feelings" (Snow 2017, 61), yet only resulting in reinforced: "feelings of low self-worth" (Zahariades 2016).

Digital detox texts describe the problem of digital overload as addiction, both in a pathological and vernacular sense. A point raised in many self-help books is that the dopamine is the reason for addiction: "Dopamine makes us feel excited, and we like feeling excited" (Price 2018), and some compare the "dopamine loop" created by digital media to drug addiction: "it leads to compulsory disorders similar to those who are addicted to

chemical stimulants and depressants such as cocaine, caffeine, methamphetamines, nicotine and alcohol" (Snow 2017), and "heavy users of the Internet can suffer brain damage similar to those suffered by people who are addicted to drugs" (Talks 2013,43). Addiction is also described as FOMO (= Fear Of Missing Out), for example defined as «a permeating concern or worry related to not being present while others have pleasant or rewarding experiences" (Formica 2015). In turn, the self-help books and websites explain that FOMO causes loss of sleep and insomnia with reference to how LCD lights of tablets and smartphones stimulates you to stay awake (Formica 2015; Price 2018).[22]

Digital detox books and websites suggest strategies for reducing damaging effects on body and mind caused by digital media usage. Again, the strategies can be divided into two categories, of which the first is practical and the second is more existential. The main practical advises in the detox texts are nutritious food, sleep, exercise: "If it grows, eat it, if it does not grow, do not eat it" (Formica 2015), "Eat healthy, and often, and get enough sleep" (Ravatn 2014, 102), "a healthy diet, exercise, and sleep can help you find the right balance in the use of technology" (Bratsberg and Moen 2015, p. 132). In terms of exercise, the most often mentioned activities are walking (without your phone) and yoga (Zahariades 2016; Price 2018; Goodin 2017). Other guidelines are avoiding multi-tasking, deleting unrewarding Facebook 'friends', and self-discipline (Zahariades 2016, Bratsberg and Moen 2015, Ravatn 2014). The digital detox texts suggest a variety of analogue activities, including knitting, sawing, colouring, cooking (old recipe), handwriting and gardening (Talks 2013; Goodin 2017; Perice 2018). While some advises are general remedies: "Gardening is good for the mind, body and soul" (Talks 2013), others are specific solutions to a problem "Reading before bedtime will improve your sleep" (Goodin 2017). A healthy sleep hygiene is

described as one of the key rewards of doing a digital detox; Maushart tells how, during the

media fasting period, the youngest daughter begins to sleep regularly and regain her

energy. Her moodiness "which we'd put down to being a teenage girl … turned out to be

largely a function of being *tired*" (2010, 325).

Strategies to handle more existentialist challenges, including low self-esteem,

loneliness and addiction are widely offered in the self-help books and websites. Key advises

are to ignore external pressure, and to nurture our authentic self: "Disconnect from our

always-connected lives, and reconnect with ourselves" (Huffington 2014), "To be able to

share our authentic selves requires more than sharing of digital images and messaging

(Fielding 2014, 10), "allow you to 'be' and listen to your inner voice and rediscover your

authentic self (125).

Yet, in order to achieve this goal, the detox texts' supreme advice is a period of

abstention from digital media, alternatively a digital detox vacation. Digital detox®[23] for

example offers "a mindfulness based and psychological driven program with a handful of

journals, yoga mats, arts and crafts, typewriters, and one agenda; disconnect to reconnect".

The benefits of a digital detox trip are compared to a self-growth seminar, as will help you

"reconnect with your inner self", "If you do not go within you go without", "In order to feel

better, I started learning how to meditate", "I must be kind, loving and patient with myself.

The more self-love, kindness and patience I feel, the faster I will incorporate the new habit

in my life", "The purpose is to create more awareness of what is going on in our mind and to

interrupt our identification with thoughts" (Formica 2015). Detox is "an important step

towards changing the way you see yourself" (Zahariades 2016). Again, the desired prize is a

more authentic life: "By disconnecting from our devices we reconnect with: ourselves, each

other, our communities, and the world around us … becoming more present, authentic, compassionate and understanding".[24]

The yearning for authenticity is integral to modernity, and the ideal of an authentic self is a modern construction; existentialist notions of authenticity as inwardness is manifested in modernism and the 'subjective turn' in modern culture. In a pre-modern society, there was little room for self-development and searching for the real reality under the surface (Berman 2009). The modern ideal of authenticity is about being true to oneself, but also implies self-fulfilment and self-realisation. As such, the digital detox trend offers not only practical advice to prevent invasion by omnipresent digital media, but also a more complete package of authenticity and self-improvement. If you follow the advice, you are on the road to "inner peace" and "relations in real life" (Bratsberg and Moen 2015, 144), and being more "in touch with our inner selves" (Goodin 2017).

As we turn to the wider cultural and societal implications of digital detox, these aspects place digital detox firmly within a discourse of self-optimization. Self-optimization describes the trend where individuals are not only expected but feel obliged to improve their lives. The detox trend is related to many other forms of self-optimization: healthy eating, exercise, mindfulness, a balanced lifestyle etc. Indeed, digital detox texts often include a description of a personal conversion as a generic feature. Self-help authors and founders of corporate detox sites describe their first-hand experiences with the negative side effects of digital media, and demonstrate how they have managed to turn their lives around; implying that their journeys of self-improvement will inspire others. In the self-help books analysed for this study, all authors confess to have been a 'bad role model prior to conversion, describing themselves as a former 'tech addict' (Formica 2015), 'digiholic' (Talk 2013), or

'wired geek' (Snow 2016), or describing how they recovered from 'nomopfobia', the fear of being without your phone (Goodin 2017), procrastination and web-induced lack of concentration (Ravatn 2014), and health-damaging burnout (Huffington 2014). Confessions based on first-hand experiences increase the credibility of authors and founders as inspirational characters in the market for 'authentic lifestyles'.

Related to the trend of self-optimization is the trend of responsibilization, also highly relevant to understand the cultural phenomenon of digital detox. Responsibilization is a term from the literature of governmentality, referring to "the process whereby subjects are rendered individually responsible for a task which previously would have been the duty of another – usually a state agency – or would not have been recognized as a responsibility at all" (Wakefield & Fleming 2009, 277). Responsibilization is associated with neo-liberal policies and the shift onto individuals for designing personal solutions to global problems (Elliott & Lemert 2009). The digital detox trend derives part of its credibility from its roots in previous forms of media resistance, such as grass-roots movements for TV-free periods and campaigns against media commercialization or amorality. The corporate detox firms often have a 'manifesto', their charismatic leaders engage in public speaking on behalf of the cause, they publish books, hold meetings and construct themselves as inspirational agitators. Yet, the aim of corporate detox is in no sense to build grass-root movements or achieve substantial political change. Instead, personal conversions and 'social movement'-character is more of a business strategy; digital detox is used as a trademark, and yearning for authenticity lays the ground for a burgeoning market of self-help literature, retreats, and events. In a sense, this is the 'Californian' way of being societally engaged (Sutton 2017). Fish (2017) criticises the lack of political agenda; the detox 'movement' do not work for

changes in work rules for example, to limit the level of exploitation of workers, but more for

individual improvement. Rather than criticizing the technology or the industry, the problem

is the users and their relationship with digital media: "In reality, the problem lies in us,

rather than technology (Talks 2013, 82), and "the problem isn't smartphones themselves,

but the problem is our relationship with them" (Price 2018, 2).

As such, digital detox illuminates the shift in media resistance and protest from actions

to restrain certain media and protect individuals through regulations, to an emphasis on

heightened consciousness and taking a healthy pause (Syvertsen 2017, 93). These aspects

also point firmly to commodification, as a third societal force illuminating digital detox.

While digital detox is an interesting social and cultural phenomenon, it is also a sphere of

business opportunity. There are businesses to keep you attached to social and online media,

but also businesses that can help you get away.

Conclusion: Real life and media life

We have explored the phenomenon of digital detox and discussed three research

questions: How is the problem defined, what are the strategies suggested to deal with them

and what are the wider societal implications of the phenomenon of digital detox. We have

answered these questions and identified factors relevant to media resistance and

authenticity.

As discussed above, an authentic life presumably requires 1) a 'sense of time', in which

we restrict meaningless time-waste, are conscious about time, and spend time wisely and in

accordance with our inner values; 2) a 'sense of place', in which we are present, grounded

and connected with nature and people in real life; 3) a 'sense of self', meaning that we live

healthy lives and gain self-worth and confidence from within rather than depending on external feedback. In this study, we have shown how self-help literature and corporate websites promise improvements on all three counts. Digital detox reflects the cultural tendency to idealize and cherish 'authentic life'. The nostalgia for a time when humans lived in harmony with time, space and themselves, is presented as an alternative to the alienating 'space-time distanciation' which is a distinctive mark of postmodernity (Barney 2004:33). The nostalgia is paradoxical as the digital detox texts does not promote a tech-free society, but underline that there are positive aspects of digital media and argue that "We shouldn't be alarmist (…). The point of this book is not to get you to through your phone under the bus" (Price 2018), and "I don't think data plans and mobile Internet are the devil" (Snow 2016). The main point in digital detox texts is to promote a balance between our offline and online lives, for example: "we love all the opportunities in the new digital environment (…). As long as you find the right balance" (Bratsberg and Moen 2015, 185). While the narratives in the literature are often nostalgic, they are rarely historically specific.

Yet, despite the paradoxes, we should not underestimate the digital detox trend as a possible and sometimes rewarding response to the persuasive mechanisms of the media industry. Digital detox is a reaction to the experience of being temporally overloaded and invaded, trapped in a superficial, narcissistic and fabricated space, needing strategies to improve health and mindful presence. Studying digital detox confirms that the notion that life nowadays is digital life, popular in media studies, is contested; instead there is a continued insistence on the distinction between real life and digital life, mediated life and authentic life.

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