

**Building a mindful relationship
with digital media in metamodern times**

Exploring the opportunities for Zillennials prone to anxiety

Sofia Kaminska

MA Research Thesis

Lucerne School of Art and Design

Master of Arts in Design: Digital Ideation

First Supervisor

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Hans Kaspar Hugentobler

30.09.2023

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control**

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Abstract

In an era where digital immersion is the norm, this master's thesis probes the intricate dynamics between human behaviour and digital media, particularly among late millennials and Zillennials. The central issue addressed is the pervasive sense of dissatisfaction and anxiety many experience in the digital realm. The research seeks to uncover the root causes of this digital discontent: Why do users feel unsatisfied, anxious, and overwhelmed in their digital interactions?

Employing a multi-faceted methodology, this study combines desktop research, semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews, and self-reflection experimentation. A significant portion of the research involved engaging directly with the target demographic to gain first-hand insights. Results indicate that digital-induced anxiety is notably more prevalent among those predisposed to anxiety-related syndromes. While some solutions advocate for stringent digital diets, this thesis champions reshaping habits and routines for a balanced digital life.

Keywords: max. 5 keywords referring to your research thesis

Digital Anxiety, Zillennials, Digital Media, User Experience, Mindfulness

Affidavit

I hereby solemnly declare that I have independently prepared this final year thesis. Ideas directly or indirectly taken from outside sources are indicated as such.

In the process of writing this thesis:

- I utilized the AI-powered writing tool, Deepgram, to transcribe voice and video-recorded interviews.
- I employed ChatGPT to structure the text and create summaries of the interviews.
- I used Grammarly and LanguageTool for punctuation and grammar checks.
- I relied on DeepL and Google Translator for translating literature and interviews.

The work has not previously been presented to another examination authority nor otherwise published either in the same or in similar form.

Lucerne, 30.09.2023

Signature:



Foreword

I find immense joy in contemplating and expressing my thoughts about the internet, especially given its significance for those of us born at the cusp of the new millennium. Born in 1999, I represent a unique generation that witnessed the internet's formative years and its evolution into an integral part of our lives. The internet is so intrinsically woven into my existence that the boundary between it and me often seems indistinct. Yet, it's this exploration of interconnectedness, rather than leading to identity questions, that enthuses me and fuels my reflections.

I was born in an era when the internet, much like me, was taking baby steps into homes across the world. We have grown side by side, akin to twins who slowly become indistinguishable after birth. Although my earliest memories are tinted with the hues of the digital age, they aren't devoid of glimpses into a world just beginning to grapple with the dawn of the internet.

My early childhood was in a period when a shared family computer was a norm, not an exception. I still recall my first interaction with the internet, the awe, and wonder I felt at the seemingly endless pool of information at my fingertips. The first time I queried about something as trivial as a weekly horoscope, followed by a cheat code for a game I was engrossed in, it felt like I had accessed a vast reservoir of knowledge not available to everyone. This feeling of having a unique advantage, coupled with the realization that I could endlessly seek and find answers, is something I'll never forget.

My first social media sign-up occurred around my teenage years, coinciding with a time when having a personal computer was becoming commonplace, and smartphones were starting to find their way into everyone's hands. I remember the buzz that surrounded the arrival of my first smartphone during my middle school years. That's when the world began to shift dramatically towards an even more digital realm.

Today, the way I interact with the internet is fundamentally different. Rather than pulling out information, I am constantly pushed by notifications, emails, news, and alerts, with a dash of personal messages scattered in-between. The internet has morphed, with the era of social networks experiencing its zenith and now undergoing a transformative period. Now, our smartphones aren't just tools; they've become extensions of our beings, reshaping our relationships.

For me, reflecting on the internet's journey and its impact on our lives is not merely an academic exercise. It's an intimate exploration of my own growth narrative, a narrative intertwined with the digital age. Had I been born a decade earlier, I might have experienced the internet as a novelty; if born ten years later, I might have seen it as an integral part of existence. As it turned out, my generation could see the digital media as an equal, an evolving imaginary friend with whom we could embark on extraordinary adventures

beyond the real world. We were naive humans, growing alongside an emerging technology that would transform everything. I can't guess my potential personality, job, or circle of friends. Subtracting my online life seems equivalent to erasing part of myself.

The year 2020 marked our life online. It was a year of Zoom for work, socialization, and even dating. Though we were home, life truly occurred on our screens. As long as I've been cognizant, the internet and real life have been moving closer to each other, two distinct worlds irresistibly drawn together. I felt gratitude for the ability to connect with loved ones online, yet there was an underlying anxiety about the omnipresence of the digital sphere. The inability to fully embrace offline moments, coupled with the pressure of online hyper-productivity, left me feeling overwhelmed. While 2020 introduced beneficial changes like remote work flexibility, it also accelerated my online presence to match my offline pace, a shift I have mixed feelings about. The habit of sharing my life online stuck with me, making digital validation essential to be fulfilled offline.

We are humans, and our core desire is to feel understood, secure, and unique. So, what happened when we were offered countless and endlessly adaptable ways to connect and relate to each other? What did we create, and what did it transform us into?

When I refer to 'us,' I am speaking not just of my thoughts, but also the thoughts of those who share the same feeling. The generation of inbetweeners who are neither 100% Millennials nor 100% Gen Z. We are a mix of both. Technology evolution was a defining part of our childhood. We grew up while technology was evolving from Analogue to Digital, experiencing both worlds, opposed to millennials and generation Z who typically only experienced one type. Not all of them will be directly quoted, but their input has significantly contributed to this narrative.

Digital media is going through the period of change right now, we are leaving the post-social media era and entering the world of omnipresent AI. There are so many things happening everywhere all at once, we are bombarded with content and triggered by every notification. A lot of writing about the internet in the 21st century tends to be pessimistic. The ones who try to deal with it find see the only way to escape. But it doesn't have to be this way; if enough of us want change, we can make it happen. Despite the strange and daunting times, the internet has brought immense joy and changed many lives for the better.

I hope this work will resonate with people like me, fellow nonconformists who want to build more human-friendly, ecological relationships with their digital-selves. This work might not find the answers to all questions. Furthermore, it was not aimed at. It serves its purpose if it raises even more. Questioning the way we live, our habits and our culture. Opening the space for identifying complex issues rather than proving a certain theory. So, treat it as a door for opening more opportunities to reflect, explore and create.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Statement

Today's digital media¹ interactions are often dominated by ingrained habits, formulated through extensive repetition in specific contexts. Such habitual patterns can divert users from their intent, bringing feelings of regret. Most users remain oblivious to how these habits dictate their interactions. Unable to exert control, they feel powerless. Many also show anxiety linked to media consumption. While solutions like digital detoxes² provide temporary relief, they mimic diet cycles, heightening post-detox indulgence. For millennials, the narrative demonizing screen time fosters a paradoxical love-hate relationship with technology, rife with guilt and dissatisfaction. Despite growing awareness, fast information dissemination prevents deep understanding, leaving users as pawns, not empowered participants. This underscores the need for balanced solutions that harness technology's benefits without compromising wellbeing.

1.2. Research Question

“How does the habitual use of digital media contribute to feelings of dissatisfaction, irritation, and overwhelming informational overload among Zillennials³, and what role does predisposition to anxiety play in exacerbating these feelings?”

The digital age, characterized by rapid technological advancements and the ubiquity of digital devices, has brought forth several challenges, especially for the younger generations⁴. Central to these challenges is the pervasive sense of dissatisfaction, irritation, and the overwhelming feeling of informational overload, collectively termed as “digital anxiety” (Bennett, 2023). This phenomenon predominantly affects the younger generations, namely Gen Z, Zillennials, and late millennials, who either grew up with these technologies or witnessed their exponential growth. The primary focus of this thesis is on Zillennials, but the findings could offer insights applicable to the broader spectrum of younger generations.

The research question seeks to understand the intricate relationship between habitual digital media use and the resultant feelings of digital anxiety. Specifically, it aims to discern whether a predisposition to anxiety acts as a catalyst in intensifying these feelings. Sub-questions that arise include: Does inherent anxiety-proneness amplify the effects of digital anxiety? Are there techniques from the realm of psychology that can be employed to mitigate the effects of digital anxiety?

¹ Refers to all electronic media content like websites, streaming services, social media platforms, computer games, etc. that can be accessed via digital devices. (Ra et al., 2018)

² Periods of deliberately reducing or avoiding use of digital devices and media. (Sreenivas, 2023)

³ Microgeneration of people born between 1992/1993-1998. Too young to be a Millennial, but too old to be a Gen Z'er (*Urban Dictionary*).

⁴ The Centres for Disease Control (CDC) reports that teen depression, anxiety, and suicidality have steadily risen for the past decade, especially among girls. (Kamenetz, 2023)

The relevance of this research question is underscored by the increasing dependence on digital media and the subsequent challenges faced by the younger generations. Addressing this question is not only pertinent for understanding the psychological implications of digital media use but also for devising strategies that promote healthier digital habits. The findings could pave the way for interventions that strike a balance between harnessing the benefits of technology and ensuring mental well-being.

1.3. Stakeholders

In the intricate web of today's digital landscape, Zillennials stand out as the primary target audience and the central stakeholder of this research. These young individuals aren't just casual digital users; they're deeply engaged, often immersed in creative fields, either as students or professionals. Their real-world identity seamlessly intertwines with their online persona, especially on platforms like Instagram, which serves as a blend of professional showcase, curated image, and life diary. While they're well-informed about managing digital stress, the challenge typically lies in translating that knowledge into tangible action.

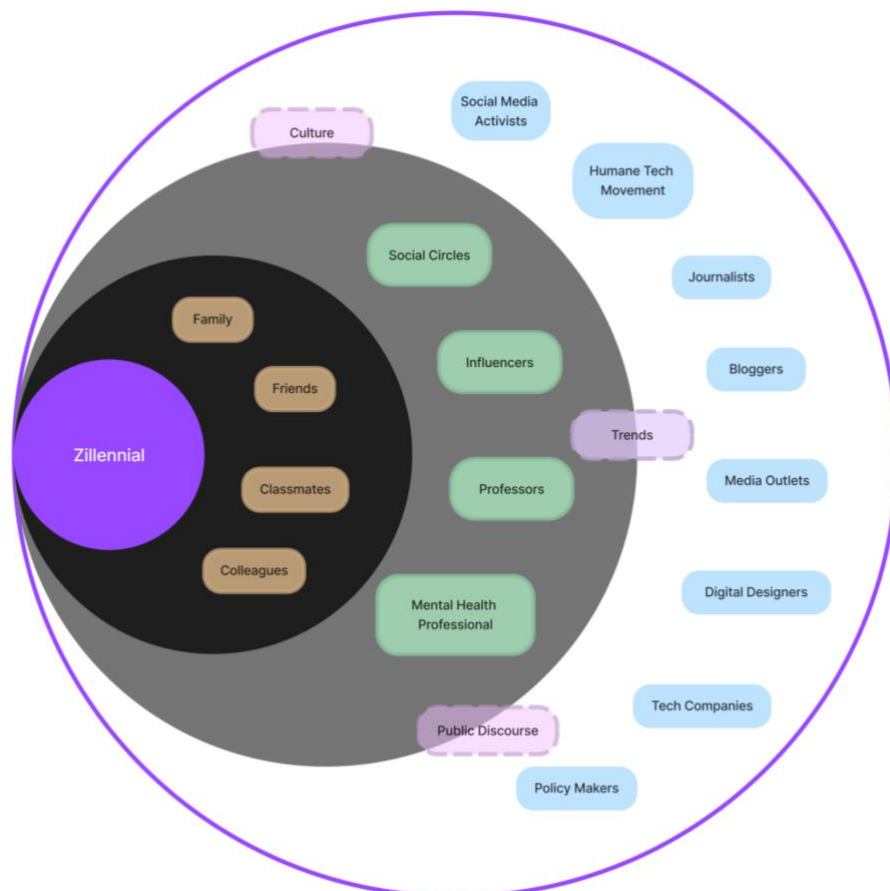


Figure 1 Zillennial's Digital Media Stakeholder Map.

Zillennials don't exist in a vacuum. They're surrounded by a constellation of interest groups that influence, shape, and are shaped by their digital interactions (Figure 1). This includes their immediate circles like Family, Colleagues, Friends, and Classmates. Then there are the Content Creators, ranging from influencers to journalists and broader media outlets, who feed into the digital content Zillennials consume. The backdrop to their digital journey is often set by Culture, Trends, and Public Discourse. However, there are also Pattern Disruptors⁵ like activists, the Humane Tech Movement, educators, and mental health professionals who challenge the status quo and introduce new perspectives. At the helm of the digital tools and platforms Zillennials use are Tech Companies and Digital Designers, while Policy Makers play a pivotal role in setting the rules of the game.

This research delves deep into the world of Zillennials, aiming to provide a grounded perspective on their digital interactions, considering the myriad influences and experiences that shape their digital journey.

1.4. Outcome

The research unveils a nuanced interplay between digital technology and wellbeing. Desk research and experiments finding showed that passive digital consumption often amplifies anxiety, while active engagement can foster a sense of connectedness. Notably, despite the common blame on notifications, as empirical study of smartphone use in real-life contexts by Heitmayer and Lahlou proved, most digital interactions are user-initiated, underscoring the importance of understanding user motivations and contexts. Stakeholder experiment proved the Newport's "Digital Minimalism"⁶ theory that periodic disconnection from technology emerges as a beneficial practice, enhancing creativity and focus. Yet, interviews highlighted that societal expectations of perpetual connectivity exert immense pressure, leading many to feel they're at the mercy of their devices rather than in control. This study underscores the urgency of not merely demonizing technology but fostering healthier, sustainable digital relationships. While more research is required on the psychological impacts, as literature overview on digital anxiety proved, initial findings suggest properly "balancing one's digital diet" could help restore user agency, decrease anxiety, and foster digital wellbeing. By reshaping habits and promoting mindful use, there's potential to reclaim user agency, mitigate anxiety, and champion digital wellbeing. The overarching aim is to transition from a state of digital powerlessness to one of mastery and intentional engagement and fostering a dialog and sharing within community.

1.5. Research Design

⁵ Those who challenge the prevailing status quo and introduce new perspectives. (Christensen, 2015)

⁶ Digital minimalism is a philosophy that emphasizes intentional and value-driven use of digital tools while reducing digital clutter and distractions. (Newport, 2019)

To address the research question, a multifaceted and interdisciplinary approach was adopted, aiming to capture the nuances and complexities of the relationship between Zillennials and digital technology. The primary objective was to foster meaningful dialogue within the target group and gain insights from a diverse array of experts spanning fields such as marketing, psychology, interaction design, journalism, philosophy, and sociology.

Methods and Rationale:

- **Semi-structured, Qualitative Interviews:** This methodology was preferred due to its inherent flexibility, allowing participants to express their emotions, experiences, and viewpoints in a fluid manner. A total of nine primary stakeholder interviews were conducted with Zillennials who exhibited varying levels of anxiety and diverse digital media habits. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of self-reports, a triangulation method was employed, prompting participants to provide concrete data on their digital media usage. Moreover, expert interviews engaged professionals and researchers from diverse fields, including psychology, philosophy, marketing, and sociology, yielding a multifaceted perspective on the challenges and nuances of digital interaction.
- **Self-reflection and Experimentation:** Recognizing the deeply personal character of digital interactions, self-reflection became a cornerstone of the investigative process. I embarked on an introspective journey into the digital realm, scrutinizing my own patterns, behaviours, and emotions, which enabled me to draw insightful comparisons with the broader Zillennial group. A “digitally-naked”⁷ visit to the museum, devoid of a smartphone, formed the foundation for my self-reflection diary. This hands-on experience catalysed the stakeholder experiment where participants, numbering 29 in total, took a digital hiatus. Post-experimentation, participants articulated their insights in a co-creation form, elucidating potential resolutions, gauging their well-being, and setting the groundwork for an ensuing focus group.
- **Diverse Source Analysis:** Supplementing traditional literary resources, this study penetrated the realms of contemporary media like podcasts, documentaries, and contributions from fellow design enthusiasts. Podcasts surfaced as an invaluable reservoir of novel insights and cutting-edge opinions from industry frontrunners. Documentary analysis offered a vivid, narrative glimpse into the digital domain, while interfacing with design students fostered a joint quest for innovative solutions.
- **Comprehensive Literature Review:** The research encompassed a diverse literature review, anchoring findings in the multifaceted complexities of the digital age. Heitmayer & Lahlou (2021) offered empirical insights on smartphone-induced disruptions, while Idelji-Tehrani, Dubicka, & Graham (2023) illuminated the clinical nuances of digital interactions. Exploring

⁷ An experience or period without the use or influence of digital devices.

well-being, Walsh et al. (2021) probed the relationship between restricted digital use and happiness, resonating with Newport's (2019) advocacy for intentional digital minimalism and Odell's (2019) call to resist the attention economy⁸. On the philosophical front, Rosa (2018) discussed our perceptions of an ever-changing world, and Self (2018) articulated contemporary cultural shifts in “THE BIG FLAT NOW.” These sources, bridging empirical, philosophical, and sociological domains, provided a holistic understanding of modern digital interactions.

In essence, the chosen research design was both experimental and holistic, aiming to capture the multifaceted nature of the digital experience for Zillennials. By integrating diverse methods and sources, the research sought to provide a well-rounded and in-depth understanding of the challenges faced and to chart a path forward that is both informed and innovative.

1.6. Motivation

The decision to investigate the profound challenges associated with digital media usage stems from personal experiences and observations. Like many individuals, excessive screen time has often resulted in lost hours due to digital distractions. Discomfort has been observed from extended device usage, with nights frequently extending into early mornings, disrupted by the allure of screen glows.

However, this is not just an individual dilemma. Conversations and referenced studies highlight that such digital dependence is a widespread issue, affecting a significant portion of the global population. Recognizing the breadth of this concern – with a substantial majority of the global populace reliant on smartphones – emphasizes the pressing need for intervention. The problematic relationship with digital media is perceived as a defining challenge of this era, necessitating effective strategies to foster a balanced digital society.

While there is growing awareness of the pitfalls of excessive digital consumption, there remains a pronounced absence of comprehensive, effective solutions (Tillich & Reigber, 2023). This void expands as the tech industry capitalizes on user attention. In the role of a Digital Ideation researcher⁹, the focus extends beyond merely the design of digital interfaces. The objective is to comprehend the intricate algorithms employed by leading tech corporations and to endeavour towards establishing a more user-centric and balanced digital experience.

⁸ A system that treats human attention as a finite resource that can be monetized, especially in the realm of digital products and advertising. (Experience, 2023)

⁹ (HSLU, 2023) A role focused on the generation, development, and communication of ideas related to digital media and interfaces.

The growing awareness of the pitfalls of excessive digital consumption is evident through various studies and expert insights, yet there remains a pronounced absence of comprehensive, effective solutions. Odgers and Jensen (2020) conducted an extensive review, revealing mixed results regarding the impact of digital technology on adolescent mental health, thereby underscoring the complexity of this relationship and the need for more robust research methodologies. Similarly, an expert interview with Wim Runkel highlighted the increasing prevalence of digital anxiety among young adults, triggered by digital interactions, and emphasized the necessity for a balanced approach between digital and real-world interactions. Furthermore, insights from the creators of the “Justr” project, Thore Reigber and Janosch Tillich, underscored the complexities of behavioural addictions in digital device usage, focusing on deeply ingrained habits and routines developed over time. These sources collectively illustrate the multifaceted challenges posed by digital consumption and the critical need for innovative and effective solutions to address them.

This project is a voyage of self-exploration with aspirations to identify solutions that go beyond superficial remedies. The ambition to achieve a comprehensive understanding compels the integration of diverse insights, spanning philosophy, sociology, psychology, and digital design.

1.7. Overview of Chapters

The thesis is structured to provide a deep dive into the relationship between Zillennials and digital media. The Introduction lays the groundwork by presenting the problem statement, research question, expected outcomes, motivation, and an overview of the methodology. It establishes the focus on exploring digital anxiety among Zillennials. The chapter titled “Where Are We?” contextualizes the research by analysing broad societal and philosophical trends like metamodernism¹⁰ that influence the digital landscape. The Qualitative Research chapter delves into first-hand insights, detailing findings from interviews and experiments. Insights from domain experts are consolidated in the Expert Interviews section, providing a professional perspective on the matter. Following this, the Secondary Research synthesizes relevant academic literature spanning topics like digital anxiety, technology addiction theories, and social media's societal impacts. Research Prototyping applies the accumulated insights to conceptualize potential solutions like apps, media, and hardware solutions that address identified issues. It's followed by a Conclusion that reflects on the central findings, assesses the approach, summarizes key takeaways, and charts out next steps for developing and testing solutions.

¹⁰ The philosophy and view of life that corresponds to the digitalized, post-industrial, global age. (Cunff, 2019)

2. Where Are We?

2.1. The system

In our complex modern world, Zillennials find themselves at a unique crossroads of the digital and the real. As individuals navigating life's challenges, they step into the online world as 'users', a term that captures their interaction with a wide variety of online platforms and tools. Their real-world identities, influenced by relationships with friends, family, colleagues, or classmates, don't just stay offline; they also show up online, affecting and being affected by their digital interactions. This dual role plays a big part in their overall well-being (Figure 5).

The mental well-being of Zillennials is a delicate balance, influenced by both their immediate social environment and broader societal factors. While personal relationships can offer support, they can also be sources of stress, especially when translated into the digital realm. Factors like mental health, a predisposition to anxiety, and notably, digital anxiety and addictions, further complicate this balance. The public sphere, characterized by prevailing trends, cultural norms, and the overarching public discourse, casts a significant shadow on their digital experiences. This sphere is, in turn, heavily influenced by content creators - the influencers, journalists, and media outlets. These creators not only shape public opinion but are also reciprocally shaped by the very discourse they help create.

Diving deeper into the digital ecosystem, we find a plethora of services - from messengers and social media to streaming platforms - all vying for the Zillennial user's attention. The gateway to these services is a combination of software and hardware, intricately designed to provide an immersive experience. However, the design isn't neutral. Algorithms determine content hierarchy, notifications tug at attention spans, and user interfaces can sometimes foster addictive patterns. These elements, often subtle, have profound implications for a user's well-being.

Behind the digital curtain are the tech companies, the architects of the digital realm. Their decisions and innovations can sway policymakers, and conversely, regulations can influence tech trajectories. Digital designers, the craftsmen of the online experience, play a pivotal role, determining how users interact with and perceive the digital world. Yet, the system isn't static. Pattern disruptors, like educators, activists, and the humane tech movement, challenge the status quo. Educators illuminate the challenges and coping mechanisms related to digital anxiety; activists push for change at the policy level; and the humane tech movement advocates for a more user-centric digital landscape.

In essence, Zillennials navigate a multifaceted world, where the lines between the real and the digital blur, and where every touchpoint, from a simple notification to a broader cultural trend, has the potential to shape their well-being.

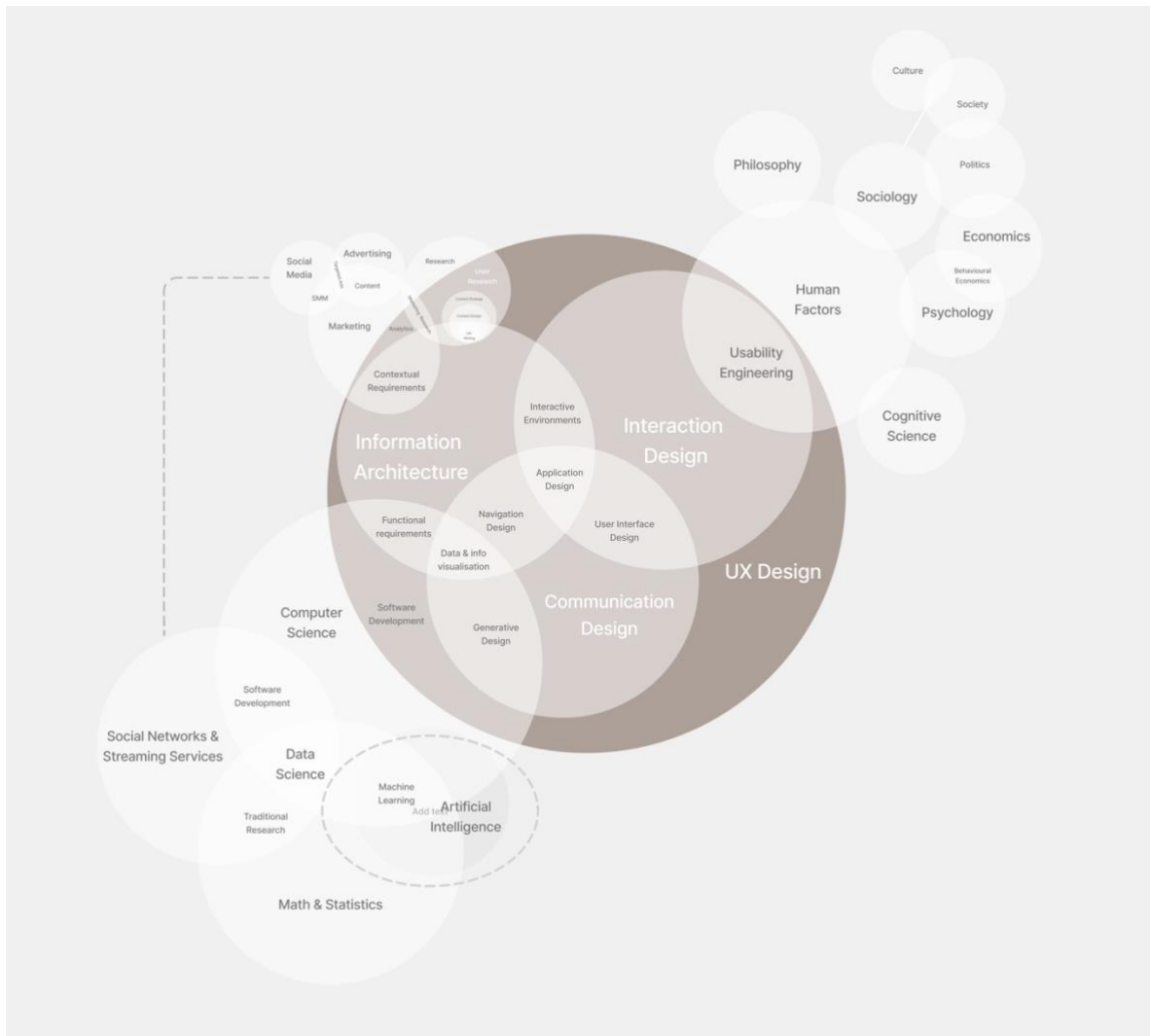


Figure 4 Diagram of fields related to the research.

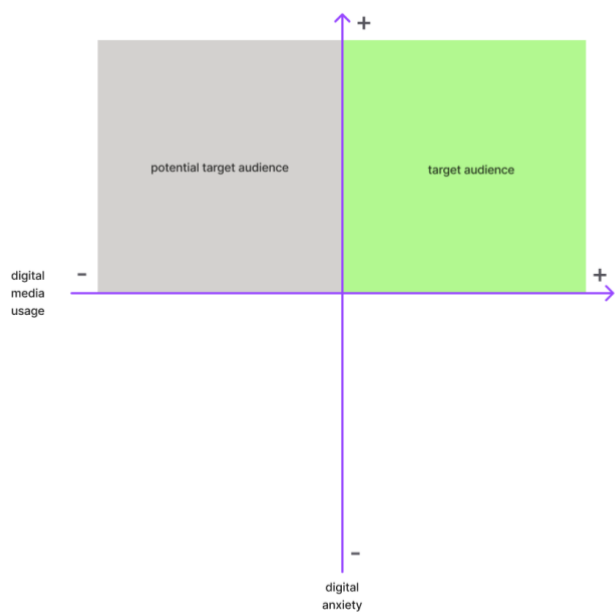


Figure 2 Target audience matrix.

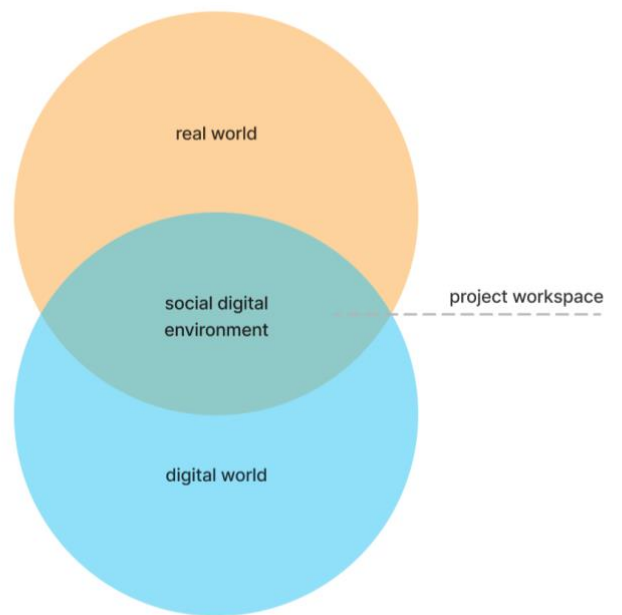


Figure 3 Project workspace diagram.

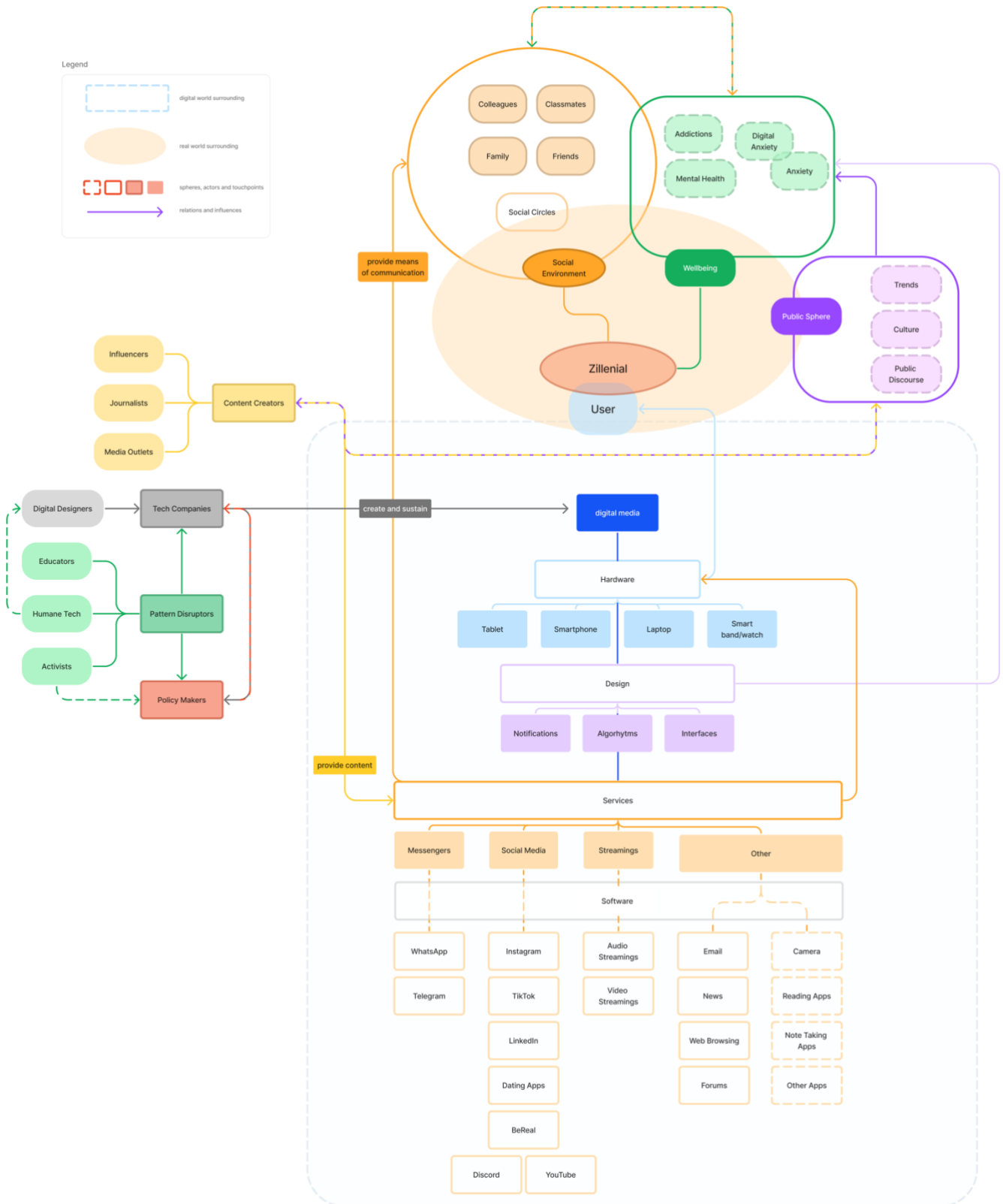


Figure 5 Systems map of Zillennials' digital media relations.

2.2. The Big Flat Now

Cultural creation in the new millennium embodies absolute equality. Information produced and disseminated navigates through channels devoid of hierarchy and central authority. No dominant source of power, no universally accepted arbiter, and no centralized storehouse exist.

Over 90 percent of internet users use mobile phones to browse the internet (Ruby, 2023), with more than seven billion mobile phones worldwide (Turner, 2018). Information of any type, from any epoch in human history, is accessible at all times, from all places to everyone. From a mere 23,000 websites and fewer than 40 million users in 1993 (Self, 2018), 2023 sees approximately a billion websites (NJ, 2023) and over five billion users (Ruby, 2023).

“The Big Flat Now” is a term and the title of an essay penned by Jack Self, an architect, and writer, featured in the issue of 032c¹¹ from 2018. The term encapsulates our current era, marked by immediacy, accessibility, and a sense of everything existing on a singular digital plane. This omnipresence of digital technology has ushered in a cultural moment where various mediums, technologies, and experiences meld into a unified, flattened digital domain. Within this space, the traditional boundaries that once separated different media, historical periods, and cultural nuances are becoming increasingly nebulous, underscoring the transformative nature of our digital age.

Big: This refers to the vast digital information available today. For content to be effective, it must be quickly understood, leading to a blend of familiar yet diverse design elements. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter amplify user differences, creating a cascade of content.

Flat: “Flatness” represents not just equality, but also societal disparities like wealth inequality and institutional racism. While the digital age has deepened some divides, it also offers opportunities for shared experiences to bridge gaps. The internet's initial promise of universal democracy shifted with Web 2.0's rise, but a new generation is prompting change.

Now: This captures the digital age's immediacy. While older generations may be pessimistic, progressive movements are merging online trends with real-world issues, blurring virtual and physical boundaries. As we near the 20th century's end, there's hope for a more inclusive era driven by a shift in power dynamics.

“Flatness argues everything is the same everywhere. Nowness argues that it is the same time everywhere. In an era before instant communication, there was no such thing as the contemporary. Each location had its own rhythms, isolated movements and private concerns. A century ago, travelling from Lima to Linz

displaced you in space, but the journey also relocated you into someone else's time. By contrast, the goal of flatness is a kind of real-time, or total Earth time. On waking, the first thing most of us do is look at our screens, syncing ourselves back into the flow. We feel perpetually jet-lagged.” (Self, 2018)

Presentism and flatness affect not just now, but other eras due to our ability to access vast past data, making history feel like an ongoing present. Users navigate this vast realm mainly through platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Google, and Facebook. Built on data democracy, these platforms promote equal information treatment, allowing anyone to publish, earn, and gain fame. Content creators' value is determined by their content's appeal in this meritocratic system.

There is no single point of view, no past, and no future. This state of equality is boundless and without an endpoint. It has irrevocably altered our relationship with time and space. As a modern allegory, this flatness encapsulates the transformative impact of the internet on global society. (Self, 2018)

2.3. Seeking resonance in the world of digital

In the digital age, where screens dominate our lives and algorithms curate our experiences, there's a growing need to understand and redefine our relationship with technology. Hartmut Rosa's “The Uncontrollability of the World” (2018) provides a timely exploration into the tension between our desire for control and the inherent unpredictability of life.

Hartmut Rosa's exploration of “uncontrollability” and “resonance” offers a profound lens through which we can examine our relationship with digital media in metamodern times. It helps to navigate and articulate the feelings and challenges of an era where digital omnipresence often amplifies our desire for control, leading to feelings of alienation and disconnection. Rosa's insights into the tension between our attempts to control and the inherent unpredictability of experiences provide a foundational understanding of this digital-age conundrum.

To resonate, as Rosa suggests, is “to engage deeply and meaningfully, allowing for mutual transformation” (Rosa, 2018). In the context of digital media, this means moving beyond passive consumption or the mere quest for control. Instead, it involves active engagement, where users approach digital content with openness and curiosity, allowing themselves to be touched and transformed by it. This might manifest as deep dives into topics of genuine interest, interactive digital experiences that challenge one's perspectives, or even digital detox periods that allow for reflection and reconnection with the physical world.

“The Internet is uncontrollable. And if the Internet is uncontrollable, freedom will win. It’s as simple as that.” — Ai Weiwei, artist and activist (Weiwei-Isms, 2012)

Furthermore, recognizing the “uncontrollability” of digital experiences is crucial. While algorithms and user settings offer a semblance of control, the true essence of digital media lies in its unpredictability – the serendipitous discovery of a new interest, the unexpected connection with a stranger, or the unforeseen challenges that spark growth. By approaching digital media with an attitude of resonance, users can foster a more enriching and balanced relationship with the digital realm, embracing its unpredictability as a source of wonder and growth. In doing so, they can navigate the metamodern digital landscape with mindfulness, finding harmony in the interplay of control and uncontrollability.

2.4. Digital Minimalism

The omnipresence of digital media has led to an unprecedented level of connectivity. Yet, this constant connection often comes at the cost of mental peace. Our attachment to screens and social media platforms is affecting the health of the body politic. For Zillennials, this translates into a constant tug-of-war between the desire to stay updated and the need for genuine, undistracted experiences (Tolentino, 2019).

Cal Newport, in his book “Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World,” posits that mere willpower isn't enough to combat the pull of technology. Instead, he advocates for a structured digital detox, followed by a selective reintroduction of technology based on individual needs. Newport's digital minimalist avoids mindless digital consumption, focusing instead on meaningful offline activities (Newport, 2019). This philosophy resonates with Zillennials' quest for authenticity amidst the digital noise.

Jenny Odell, in her book “How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy,” offers a different perspective. She emphasizes the importance of disengaging from the attention economy and questions the very idea of productivity. For Odell, life is more than just an instrument to be optimized. She believes that by constantly giving our attention to tech companies for profit, we are neglecting the most valuable parts of our humanity (Odell, 2019). Odell's perspective aligns with the Zillennials desire to find meaning and authenticity in a world dominated by digital demands.

There is a high value of non-commercialized digital platforms like podcasts and group texts in young generations lives. These platforms, which require sustained attention and offer unsullied social spaces,

can serve as models for future digital media developments (Tolentino, 2019). They represent a middle ground, where Zillennials can engage digitally without the pressures of the attention economy.

For young people prone to anxiety, the key lies in mindful engagement with digital media. This involves recognizing the value in both connection and disconnection, setting boundaries, and prioritizing mental well-being. It's not about complete disengagement but finding a balance that resonates with individual needs.

Digital Minimalism, as a philosophy and practice, offers a roadmap to navigate the complexities of the digital age. By embracing its principles, a person can build a mindful relationship with digital media, mitigating anxiety and fostering genuine connections.

2.5. What is the internet doing to us?

The digital age has transformed the way we perceive, interact with, and understand the world around us. Kevin Roose's investigative piece, "The Making of a YouTube Radical" (2019) and his subsequent podcast, "Rabbit Hole" (2020) delve into the intricate web of the Internet's influence on our beliefs, behaviours, and interactions. Roose's exploration reveals a stark reality: the Internet, once likened to a neutral library or a virtual town square, has evolved into a force that actively shapes our views, nudges our decisions, and, at times, ensnares us in echo chambers. The algorithms behind platforms like YouTube, designed to maximize user engagement, often lead individuals down paths they might never have ventured on their own, exposing them to extreme views and polarizing ideologies. (Roose, 2019)

Yet, it's not all bleak. There is a transformative power of the Internet. Beyond the echo chambers and the divisive content, the digital realm offers opportunities for genuine connection, learning, and growth. The stories of individuals who have navigated the tumultuous waters of the Internet, only to emerge with a renewed sense of purpose and understanding, underscore the platform's potential for positive change ("Rabbit Hole," 2020).

In the midst of the global pandemic, as the world grappled with isolation and uncertainty, the Internet emerged as a lifeline for many. It facilitated connections, fostered communities, and provided solace in trying times. The internet keeps us constantly connected, yet increasingly disconnected. It brings the world to our fingertips, yet we clutch our phones tighter. Amidst the noise, it's easy to lose sight of what grounds us — human relationships. The chaos of the internet reflects the chaos of being human. But it also shows our enduring need for understanding.

Roose's work highlights the importance of being cognizant of the forces at play in the digital realm. While the Internet can lead us astray, it can also bring us together, offering a sense of community and belonging. It's this duality — the potential for both discord and unity — that makes the Internet a powerful tool in the modern era. As users, it's up to us to harness its potential for good, to seek out genuine connections, and to build communities that resonate with our values and aspirations.

Zillennials in particular appear to be learning how to steer clear of the challenges of social media without guidance. After facing tough battles, many are emerging from the algorithmic maze, equipped with newfound self-awareness, confidence, and strategies to deal with challenges. Their experiences are less of a dystopian horror and more of a poignant Bildungsroman¹². «Social media, as they see it, is something like a billboard-plastered, litter-strewn skateboard plaza in an unsavoury part of town. It's junky, spammy, competitive, and risky, but it's also a place where brave feats of creativity and connection nonetheless happen all the time.» (Kamenetz, 2023)

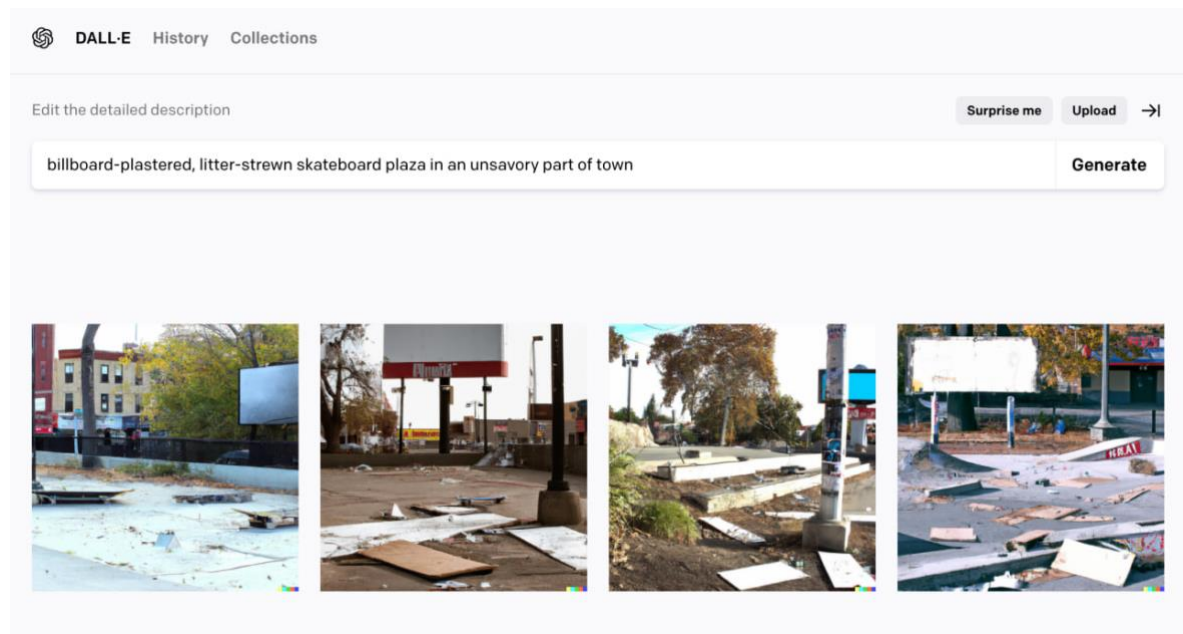


Figure 6 Screenshot from DALL-E prompt result: social media seen by young generation of users.

2.6. Attention Economy

In today's digital era, attention has emerged as a premium commodity. Unlike historical times when information was scarce and reserved for a select few, the advent of the Internet and digitization has flooded

¹² A literary term that refers to a coming-of-age story. In a Bildungsroman, the protagonist undergoes personal growth and development, often through challenges and introspection. (MasterClass, 2021)

us with an overwhelming volume of information. Despite this influx, our cognitive ability to process information remains unchanged from yesteryears. This imbalance has shifted the dynamics: we now grapple with more information than our minds can effectively process (Experience, 2023). As a result, attention, rather than information, has become a scarce and prized societal resource. This paradigm shift is evident in the global economic landscape, transitioning from a material-centric economy to the “Attention Economy”(Goldhaber, 2023).

In this new economic model, many businesses have recognized that their value hinges on capturing and retaining human attention. The competition for our focus has intensified, prompting companies to devise innovative strategies to remain at the forefront of our consciousness. Social media giants stand as the most potent entities in this attention-centric economy. The underlying principle of the Attention Economy is straightforward: revenue is derived from advertising, which in turn is fuelled by user attention. The longer users engage with a platform, the more advertisements they're exposed to, leading to increased revenue. Given this equation where “attention equals revenue,” the ultimate objective becomes maximizing user engagement.

To achieve this, companies employ two primary strategies. The first involves crafting a captivating user interface, replete with features designed to hold and prolong attention. The second strategy centres on content personalization, ensuring users receive content tailored to their preferences (Mujica et al., 2022). By harnessing user data and analytics, advertisements are meticulously curated to increase the probability of user engagement and potential purchases.

2.7. Humane Design

As the attention economy has expanded rapidly, its adverse impacts on society and individual users have often been overlooked, whether by design or oversight. This has led to pervasive issues like smartphone addiction (Goldhaber, 2023). Silicon Valley giants, despite being cognizant of these challenges, have largely offered only superficial remedies. However, public outcry has spurred some action. Tristan Harris, previously with Google and now the President and Co-Founder of the Center for Humane Technology, initiated the “Humane Design” movement after his concerns were dismissed at Google. This movement champions a more mindful approach to technology use (Rezaee & Pedret, 2018)

“If something is a tool, it genuinely is just sitting there, waiting, patiently. If something is not a tool, it is demanding things from you... and we've moved away from having a tools-based tech environment to an addiction manipulation-based tech environment. Social media isn't a tool waiting to be used; it has its own goals and its own means of pursuing them by using your psychology against you” – Tristan Harris, The Social Dilemma (Orlowski, 2020)

Humane Design emphasizes a user-centric approach, catering to both emotional and physical needs. While it draws inspiration from the widely accepted Human-Centred Design, Humane Design infuses more empathy and compassion into its methodology. A cornerstone of this approach is initiating design challenges with the question “Why?”, ensuring the true intent behind a project is understood and aligning solutions with user perspectives (Benz, 2022). While traditional design prioritizes user-friendliness and comfort, Humane Design aims to make products both beneficial and appealing. Moreover, it seeks to mitigate or even eliminate user stress and anxiety. The overarching principle is that technology should empower individuals, not overwhelm them (Furst, 2018).

Conclusion

As we've journeyed through the diverse landscape of our digital age, several key insights emerge. At the heart of this digital terrain are Zillennials, who find themselves balancing the intersections of the real and the virtual. Their experiences, influenced by a multitude of factors from personal relationships to global trends, highlight the delicate balance of well-being in a world dominated by screens and algorithms.

The “Big Flat Now” encapsulates the vast, unified digital domain where traditional boundaries blur, and everything seems to exist on a singular plane. This new reality, marked by immediacy and accessibility, has profound implications for how we perceive time, space, and our place within it.

The quest for resonance in the digital realm underscores the need for deeper, more meaningful engagements, moving beyond mere consumption to genuine connection. As the internet's vastness offers both challenges and opportunities, the essence lies in navigating its unpredictability with an attitude of resonance, embracing the unforeseen as sources of growth and wonder.

The attention economy, with its relentless pursuit of our focus, brings to the fore the challenges of information overload and the commodification of attention. As businesses vie for our time, the onus is on us, the users, to discern and decide where and how we invest our attention.

The emergence of the Humane Design movement offers a beacon of hope. It underscores the need for a more compassionate, user-centric approach to technology, ensuring that digital tools empower rather than overwhelm. In sum, as we stand at this unique crossroads of the digital and the real, the challenges are many, but so are the opportunities. The key lies in understanding, adapting, and navigating this complex world with mindfulness, ensuring that our digital engagements enrich, empower, and resonate with our real-world experiences.

3. Qualitative Research

To delve deeper into the intricacies of the digital experience among Zillennials, I embarked on a series of qualitative interviews targeting this specific demographic. Recognizing the richness that diverse perspectives bring, I engaged individuals from varied fields, including sociology, PR, design, marketing, and arts. These interviews were meticulously designed to unearth the core issues Zillennials face in the digital realm. Beyond standard queries, participants were prompted with self-reflection tasks, such as mapping their digital environment and illustrating the emotions digital media evokes in them. Additionally, reflections on screen time, personal data, and a broader understanding of terms integral to digital behaviour, like cookies, were explored. Through these six interviews encompassing eight individuals, a multifaceted view of the Zillennials digital experience was captured, offering invaluable insights for the project.

3.1. Stakeholder Interviews

The crux of our research lay in understanding the digital habits, feelings, and perspectives of Zillennials, and as such, engaging them in open dialogues became essential. In the ensuing stakeholder interviews, questions were meticulously crafted to tease out participants' personal relationship with digital technology and their feelings about the contemporary digital age. It's essential to note that while a base set of questions was prepared, each interview was tailored to the individual, and questions were adjusted to fit the context of the conversation. Therefore, not all participants were asked questions in the same manner. Detailed transcripts of the full interviews can be found in the appendix.

The interview began with ice-breaking questions, encouraging participants to introduce themselves and delved deeper, exploring their morning routines, particularly in relation to phone usage. Subsequent questions probed feelings associated with notifications, the age they perceive they're living in, and how they distinguish it from previous generations. Participants were also asked about their perceived closeness of the world due to the internet and feelings of related to digital anxiety like FOMO¹³ or informational overload. The heart of the interview revolved around their relationship with digital media, touching on its design, its effects on them, and potential digital detox strategies. The conversation also delved into news consumption patterns, digital footprints like cookies and data storage, and time spent on smartphones. They were also prompted to reflect on the concept of abundance in the digital age. Towards the end, participants discussed their experiences with streaming services, the predictability of content they encounter, and their desire for transparency or control over their digital environment.

¹³ The anxiety or apprehension one feels about missing out on digital trends, updates, or experiences happening online, often exacerbated by social media platforms, often exacerbated by social media platforms where users see others participating in activities or events they are not part of. (Alutaybi et al., 2020)

Maurice Köepfli, 25

MA student at University of Zurich, has professional experience with podcasts and cultural magazines

1. **Daily Routine:** Begins with snoozing the alarm, followed by basic morning activities and checking Instagram on his computer.
2. **Media Consumption:** Prefers traditional media like SRF, Tages-Anzeiger and Die Zeit newspapers, with limited reliance on newsletters and social media. LinkedIn is occasionally checked due to email notifications.
3. **Emotional Connection to Social Media:** He experiences varied emotions on Instagram and brings the concept of “economics of emotions”.
4. **Media Comparison:** Equates Instagram to sugar, indicating its potential harm over time, while valuing the depth of traditional media.
5. **Phone Usage:** Primarily for checking the calendar, work, messages, and communication.
6. **Digital Detox:** Employs “flight mode” for brief digital detoxes and expresses varied emotional responses to different notifications.
7. **Era Perception:** Describes the current age humorously, referencing postmodernism and meta-modernism.
8. **Digital World Views:** Values the internet for democratizing information and connecting people with similar interests, but is sceptical about the social nature of social media.
9. **Online Identity:** Has accounts on Instagram and LinkedIn. Uses WhatsApp and Telegram for messaging. Took a half-year digital detox by deactivating Instagram, emphasizing the importance of living in the moment.
10. **FOMO:** Experienced mild FOMO during his digital detox, but believes not all online content holds value.
11. **Content Control:** Prefers chronological content timelines and stresses the need for transparency in content filtering on platforms like Instagram.
12. **Data Privacy:** Uses the Brave browser for enhanced privacy and is curious about the data Instagram gathers, referring to it as a “digital mirror.”
13. **Screen Time:** Spends 1–2 hours daily on screens, with 100-200 phone checks.
14. **App Restrictions:** Attempted to limit app usage unsuccessfully, finding it simpler to delete distracting apps.
15. **Digital Overwhelm:** Values the accessibility of knowledge online but feels inundated by the sheer volume of content, especially on platforms like YouTube.
16. **Content Personalization:** Advocates for user-controlled transparent filters and stresses the importance of understanding how content is selected and filtered.

Olga Kushnir, 24

PR Specialist

1. **Digital Privacy Concerns:** Olga is wary of online platforms potentially eavesdropping on users, citing an instance where she mentioned “bikini” and subsequently received a related ad. She's also conscious of cookies, often declining them, and wishes for transparency in how content algorithms work.
2. **Online Self-Perception:** On platforms like Instagram, Olga feels people, including herself, typically showcase only the best moments. She also speaks to the overwhelming nature of the internet, where distractions can lead one astray from their original search intent.
3. **Desire for Online Control:** Olga expresses a desire for more control and understanding of her online journey, often feeling lost amidst the vast digital landscape.
4. **Phone Usage:** Olga acknowledges her frequent phone checking habit, even in the absence of notifications. Her recent screen time statistics revealed an average of 6 hours daily, with 378 pickups.
5. **Digital Detox Challenges:** Despite recognizing her phone dependency and the associated mental health implications, Olga finds it challenging to detach. She's attempted digital detoxes but felt disconnected, especially from friends.
6. **Online Shopping Behaviour:** Olga admits to making impulse purchases influenced by online ads. However, she's unsettled by how ads seem eerily tailored to her recent conversations.
7. **Concluding Thoughts:** Olga recognizes the digital world's double-edged sword: the challenge of balancing the benefits of staying connected with the need for mental well-being and privacy.

Oles Derega, 27

A multifaceted professional encompassing roles as an artist, illustrator, graphic designer, and lecturer

1. **Personal Insights:** His mornings typically start with checking news related to the Ukrainian invasion and then Instagram.
2. **Digital Interaction:** Oles perceives his phone as an emotional extension, with notifications sometimes contributing to anxiety. He uses AirPods to craft his auditory reality, but steers clear of wearables like the Apple Watch.
3. **Content Consumption:** Oles champions experiencing moments in real life and strives for balance in digital content consumption. He prefers organic content discovery over algorithm-driven suggestions and navigates platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, and even Spotify, which he views as a social network.
4. **Digital Connectivity:** Reflecting on the digital age, Oles appreciates the unprecedented connectivity smartphones offer and the democratization of experiences via the internet. However,

he also acknowledges the overwhelming vastness of the online world, underscoring the importance of human curation.

5. **Algorithm and Online Representation:** Oles touches upon the manipulation of algorithms for online visibility and wishes for more transparency from platforms. He's intrigued by how platforms interpret his interests and, while aware of data collection, hasn't delved deep into it. He sees AI's potential in content curation but feels it often misses the human element.
6. **Digital Awareness:** Oles differentiates between direct and traditional media consumption. He's cognizant of online cookies, drawing an analogy with a Ukrainian word for it “реп’яшки”, meaning weeds, that stick to you. He's mindful of his screen time, ensuring most interactions are purposeful. Sharing his digital detox experience, he advocates for events that restrict smartphone usage promoting genuine human connections and anticipates the rise of cultural norms dictating digital etiquette.

Alina Danylchuk, 25

BA in International Relations, MA in Consumer Marketing. Worked in PR, communication, and social media marketing.

1. **Digital Essentials & Emotional Impact:** Morning routines involve checking Telegram and news. While she's tried digital detoxes, they've been brief. Platforms like Instagram sometimes evoke feelings of overstimulation or inadequacy, and TikTok can intensify these emotions.
2. **Online Interaction & Unique Platforms:** Alina leans towards observing on mainstream platforms like Instagram and TikTok, but actively creates content on Medium and Telegram. She's also engaged with BeReal, a platform promoting genuine content creation as a prerequisite for content consumption.
3. **Digital Age Reflections:** Alina perceives the digital era as a whirlwind of connectivity and opportunities. However, the sheer volume of content and choices can sometimes induce feelings of overwhelm or dissatisfaction.
4. **News & Phone Habits:** Telegram channels are Alina's primary news source. She's devised a system to manage notifications and feels uneasy without her phone. Her daily screen time averages between 4.5 to 5 hours, with her phone being accessed around 200 times during the day.
5. **Platform Preferences & Digital Toolbox:** Alina expresses discontent with Instagram's current algorithm, reminiscing about its older timeline feed.
6. **Concluding Thoughts:** Alina underscores the significance of fostering a healthier bond with social media and gaining clarity on one's digital identity. She recognizes the challenges posed by the digital landscape and the potential benefits of tools aiding in online navigation.

Polina Bogatishcheva, 20

Cyril Forster, 24

BA Design Management International Graduates

1. **Daily Routines:** Polina's day starts with a to-do list, shower, and breakfast with background audio. Cyril checks the weather, hydrates, and enjoys music during his morning shower.
2. **Phone Habits:** Cyril uses “Do Not Disturb” at night and is selective with notifications. Polina keeps her phone on mute, with selective notifications, and occasionally forgets about it when socially engaged.
3. **Generation Perception:** Cyril sees the internet as a tool for global connection but feels it can be superficial. Polina feels the internet has bridged continents but is overwhelmed by its vastness.
4. **Online Interactions:** Both discuss the depth and authenticity of online connections. Cyril reminisces about pen pals and meeting online friends, while Polina questions the depth of online relationships.
5. **Online Identity:** Cyril feels his online experience is tailored, while Polina feels both overwhelmed and secure in her digital space.
6. **Social Media Platforms:** Both use Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Telegram. Cyril is active on Discord to be a part of niche communities, which he used to find on Instagram before, deleted his Facebook. Polina maintains a passive Facebook presence and has mixed feelings about BeReal.
7. **Perception of Non-Social Media Users:** Polina admires them for their self-reliance. Cyril initially finds it “lame” and acknowledges that some might still be digitally connected in other ways.
8. **Platform Evolution:** Cyril believes platforms lose their niche appeal as they grow, affecting content quality.
9. **Screen Time:** Polina shares her discomfort when people discuss screen time, feeling judged for her habits. She felt guilty about her screen time, associating high screen usage with a lack of productivity and an unhealthy mindset. She expresses the sentiment of not doing something right when societal norms suggest putting the phone away. The interviewee is sceptical about the idea of being told when to put the phone away. They believe in personal agency, deciding when and how to interact with their device. They resist the prevailing notion that screen time should always be minimized. The interviewees receive weekly screen time notifications, comparing the current week's screen time to the previous week. However, they often don't pay much attention to these notifications, proposing a level of indifference to such metrics. Polina has an average screen time of 7.5 hours and 100 phone pickups per day. Cyril emphasizes that he is more than just his screen time and enjoys using his phone. His average screen time is 6.5 hours and 150 pickups per day.

10. **Data and Privacy:** Polina expresses dissatisfaction with YouTube's content recommendations and is intrigued by TikTok after hearing Cyril's positive experience. Cyril contrasts his frustrating encounters with Instagram's Explore page with TikTok's more intuitive algorithm. He shares a strategy of starting a new TikTok account and actively engaging with preferred content to shape the feed, a tactic that resonates with Polina's struggles on the platform. Their conversation underscores the importance of algorithm transparency and the potential for user-driven content curation.
11. **Digital Habits Reflection:** Both emphasize understanding and reflecting on digital habits. Polina likens the societal trend of “putting the phone away” to the tale of “The Emperor's New Clothes,” suggesting that while everyone acknowledges the trend, few dare to question its validity. Cyril emphasizes the importance of understanding rather than merely following societal norms, comparing it to plaster solutions that don't address the root of the problem. Interviewees also touch upon the influence of guilt in shaping behaviours, with Cyril highlighting the difference between guilt-driven actions and genuine understanding. The conversation underscores the need for media literacy and a deeper comprehension of our digital interactions.

Tim Hochuli, 28

BA Industrial Design, currently doing MA Digital Ideation

Felix Prantl, 28

BA Interaction Design, currently doing MA Design Management International

1. **Morning Routines:** Tim faces challenges waking up, especially without set plans, hits the snooze button for around 20 minutes. Feels anxious if he oversleeps. Felix also struggles with waking up, sometimes feels overwhelmed in the mornings, benefits from a structured day plan. Felix has inconsistent sleep patterns, often staying up late watching YouTube.
2. **Digital Device Usage:**

Tim: Primarily uses his phone as an alarm and for brief morning browsing. Prefers YouTube as his main information source. Usually places his phone face-down. Doesn't rely on his phone when in company.

Felix: Intentionally keeps his phone away from his bed. Prefers using his laptop in the morning. Strives to stay present in his environment. Uses his phone minimally, with limited apps. Holds a critical view of social media.
3. **Interactions and Relationships:** Both value the presence of another person in the house for a better morning routine. Felix appreciates Tim's understanding, especially in the context of his ADHD. In the past, Felix has tried various coping mechanisms, including smoking.
4. **Perception of Digital Media:** Felix views digital media, particularly social media, as overwhelming and feels it often portrays unrealistic ideals.

5. Digital Media Dependency:

Tim: Feels compelled to use digital media more when alone. Uses YouTube for relaxation. Mutes irrelevant group chats. Feels societal pressure to always be reachable and desires reduced societal expectations of constant availability.

Felix: Associates digital media with incessant stimuli. Avoids potentially addictive platforms. Prefers voice messages and videos for communication, mutes most notifications, always carries a power bank. Feels a sense of disconnection when on his phone.

6. Digital Media Usage Metrics:

Tim: Aims for a daily screen time of around 1.5 hours. Primarily uses his iPad for streaming. Felix aims for reduced screen time and avoids taking the smartphone out in public, when he's waiting etc.; gets irritated by app notifications.

7. **Digital Media Wishes:** Tim: Hopes for societal change in the constant need for availability. Feels stressed by the pressure to always be responsive.

Insights

Patterns Observed:

- **Morning Digital Routine:** A common trend among interviewees is the immediate interaction with digital devices upon waking up, whether it's checking news, social media, or messages.
- **Screen Time Awareness:** Most interviewees are aware of their screen time, with some expressing discomfort or indifference towards it.
- **Digital Detox:** Several participants have tried digital detoxes, with varied success and feelings of disconnection or FOMO.
- **Notifications Management:** There's a conscious effort to manage and control notifications, indicating a desire for digital boundaries.
- **Algorithmic Influence:** A recurring theme is the influence of algorithms on content consumption, with some expressing dissatisfaction and a desire for more transparency.

Issues and Concerns:

- **Digital Overwhelm:** Many participants feel overwhelmed by the vastness of the digital landscape and the sheer volume of content.
- **Privacy Concerns:** Concerns about eavesdropping, data collection, and lack of transparency in algorithms are prevalent.
- **Emotional Impact:** Digital platforms, especially social media, evoke varied emotions, from inadequacy and overstimulation to anxiety.

- **Online Authenticity:** There's a perception that online platforms, especially Instagram, often showcase only the best moments, lacking depth and authenticity.

Wishes:

- **Desire for Control:** Many express a wish for more control over their digital journey, from content curation to understanding algorithms.
- **Transparency:** A common desire is for platforms to be more transparent about how they operate, especially in terms of content filtering and data collection.
- **Reduced Societal Pressure:** Some participants wish for a change in societal expectations around constant digital availability.

Participants exhibited varying levels of digital anxiety throughout the study. This difference was especially evident during interviews that involved two participants simultaneously. The pairing was intentional; individuals with contrasting temperaments and digital habits were chosen to foster dynamic discussions. Intriguingly, even among participants from similar backgrounds and age groups, the disparity in digital anxiety levels was palpable. A theory began to take shape, suggesting that individuals more susceptible to general anxiety might also be more vulnerable to digital anxiety. To investigate this further, participants were requested to undergo tests for general levels of anxiety, ADHD, and OCD based on diagnostic tests from Clinical Partners (2022) and to share their results. The outcomes of these tests are presented in the accompanying table, with participant names replaced by numbers to maintain confidentiality.

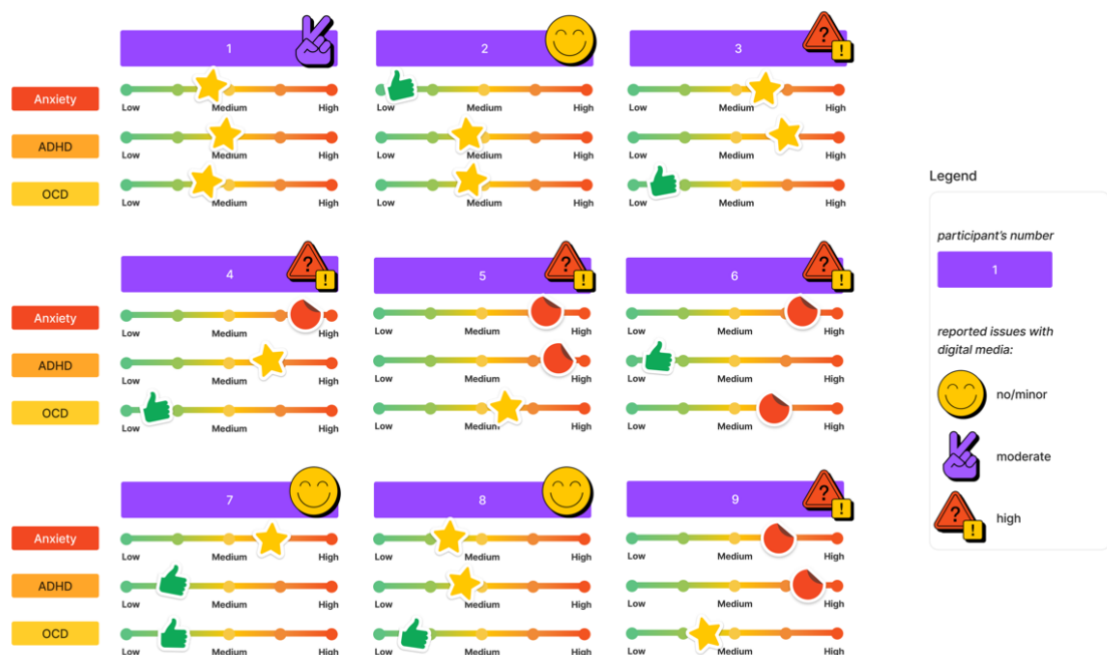


Figure 7 Anxiety and digital anxiety relativity comparison scale created based on the participants' test results.

While our results did not conclusively establish a link between ADHD or OCD and digital-induced stress, a distinct trend emerged, indicating a potential correlation between generalized anxiety and stress stemming from digital media usage. While our research provides insightful preliminary findings, it's essential to consider its limited scope. Nevertheless, it has certainly shed light on the possible interconnections between general anxiety levels and the stresses induced by digital media consumption, which were examined further in secondary research.

The Zillennials digital experience is multifaceted, with both positive and negative aspects. While the digital age offers unparalleled connectivity and access to information, it also presents challenges in terms of privacy, mental well-being, and the authenticity of online interactions. The insights from these interviews underscore the importance of fostering a healthier relationship with digital media, understanding algorithms, and setting personal boundaries in the digital realm.

3.2. Expert Interviews

In the journey to comprehend the intricacies of the digital age, turning to expert interviews was an essential next step. Testing ideas and hypotheses through these dialogues allowed us to gain deeper insights and validate our understanding. By engaging with professionals across various fields related to modern society, digital media, and anxiety, we were able to capture a holistic view of the implications of our digital habits. These conversations provide a comprehensive overview of our evolving relationship with technology, offering insights from professionals across diverse fields. Full transcripts of the interviews can be accessed in the appendix.

Wim Runkel, a Master of Medicine

1. Main Symptoms of Digital Anxiety:

- General anxiety symptoms encompass increased heart rate, rapid breathing, muscle tension, trembling, and heightened sensitivity to pain.
- These symptoms are activated by perceived threats, priming the body for a fight or flight response.
- Digital anxiety emerges when non-threatening situations, such as not having a mobile phone or the fear of missing out on social media, are perceived as threats.

2. Prevalence Among Young Adults:

- Scientific studies show varied prevalence rates, from 15% to over two-thirds, based on the criteria for defining digital anxiety.
- Neither the ICD nor the DSM recognize "digital anxiety," resulting in no standardized diagnostic criteria.

3. **Typical Triggers in Digital Media Use:**

- A deficit in emotion-regulation skills due to excessive digital media use.
- Social anxiety stemming from avoiding face-to-face interactions in favour of digital communication.
- Concerns about not being adequately connected.
- Mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal tendencies, arising from cyberbullying.
- Triggers often arise from a perceived gap between expectations and reality. [Page 2]

4. **Coping Strategies & Therapeutic Approaches:**

- Psychotherapy techniques can equip individuals to handle stress better.
- Limiting smartphone and media use can act as a preventive measure.
- Psychoeducation aids in understanding the pathological mechanisms behind the disorder.
- Therapeutic treatments include dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), mentalization-based treatment (MBT), cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), and medication. Some models are tailored to address the unique challenges millennials face with digital media.

5. **Self-help Resources & Recommendations:**

- The internet can be a double-edged sword, but understanding one's disorder and recognizing they're not alone can be beneficial.
- Fostering self-worth outside social media and engaging in real-world interactions can be therapeutic.
- Tracking screen time and contrasting it with real-world activities can provide valuable insights.
- In severe cases, professional intervention is advised.

Digital anxiety is a growing issue among young adults, manifesting in symptoms similar to general anxiety but triggered by digital interactions. While its prevalence is significant, exact figures vary due to a lack of standardized diagnosis. Root causes range from over-dependence on digital media to cyberbullying. Various therapeutic approaches are available, and while the internet can offer support resources, severe cases should seek professional intervention. The interview highlights the critical need for a balanced approach to our digital and real-world interactions.

Cortes Francisco (Frank), MA in Politics & Philosophy, PH Luzern

In a comprehensive discussion, Frank Cortes delves into the multifaceted impact of the digital age on society. He highlights the shift in societal responsibility, particularly concerning mental health and climate change, and the influence of digital media on younger generations. Frank traces the evolution of social

media sentiment over the years, emphasizing significant algorithmic changes around 2016. He underscores the importance of community in a globalized world and the generational gaps in understanding global trends.

Frank champions the integration of political engagement in education and sees potential in using social media as a bridge to younger generations. He contrasts the political landscapes of 2012 and 2016, pointing out the role of algorithms and the backlash against progressive movements. While acknowledging GDPR as a step forward for data privacy, he critiques its user experience aspects.

Reflecting on his career, Frank touches upon the challenges and learning experiences he faced. He debates the impact of filter bubbles and cancel culture, viewing social media as both an educational tool and a mirror to the educational system's shortcomings. Frank also critiques the prevailing “hustle culture” and the societal pressures for constant productivity.

Discussing cultural shifts, Frank identifies the 1980s as a significant era, marked by rapid globalization and the rise of post-modern scepticism. He delves into the cultural significance of memes, the balance of irony and sincerity, and the influence of the media on the economy. Frank critiques unchecked capitalist growth, but finds solace in non-commercial creative pursuits.

Emphasizing the creative potential of boredom, Frank advocates for unplugging from the media for genuine reflection. He also touches upon the challenges of curated online experiences and the cultural trend of nostalgia. He concludes by discussing the distorted perception of time in the digital age and shares personal reflections on anxiety and guilt, emphasizing the need to view personal anxieties within broader societal contexts.

Sirko Lesko, CEO and Founder of Senate Agency specializing in digital marketing and communication

Routine & Digital Consumption:

- Sirko's daily routine involves browsing news, chats, and platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook.
- He perceives his digital consumption as a need for continuous information and stimulation, rather than something harmful.

Future of Technology & Social Media:

- Sirko envisions gadgets becoming more integrated into daily life, leading to a hands-free, constant digital engagement.

- He predicts an increase in content consumption and time spent on social networks.
- Future communication will involve new devices and formats, with people consuming content in varied ways.

Impact of Digital Consumption:

- There's a potential for overwhelm or disengagement due to consuming vast amounts of content on social networks.
- Sirko admits to sometimes losing focus even in real-life conversations, suggesting the challenge isn't solely digital.

Engagement Strategies on Social Media:

- Authenticity is pivotal for audience engagement. Content should reflect the audience's reality, and this approach isn't limited to younger demographics.

Balancing Digital & Physical Realms:

- Sirko imagines a future where digital and physical experiences complement each other, creating an integrated space.
- It's crucial to ensure technology serves humanity and doesn't overshadow it.

Retail & Shopping Predictions:

- A significant shift towards online shopping is anticipated.
- Only a small, affluent segment of the population might afford experiences like visiting physical stores in the future due to constraints.
- Physical store visits will be valued for the positive emotions and experiences they offer.

Olivia, Journalist for Peeps, an app that showcases the diversity of young people in Switzerland

- **Media Consumption Trends:** There's a clear generational gap in media consumption, with younger audiences gravitating towards personalized content. The global trend of narrative journalism is slowly permeating German journalism. Traditional radio is witnessing a decline, making way for podcasts.
- **Media Formats & Personalization:** Podcasts are gaining traction, with personal stories becoming a global journalism trend.

Thore Reigber and Janosch Tillich, "Justr" project creators

Motivation & Research

- The duo aimed for a solution with real impact, focusing on empowering people to form their own routines.
- They based their concept on studies observing daily smartphone interactions.
- The goal was to turn unconscious routines into intentional, self-determined actions.
- Challenges arose in testing their ideas, especially when subjects knew they were being observed.

Potential Impact & Methodology

- The project speculates about the potential impact of their prototype.
- They used a variety of methods in their development process, notably the “100 ideas” method.
- The project was showcased at an exhibition, receiving generally positive feedback.

Implementation Challenges

- A recurring theme is the challenge of integrating their solution into existing mobile operating systems.
- Major players, like Apple or Android device manufacturers, might not align with implementing a feature that could potentially restrict phone usage.

In conclusion, the expert interviews have provided a comprehensive exploration into the multifaceted relationship between individuals and the digital realm. Key insights reveal a generational shift in media consumption, with younger audiences gravitating towards personalized, narrative-driven content. The rise of podcasts and the decline of traditional radio underscore this trend. Authenticity emerges as a pivotal factor in audience engagement, emphasizing the need for content that mirrors real-life experiences. As technology continues to evolve, its deeper integration into daily life is anticipated, presenting both opportunities and challenges.

Several concerns have been highlighted, including the potential for digital overwhelm, declining attention spans, and the challenges of implementing digital well-being¹⁴ solutions. Digital anxiety, characterized by symptoms akin to general anxiety but triggered by digital interactions, is a growing concern, especially among millennials. This anxiety is further exacerbated by issues like cyberbullying, fear of missing out, and the societal pressures of the digital age.

Moreover, the interviews underscore the broader societal implications of our digital habits. The shifting responsibility for global issues onto individuals, the relentless drive of capitalism, and the commodification of personal experiences all point to a need for a more balanced and conscious approach to our digital interactions. The insights, concerns, and issues raised in these interviews emphasize the importance of fostering a digital ecosystem that prioritizes well-being, authenticity, and genuine human connection.

¹⁴ Digital well-being refers to the state of personal physical and mental health in relation to the use of digital devices, platforms, and technologies. (Burr et al., 2020)

3.3. Self-Experiment

In an era where our smartphones have become extensions of ourselves, the idea of being without them, even momentarily, can evoke feelings of vulnerability. This sentiment was aptly captured in an improvised experiment titled “Naked in the Museum.” The term “naked” here is metaphorical, alluding to the exposed feeling one experiences without the protective shield of their phone. Drawing inspiration from interviews where individuals expressed feeling incomplete without their smartphones and the “Off The Hook” series (Jardillier, 2022), I embarked on this experiment at Kunsthaus Zürich.

The Experiment: Equipped with just a notebook and pen, I intentionally left my smartphone – an object I’m deeply attached to — in a locker. My aim was to immerse myself in the museum experience without the constant urge to capture moments digitally.

Key Observations:

1. **Initial Anxiety:** The first 15–30 minutes were marked by palpable anxiety. The absence of my smartphone felt like a sudden deprivation of modern-day essentials — internet access, a camera, and digital payment methods.
2. **Shift in Focus:** As time passed, the anxiety waned, replaced by heightened curiosity and observation. The inability to photograph artworks forced me to adopt alternative documentation methods, such as jotting down titles or sketching.
3. **Rethinking Digital Habits:** I questioned my incessant need to photograph everything, realizing that I rarely revisit these images. This led to introspection about the motivations behind such behaviours – collecting experiences, sharing them online, and preserving memories.
4. **Enhanced Engagement:** Without the distraction of my phone, I engaged more deeply with the artworks, reading descriptions and reflecting on their significance.
5. **Observing Others:** I became more attuned to the behaviours of fellow visitors. Many mirrored my usual habits – consulting online museum maps, photographing artworks, and seeking online information.
6. **Occasional Temptation:** Despite the immersion, I occasionally felt the pull to retrieve my phone, driven by the fear of missing out on important notifications.
7. **Post-Experiment Reflection:** Retrieving my phone post-experiment was an anxious affair, anticipating a barrage of notifications. However, the reality was far less overwhelming. I recognized that had I been with my phone, I would've felt compelled to respond immediately.
8. **Compensatory Behaviour:** After the experiment, there was an initial urge to overcompensate for the missed photo opportunities. However, subsequent self-reflection made me more conscious of my phone usage.
9. **Social Context Matters:** The experiment underscored that smartphone dependency intensifies when one is alone. In social settings, the urge to be constantly connected online diminishes.

Conclusion: The “Naked in the Museum” experiment illuminated the profound impact smartphones have on our behaviours and perceptions. While they offer convenience, they also foster a compulsive need to be constantly connected, often at the expense of genuine, in-the-moment experiences. This exploration underscores the importance of periodically detaching from our digital devices to reconnect with our surroundings and ourselves.

3.4. Stakeholder Experiment

In the heart of the digital age, Zillennials, the primary stakeholders and target audience of this study, find themselves at a crossroads. While they are deeply integrated with their devices and the digital realm, they also grapple with the anxieties that come with it. From the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) to the overwhelming influx of information, from feeling unfocused and distracted to the undeniable addiction to smartphones and social media, the challenges are multifaceted.

This relationship between individuals and digital media can be likened to our relationship with nutrition and diet. Just as crash diets offer a short-term solution but often fail in the long run (Mirabello, 2022), many solutions to digital media overuse, such as digital detoxes or strict restrictions, might seem effective initially but don't address the root of the problem (Ellis & Davidson, 2019). A more systemic approach, akin to balanced nutrition, focuses on education and gradual habit change, offering a more sustainable solution.

Preliminary interviews with Zillennials revealed a complex picture. While most acknowledged the challenges posed by digital media and were aware of potential solutions, they often failed to act on this knowledge. Many have attempted digital detoxes or set restrictions on their devices, only to revert to old habits. Yet, these detoxes typically served as a mirror, reflecting habits they hadn't even realized they had. Much like a nutritional detox aims to cleanse the body, a digital detox can help individuals clear the digital clutter, allowing them to reflect and decide what digital habits they want to reintroduce into their lives.

For many Zillennials, digital media isn't just a tool; it's an extension of their identity. The idea of completely disconnecting is as foreign as severing a part of oneself. They don't desire to abandon this digital realm; they yearn for control and intentionality in their interactions. This dynamic is reminiscent of human relationships, where therapy or counselling can help reshape and balance the relationship based on individual needs and desires.

To delve deeper into this intricate relationship, we reached out to potential participants through Instagram stories, a platform known for its time-consuming nature (Atske, 2022). Out of 176 viewers, 18 expressed

interest in participating. A subsequent post on Telegram channel garnered interest from 12 more individuals (Kaminska, 2023). Ultimately, 29 committed participants undertook the entire experiment, showcasing a high level of engagement. For a more detailed perspective and comprehensive understanding, all the materials, interviews, and tasks related to this study can be found in the appendix.

Aims:

1. **Digital Media-Free Experiment:** The primary objective was to understand participants' post-detox reflections, assess their commitment to further experiments, determine if commitment to the study facilitated action, and identify barriers faced before and during the experiment.
2. **Co-reflection Form:** The aim was to assemble a potential focus group by gauging interest in further participation, uncover questions stemming from the digital-free experiment, solicit suggestions for improving the digital media relationship, and evaluate the impact of digital-free time on well-being and control.

Methodology

Qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing an experimental design where participants were asked to engage in or abstain from certain digital behaviours and then reflect upon their experiences. The primary data collection technique is self-observation and reflection. Their experiences were recorded akin to personal diary or journaling, and the subsequent data can be analysed using thematic analysis to discern patterns and insights about phone usage, distractions, and related behaviours. While the depth of personal experiences is a strength of this study, its findings might not be broadly generalizable.

Digital Media-Free Experiment: Participants, primarily Zillennials, were instructed to engage in digital-free activities. They documented their experiences, feelings, and observations before, during, and after the activity in text, voice or video-diary forms.

Co-reflection Form: After the digital-free activity, participants filled out a form reflecting on their experiences, feelings about living in a digital world, and suggestions for improving their relationship with digital media.

Participants Feedback and Findings

Digital Media-Free Experiment

Participants identified several **barriers**, both before and during the experiment, that hindered their full engagement.

1. **Dependency & Reflexive Use:** Participants detailed reflexive habits and dependency on smartphones for various tasks and comfort.

2. **Mental Dialogue Addressing Concerns:** Concerns like buying bus tickets, knowing the time, receiving important messages, etc., were barriers for some participants.
3. **Temporary Boredom During Idle Times:** Without the phone, some participants felt temporary boredom during moments of inactivity.
4. **Occasional Discomfort:** Participants experienced discomfort when the phone was not available for quick answers or when faced with unanswered questions.
5. **Fear of Missed Opportunities:** Some participants felt they missed out on capturing moments, like scenic views, due to the absence of their phone.
6. **Habitual Phone Use During Work Breaks:** Some participants noticed their habitual phone use, especially during breaks.
7. **Need to Engage with Social Media:** Even when deemed unnecessary, there was a felt need to engage with social media platforms.
8. **Habit of Spending Time in Bed Checking Social Media:** Some participants had a routine of spending significant time in bed on their phone, especially in the morning.



Figure 8 Word cloud based on participants' answers to the question "Describe in three words how you feel living in a world where digital media is an integral part of everyday life" in reflection form.

The post-detox reflection ranged from feelings of liberation and clarity to anxiety and detachment:

1. **Awareness:** Many participants became more conscious of their digital habits, recognizing the overstimulating nature of constant connectivity.
2. **Benefits:** Participants noted several positive outcomes from the detox, such as reduced anxiety, enhanced focus, normalized sleep patterns, and increased self-awareness.

3. **Challenges:** The thought of being without their devices induces anxiety in some, highlighting a deep-seated dependency.
4. **Re-evaluation:** The experiment prompted introspection, with participants questioning the value digital platforms added to their lives and contemplating more mindful consumption.
5. **Desire for Balance:** While acknowledging the advantages of digital media, there was a consensus on the need for a balanced approach to its consumption.
6. **Commitment:** Many participants expressed a willingness to engage in further experiments.

The barriers faced by participants during the digital detox experiment underscore a profound dependency on their digital devices. This deep-seated reliance brought to light the emotional and psychological challenges they encountered when attempting to distance themselves from digital media. Overall, the reflections emphasize the significant emotional and psychological impact of constant connectivity and highlight the potential benefits of taking periodic breaks from it.

Co-reflection Form Insights:

- **Questions Arising:** Participants had various questions about their digital habits, the role of digital media in their lives, and the potential benefits of digital detox.
- **Suggestions:** Recommendations included practising mindfulness, setting digital boundaries, and understanding the underlying mechanisms of digital addiction.
- **Impact on Well-being:** Many participants reported improved well-being and a heightened sense of control post-experiment.
- **Interest in Further Participation:** A significant number of participants expressed interest in further research and participation.

The two-stage experiment provided a comprehensive understanding of the Zillennials relationship with digital media. The findings not only spotlighted the challenges this generation grapples with, but also underscored the tangible benefits of periodic digital breaks. Many participants revealed that digital media often served as an escape, making its absence feel like a void. This absence also brought forth feelings of insecurity, especially when venturing outside without their phones. A significant observation was the habitual use of digital media during breaks and even amidst tasks, leading to heightened distractions. However, the digital-free intervals proved beneficial in enhancing time management and focus. A considerable number of participants postponed the experiment due to the fear of missing out, be it messages from friends or crucial work emails. This exercise illuminated the blurred boundaries between work and personal life for many. Many reported a newfound clarity, particularly those who undertook the experiment in the morning. Additionally, participants who engaged in face-to-face interactions during this period felt a deeper connection to their conversations and the environment.

4. Secondary Research

4.1. Literature Overview

4.1.1. Notifications

In the series of interviews conducted, a prominent theme that emerged was the pervasive influence of smartphone notifications on the daily lives of the participants. Many voiced their concerns about the constant interruptions these notifications bring, often describing them as primary sources of distraction. To cope with this, several interviewees shared their strategies: from muting notifications, keeping their phones on silent, to even placing their devices face down to avoid the visual lure of flashing screens. While these personal experiences highlight a collective attempt to regain control over their digital environments, an empirical study by Maxi Heitmayer from the London School of Economics and Political Science offers a deeper exploration into this phenomenon.

On a comprehensive empirical study titled “Why Are Smartphones Disruptive? An Empirical Study of Smartphone Use in Real-Life Contexts,” the delved deep into the impact of smartphone notifications on users (Heitmayer & Lahlou, 2021). The research, which utilized first-person wearable video cameras, amassed over 200 hours of footage, capturing 1130 unique smartphone interactions from 37 participants spanning the UK, France, and Germany. Contrary to the prevailing belief that notifications are the primary culprits behind smartphone distractions, Heitmayer's findings present a different narrative. A significant 89% of these interactions were found to be user-initiated, not driven by notifications. This pivotal revelation suggests that the perceived intrusiveness of smartphones might be more anchored in users' ingrained behaviours and habits than in the inherent notification systems of the devices.

The study's methodology was rooted in Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography (SEBE), a technique that offers a rich, contextual perspective on user behaviour in their natural environments. This approach ensured the accuracy of data by minimizing potential biases and recall errors. Participants, primarily aged between 21 and 29, wore discreet cameras, providing a first-hand audiovisual account of their interactions. The subsequent qualitative analysis, based on Replay-Interviews, allowed participants to reflect upon and comment on their actions, intentions, and emotions, offering a deeper understanding of their smartphone engagement.

The backdrop of this research is the omnipresent nature of smartphones in today's society and the concerns surrounding their overuse. Notifications, often seen as a major distraction, have become an integral part of our daily lives. However, their perceived disruptiveness is multifaceted and varies based on context. While they serve essential purposes, the constant pressure to remain available and the looming fear of missing out can strain mental well-being and interpersonal relationships.

In conclusion, Heitmayer's study underscores the importance of understanding user behaviours in real-world contexts. It challenges the dominant narrative around smartphone disruptions, emphasizing that the issue might be more about users' learned behaviours than the devices themselves.

4.1.2. Theories of addiction

In the age of digitalization, the way we interact with our devices, especially smartphones, has become a focal point of research and concern. The “Just” project, a bachelor's research endeavour by Janosch Tillich & Thore Reigber from Zurich University of the Arts, delves deep into the compulsive behaviours associated with smartphone use. Their investigation highlights the formation of habits and routines over extended periods of smartphone use and the subsequent impacts on mental and physical health, as well as user satisfaction.

The project draws parallels between compulsive smartphone behaviour and theories of addiction. Addiction, in its various forms, has been extensively studied, with numerous theories attempting to explain its origins and persistence. These theories range from biological explanations, focusing on the brain's dopamine reward circuits, to predisposition theories that consider genetic and personality traits. Learning theories describe addiction as a learned response, emphasizing the role of the environment and observation in shaping behaviour. Decision-making theories, on the other hand, revolve around the choices individuals make, either intuitively or rationally, that lead them down the path of addiction. Motivation, self-regulation, psycho-social influences, and contextual factors also play significant roles in understanding addiction.

To gain a more practical perspective, the researchers interviewed Britta Thelitz, Head of Prevention at the Center for Gambling and Other Behavioural Addictions. The insights from this interview were illuminating. A significant revelation was that most patients do not seek help on their own but are often brought in by concerned third parties. This underscores the challenge of recognizing and admitting to one's addictive behaviours. Thelitz emphasized the importance of early prevention and education, noting that behaviours formed during adolescence can persist into adulthood. Treatment approaches are highly individualized, ranging from systematic therapy involving family and work environments to cognitive behavioural therapy that empowers patients to counteract negative behaviours independently. (Interaction Design ZHdK, 2023; Tillich & Reigber, 2023)

The “Just” project's findings underscore the complexities of behavioural addictions, especially in the realm of digital device usage. It's not just about the notifications or the apps; it's about the deeply ingrained habits and routines that users develop over time. As we continue to integrate technology into every facet of our lives, understanding and addressing these behaviours becomes paramount for our well-being.

4.1.3. Digital Media restriction and well-being

In the digital age, the relationship between smartphone use and psychological well-being has become a pressing concern. Two pivotal studies shed light on this intricate relationship, offering insights into the potential consequences of our digital habits.

The first study, conducted by Jean M. Twenge, Gabrielle N. Martin, and W. Keith Campbell, titled “Decreases in Psychological Well-Being Among American Adolescents After 2012 and Links to Screen Time During the Rise of Smartphone Technology,” analysed the psychological well-being of American adolescents spanning a period of 25 years. The research identified a concerning decline in well-being indicators post-2012, coinciding with the rise of smartphone technology. A significant correlation was found between increased screen time, especially on platforms like social media, texting, and gaming, and decreased psychological well-being. In stark contrast, adolescents who limited their electronic communication reported higher levels of happiness. This study underscores the potential negative implications of the rapid proliferation of smartphones and the shift in adolescents' time allocation towards digital media. (Twenge et al., 2018)

The second study, a draft preprint by Lisa C. Walsh, Annie Regan, Karynna Okabe-Miyamoto, and Sonja Lyubomirsky titled “Does Putting Away Your Smartphone Make You Happier? The Effects of Restricting Digital Media and Social Media on Well-Being,” took an experimental approach. Over an 8-day period, Gen Z participants were assigned to restrict their use of digital media, social media, or water (as a control). The results were revealing. Participants who curtailed their digital media use experienced a myriad of psychological benefits, including enhanced life satisfaction, mindfulness, autonomy, and self-esteem. Conversely, those who limited their social media use witnessed fewer benefits and even some adverse effects, suggesting a potential withdrawal-like response. (Walsh et al., 2021)

Together, these studies highlight the nuanced relationship between digital media consumption and well-being. While the Twenge et al. study emphasizes the potential pitfalls of excessive screen time, especially among adolescents, the Walsh et al. study suggests that the type of digital restriction matters. Limiting general digital media appears to be beneficial, but restricting social media specifically might have mixed outcomes. Studies suggest a need for a balanced approach to digital consumption, emphasizing the importance of moderation and mindful usage.

4.1.4. From face-to-face to digital space: the millennial shift in social engagement

The dawn of the digital age has ushered in unprecedented changes in the way society communicates, perceives, and interacts. Particularly impacted by this transformation is the millennial generation, often dubbed the “iGen,” who have grown up amidst the rapid proliferation of technology, digital media, and smartphones. Madeline Nunley's research, titled “The Influence of Media in the Digital Age on Millennials,” provides a comprehensive exploration of this phenomenon, shedding light on the profound implications of the digital landscape on millennials' societal participation and interactions. (Nunley, 2018)

One of the most salient shifts observed in the millennial generation is the transition from traditional face-to-face communication to digital interactions. Smartphones, with their myriad of communication apps and platforms, have become the primary conduit for social interactions. This shift has given rise to the phenomenon of “internet friends” – relationships that are cultivated and maintained predominantly within the digital realm. While these digital relationships offer a sense of global connectivity and have become as meaningful as real-life interactions for many millennials, there's a growing concern about the potential erosion of physical, in-person relationships. The omnipresence of smartphones in social settings often results in millennials being more engrossed in their devices than in the company of those physically present, leading to a paradoxical blend of connectivity and isolation.

Moreover, the pervasive influence of media, especially social media, has played a pivotal role in shaping millennials' perceptions of self and society. Platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook are rife with curated images of individuals, typically presenting an idealized version of reality. This constant exposure to a specific portrayal of beauty, success, and lifestyle has had profound implications on millennials' self-esteem and body image. The incessant bombardment of photoshopped images and filtered selfies has fostered unrealistic beauty standards, leading to feelings of inadequacy and, in some cases, issues like body dysmorphia and eating disorders.

Media's portrayal of race and gender has influenced millennials' perceptions and understanding of these constructs. While there have been positive strides in representation, there's still a significant portion of the population that feels excluded or misrepresented by the prevailing media narratives.

However, it's essential to acknowledge the empowerment that digital media has brought to the millennial generation. The ability to connect with anyone globally, share ideas instantaneously, and access a wealth of information at one's fingertips has undeniably enriched societal engagement and participation. While technology, digital media, and smartphones have endowed millennials with unparalleled connectivity and opportunities, they have also brought forth challenges that impact their societal interactions and self-perceptions. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, understanding its multifaceted impact on societal dynamics becomes imperative.

4.1.5. Digital anxiety

During a series of interviews, an intricate relationship between digital media use and individual predispositions became evident. Participants with heightened anxiety levels exhibited a pronounced struggle with digital media, often expressing feelings of FOMO and discomfort at prolonged disconnection. In contrast, more relaxed participants voiced concerns rooted in societal pressures, such as the need for prompt online interactions and maintaining a curated digital persona. To validate these observations, all interviewees underwent ADHD, OCD, and Anxiety diagnostic tests from Clinical Partners (Clinical Partners, 2022), a leading UK-based mental health service provider. The results reinforced the initial findings, prompting a deeper exploration into the medical literature on digital anxiety. Adopting a mixed-method research approach, the study hypothesized that conditions like OCD, ADHD, or general anxiety disorders might heighten susceptibility to digital media-induced anxiety. While results didn't distinctly link ADHD or OCD to digital media stress, there was a clear trend suggesting a correlation between general anxiety and digital media-related stress, especially more pronounced among females. This research, though limited in scope, underscores the potential interplay between general anxiety levels and digital media-induced stress.

Odgers and Jensen (2020) embarked on a comprehensive review to understand the relationship between digital technology usage and adolescent mental health. Their findings, based on a range of studies from 2014 to 2019, revealed mixed results. While some studies showed positive or null associations, others indicated negative implications. Notably, the most rigorous studies reported only minor associations, suggesting that the impact of digital technology on adolescent well-being might not be of significant clinical relevance. This underscores the complexity of the relationship and the need for more robust research methodologies. (Odgers & Jensen, 2020)

Idelji-Tehrani et al. (2023) delved into the profound influence of digital technologies on children and young people (CYP). While the benefits of digital technologies, such as fostering social connections and identity formation, were acknowledged, the authors also raised concerns about its potential negative impacts. These include effects on psychological well-being, neurocognitive development, depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. The paper emphasized the need for a standardized digital use assessment (DUA) tool to better understand CYP's interaction with technology and their potential vulnerabilities or resilience to online risks. (Idelji-Tehrani et al., 2023)

Small et al. (2020) presented a detailed analysis of the influence of frequent digital technology use on brain function and behaviour. Their research highlighted both potential negative and positive impacts. On the downside, extensive screen time has been associated with heightened attention-deficit symptoms, impaired emotional and social intelligence, technology addiction, social isolation, and disrupted sleep. Particularly concerning is the link between screen time and symptoms of ADHD. On the upside, certain

digital tools, apps, and online searches may serve as neural exercises, potentially benefiting brain health. (Small et al., 2020)

Dienlin and Johannes (2020) offered a comprehensive overview of the literature exploring the relationship between digital technology use and adolescent well-being. Their findings suggest that the effects of digital technology on well-being are multifaceted. While some adolescents experience increased connectedness and positive interactions through active digital engagement, others face heightened levels of anxiety and loneliness, particularly with passive use. The paper emphasized the distinction between active and passive digital technology use, noting that active use, such as chatting and sharing, may have different implications for well-being compared to passive consumption. (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020)

4.1.6. Findings

The secondary research uncovered nuanced insights into the complex relationship between digital technology and mental wellbeing. As technology continues to evolve and become further ingrained in daily life, questions arise around its impacts on our wellbeing. While the connectivity and convenience it offers are invaluable, there are also risks, ranging from information overload to social isolation. The following passage provides a thoughtful examination of key areas needing attention, from reforming algorithms to fostering digital resilience.

Insights:

1. **Multifaceted Relationship:** Digital technology's impact on mental well-being is not linear. It can vary based on the type, duration, and context of usage.
2. **Active vs. Passive Use:** Active digital engagement, such as chatting and sharing, often correlates with feelings of connectedness and positive interactions. In contrast, passive consumption, like merely scrolling through feeds, can lead to feelings of inadequacy and loneliness.
3. **Developmental Stage Matters:** Adolescents, due to their developmental stage, might be more susceptible to the influences of digital technology. However, the effects are not fundamentally different from those observed in adults.
4. **Digital Myopia:** Many studies have been narrowly focused on screen time, gaming, and internet addiction. A broader perspective that encompasses various online experiences and risks is essential.
5. **Digital Exclusion:** The inability to access web-based services, exacerbated by events like the COVID-19 pandemic, can lead to increased inequalities in educational and occupational prospects.

Digital Media

Positive Aspects:

- **Global Connectivity:** Digital media provides an unprecedented platform for global connectivity, fostering understanding and shared experiences.
- **Cognitive Training:** Certain digital tools and games can enhance cognitive abilities, memory, and multitasking skills.
- **Mental Health Interventions:** Some apps offer interventions that provide self-management, monitoring, and skills training, potentially improving mood and behaviour.

Negative Aspects:

- **Distorted Self-Image:** Constant exposure to idealized images on platforms like Instagram can lead to feelings of inadequacy and issues like body dysmorphia.
- **Reduced Physical Activity:** Increased screen time can lead to sedentary lifestyles, contributing to physical health issues.
- **Sleep Disruption:** Extensive use of digital devices, especially before bedtime, can disrupt sleep patterns.
- **Digital Dependency:** Over-reliance on digital devices can lead to reduced face-to-face interactions and a diminished ability to function without constant digital stimulation.

Issues:

1. **Anxiety and Loneliness:** Excessive passive use of digital media can lead to heightened levels of anxiety and feelings of loneliness.
2. **Attention Deficit:** Extensive screen time has been linked to symptoms of ADHD, especially in young children.
3. **Impaired Social Intelligence:** Reduced face-to-face interactions can impair the ability to recognize emotions and social cues.
4. **Technology Addiction:** Pathological internet use shares features with substance-use disorders, leading to concerns about technology addiction.
5. **Social Isolation Paradox:** Despite the connectivity offered by social media, its use can sometimes lead to feelings of social isolation.

In conclusion, while digital media offers numerous benefits, it's crucial to be cognizant of its potential pitfalls. A balanced approach to technology use, coupled with a deeper understanding of its implications, can help harness its positives while mitigating the negatives.

4.2. Related Projects

In today's digital age, the omnipresence of smartphones and social media platforms has transformed the way we communicate, work, and entertain ourselves. However, with the benefits of instant connectivity come challenges related to over-reliance, addiction, and the erosion of genuine human interaction. Several designers, practitioners, and researchers have delved into this issue, offering insights, solutions, and critiques. Here's a look at the state of the art in this domain.

Yondr & Distractagone

Addressing the issue of smartphone distractions, DistractAGone (Clark, 2016) is a timed safe for phones, while Yondr (*Yondr: How It Works*, 2023) is a locking case used at events to prevent distractions. Both projects underscore the need for undistracted human interaction, though they also hint at potential drawbacks, such as the loss of essential tools and safety concerns.

Punkt MP01 mobile phone

MP 01, hailed as the “ultimate minimalist dumb phone,” is a response to the overwhelming complexities of modern smartphones. Designed with a simple operating system, the MP 01 eliminates internet distractions, offering users a break from the constant barrage of notifications and apps. (Punkt, n.d.)

Fantastic Smartphones

Developed by students at ECAL's Bachelor of Media & Interaction Design, this series of interactive installations critically examines our relationship with smartphones. The installations explore various facets of smartphone usage, from the time lost away from phones to the influence of social media on our actions. The project raises the question: Is the smartphone still a source of pleasure, or has it become a source of alienation? (*Fantastic Smartphones*, 2021)

JUSTR, Redefining Digital Routines

"JustR" delves into compulsive smartphone behaviour, emphasizing the long-term impact on mental and physical health. The project aims to transform problematic smartphone habits into satisfying user experiences using behavioural psychology. (Tillich & Reigber, 2023)

The Social Dilemma & Social Media Reboot

The documentary “The Social Dilemma” (Orlowski, 2020) sheds light on the adverse effects of social media, from mental health issues to societal polarization. In response, the Social Media Reboot (*The Social Media Reboot*, 2021) initiative offers steps to regain control over one's relationship with technology, emphasizing the need for conscious tech usage.

Das Offline Dorf

Linda Meixner's initiative, the Offline Village, offers a 6-day smartphone detox. Stemming from her personal experiences as an influencer, the project aims to promote healthier smartphone usage and enhance real-world sensory experiences. The Offline Village stands as a radical approach to breaking free from digital addiction, contrasting with other solutions that focus on device functionality. (*Offline Dorf*, 2023)

WELLSPENT, Better Screen Time

Wellspent's mission is to ensure all screen time is purposeful. The initiative encourages users to use technology consciously, aiming to eliminate feelings of time wastage on platforms like Instagram. (Wellspent, n.d.)

ONE SEC

This tool introduces a delay when opening distracting apps, forcing users to pause and reflect. By adding friction, ONE SEC aims to break the cycle of instant gratification associated with social media notifications. (*One Sec*, n.d.)

OPAL, Screen Time for Focus

Opal offers a comprehensive approach to mindful tech usage. It provides metrics on focus levels, removes distracting apps during focus sessions, and offers insights into one's digital habits. (*Opal*, n.d.)

Social Media and Youth Mental Health Advisory

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory (2023) titled is a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted relationship between social media usage and the mental well-being of young individuals delves into both the potential benefits, such as community building and self-expression, and the potential harms, including links to depression, anxiety, and exposure to harmful content. The Advisory serves as a clarion call for collective action to safeguard the mental well-being of the younger generation in the digital age. (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023)

In assessing these case studies, it's evident that there's a growing awareness of the pitfalls of unchecked smartphone and social media usage. While some solutions, like Das Offline Dorf, advocate for complete disconnection, others like JUSTR and OPAL focus on transforming our digital habits. The challenge lies in finding a balance that preserves the benefits of technology without letting it dominate our lives. The current state of the art reveals a spectrum of approaches, each with its merits and limitations. As we move forward, the quest for mindful tech usage remains a dynamic and evolving field, ripe for new insights and innovations.

5. Research Prototyping

Through our study of the digital realm, we've gathered numerous insights that illuminate the complicated bond people have with their devices. These findings, derived from extensive research, interviews, and expert opinions, have been instrumental in guiding the next phase of our project. As we delved deeper into the challenges and aspirations of the modern digital user, it became evident that there was a pressing need for innovative solutions. These solutions should not only address the identified issues but also resonate with the evolving digital behaviours and preferences of users.

Prototype foundations form the findings

- **Seeking Balance Over Abstinence:** There's a growing recognition of the need for non-canceling methods. Instead of resorting to extreme measures like setting timers or deleting apps, the emphasis is on building a harmonious relationship with digital devices, rather than complete digital detoxes.
- **Habitual Overuse:** While individuals cherish their devices and the conveniences they offer, many find themselves trapped in habitual patterns, leading to excessive phone checks and screen time.
- **Craving Authenticity:** In the digital realm, there's a pronounced appreciation for human connection, sincerity, and genuine engagement. Authentic interactions are valued over superficial digital exchanges.
- **The Power of Community:** Sharing experiences, thoughts, and reflections within a community setting is seen as therapeutic and empowering, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual understanding.
- **The Role of Self-reflection:** Central to reshaping digital habits is the act of self-reflection. It's through introspection that individuals can recognize patterns and reimagine their digital behaviours.
- **Educational Challenges:** Comprehensive educational projects, while valuable, often feel overwhelming to users. Bite-sized insights, on the other hand, offer a more digestible approach, fostering awareness and a sense of control.
- **Routine as an Anchor:** Established routines serve as a bulwark against various forms of anxiety. They instil a sense of purpose and control, anchoring individuals amidst the digital chaos.
- **Short Attention Spans:** The contemporary digital user often has a limited attention span. As such, information and interactions need to be swift, concise, and non-intrusive.
- **Emergence of Curated Media:** Traditional media forms are witnessing a shift, with curated newsletters, Telegram channels, and podcasts gaining traction. These platforms offer tailored content, resonating with the modern user's desire for personalized experiences.

- **Digital Dichotomy:** A palpable tension exists between two contrasting digital trends. On one end, there's the push for digital detoxes and reduced screen time, especially among those feeling digital anxiety. Conversely, societal norms and expectations pressure individuals to maintain constant connectivity, a sentiment more prevalent among the digitally laid-back demographic.

With this understanding as our foundation, we embarked on the ideation and prototyping stage, aiming to translate our insights into tangible prototypes that could potentially redefine our digital interactions. Let's delve into the prototypes we've conceptualized based on these findings. For a deeper exploration and context, all related materials from our research can be accessed in the appendix.

5.1. Hardware

The Synclet: Conceived during the Passerelle preparation course for the Master's program in Digital Ideation, the Synclet is a wearable bracelet equipped with biometric sensors. It detects the user's emotional state and provides real-time feedback through haptic vibrations and colored light cues (Figure 9). Paired with its dedicated app, it offers interventions tailored to the user's emotional state, promoting mindfulness and reflection on digital media's impacts.

5.2. Offline solutions

Speculative Sticker and Poster Bombing

This initiative involves placing thought-provoking stickers and posters in high-traffic areas like museums, universities, and other public spaces. These stickers and posters pose speculative questions about device usage, prompting individuals to reconsider their digital habits and engage more with their immediate surroundings. Examples include prompts like “Have you considered engaging with the world outside your screen?” or “Why not strike up a conversation with a fellow visitor about the exhibit?” (Figure 10).

Digital-free Offer

This concept partners with cafés and other public spaces to promote digital detox. Patrons are encouraged to leave their devices at the counter in exchange for discounts or other incentives. This not only provides individuals with an opportunity for reflection and a break from their screens, but also offers businesses a unique marketing strategy. It promotes quicker table turnover rates and ensures tables remain free from laptops and other devices, not through prohibition, but through positive reinforcement and customer choice.

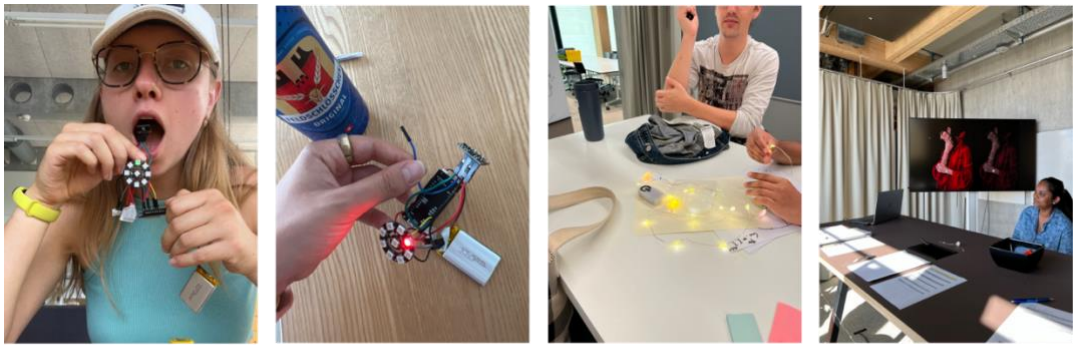


Figure 9 Synclet Prototype.



Figure 10 Poster Prototype

5.3. Media Solutions

Documentary

The documentary chronicles Zillennials' coming-of-age struggles, highlighting how growing up as digital natives impacted their lives. Through interviews, footage, data, and experts, it illuminates the promises and perils of technology for these young adults. By showcasing diverse perspectives, the film encapsulates Zillennials' complicated digital journey, aiming to educate audiences and empower more mindful technology use.

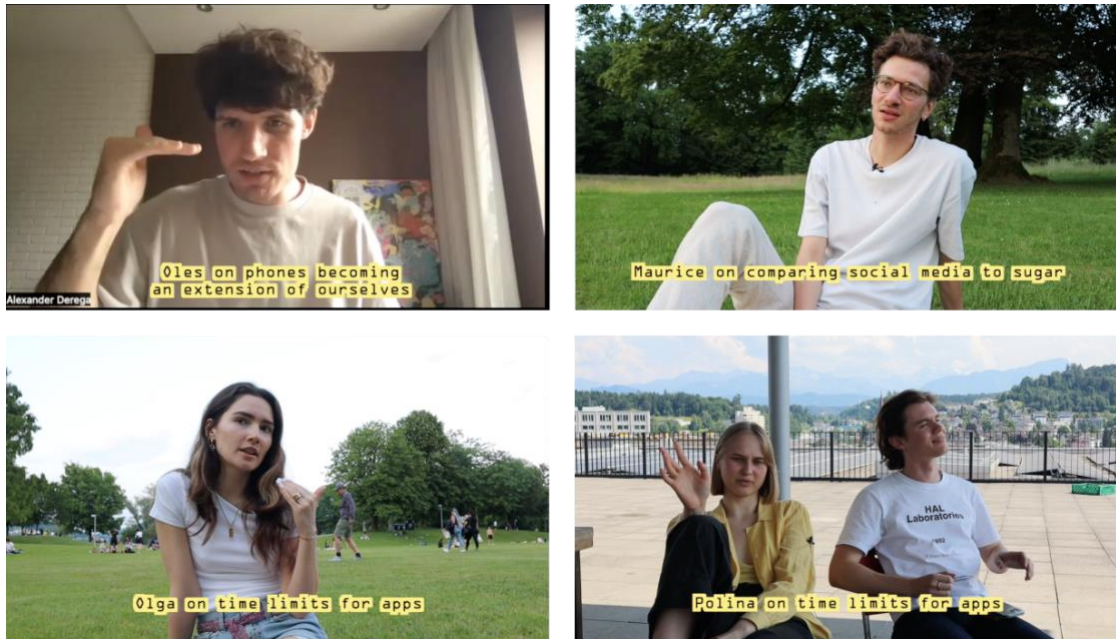


Figure 11 Documentary prototype.

Podcast

An interactive community podcast that delves into modern digital etiquette, fostering a collaborative space for listeners to shape the discourse on digital norms.

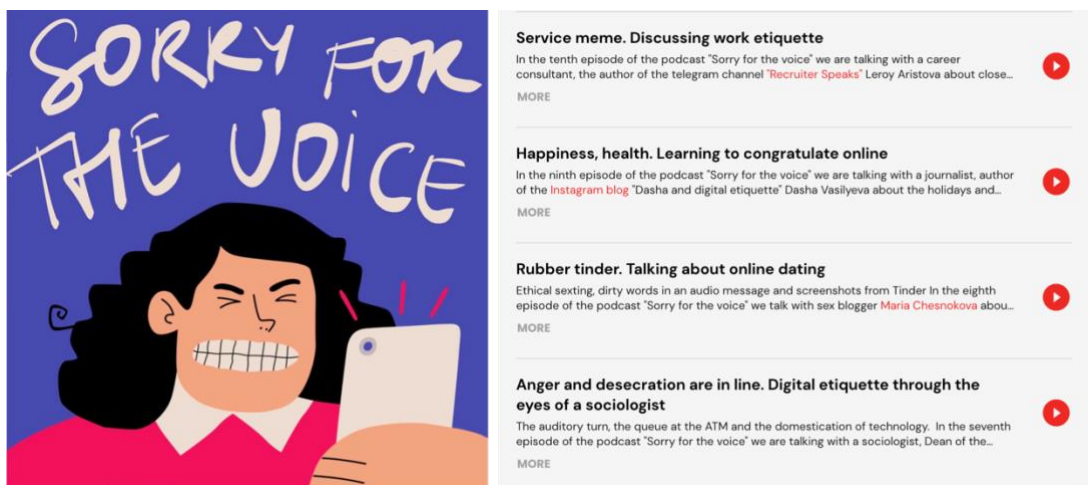


Figure 12 Podcast prototype.

Bite-Sized Ed Videos

In partnership with the Peeps platform, a video was produced to demystify the workings of cookies, offering viewers a concise and clear understanding of this digital concept. That could be used in both offline and online ad campaigns for raising awareness.

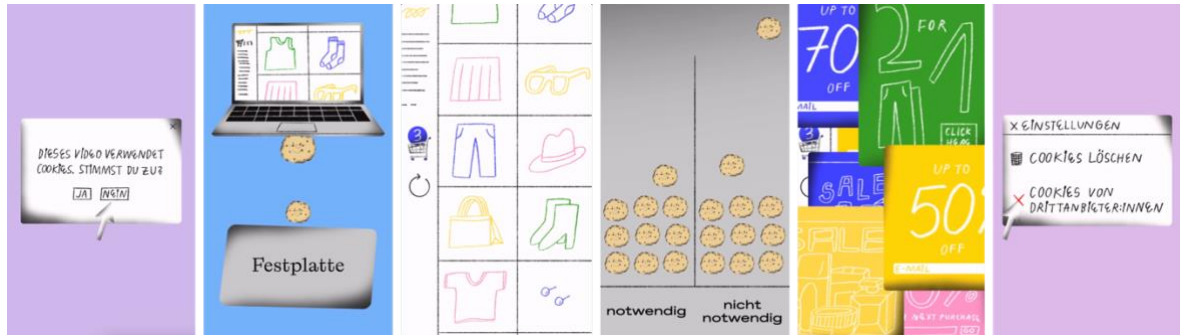


Figure 13 Educational video prototype, Sofija Kaminska x Peeps.

Curated Coaching Program

A personalized program designed to assist individuals in understanding and modifying their digital habits. Through reflection, analysis, and guided learning, participants are empowered to make informed decisions about their digital media usage, fostering healthier relationships with their devices.

Multimedia Blog

A comprehensive platform that amalgamates various media forms, fostering a space for users to navigate, discuss, and shape their digital well-being journey.

5.4. Digital Solutions

Rewired App

Rewired is a transformative app designed to foster healthier digital media relationships. Drawing inspiration from personal relationship dynamics, it promotes self-reflection and community sharing to reshape digital interactions. Users can tailor their experience with goal-specific filters, engage in community discussions, plan digital routines, access curated well-being content, and participate in quizzes. Through bite-sized modules combining knowledge, tasks, and reflection, Rewired offers a holistic approach to digital well-being, making it an indispensable tool in today's digital age (Figure 14).

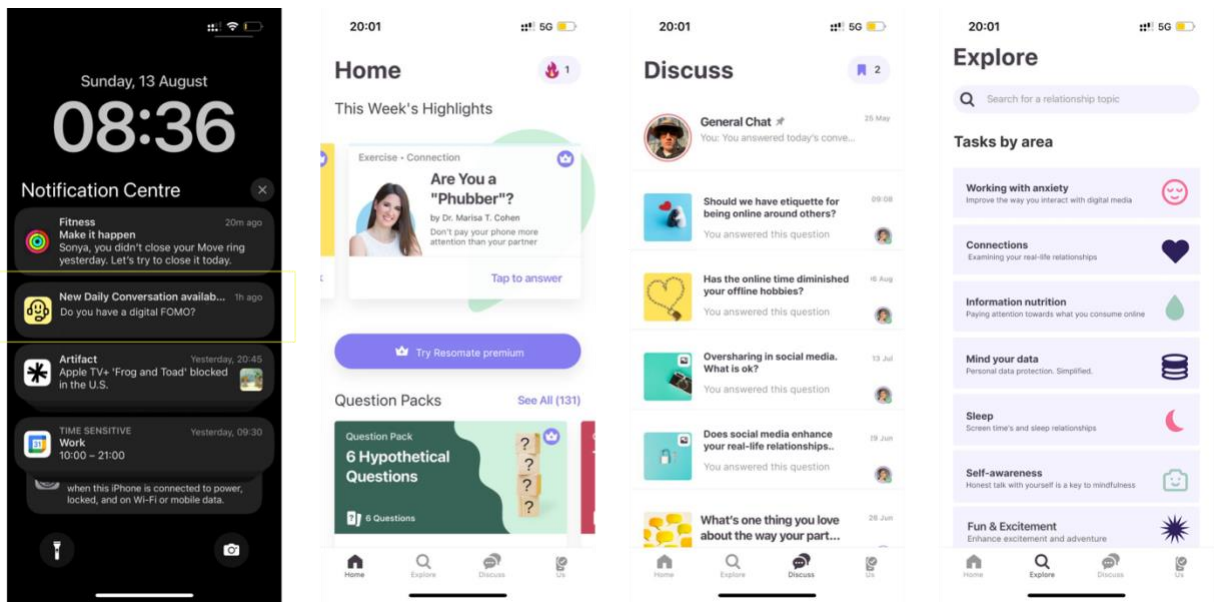


Figure 14 Rewired App interface prototype.

ResoMate Chat-bot

ResoMate Chat-bot seamlessly integrates into the 2023 digital landscape, leveraging advanced machine learning to offer users personalized insights and reflection tasks on their digital habits. Accessible instantly without downloads, it provides timely responses across popular messaging platforms, promoting digital well-being in a cost-effective and user-friendly manner, aligning with the trend of chatbots revolutionizing user engagement (Studio, 2023).

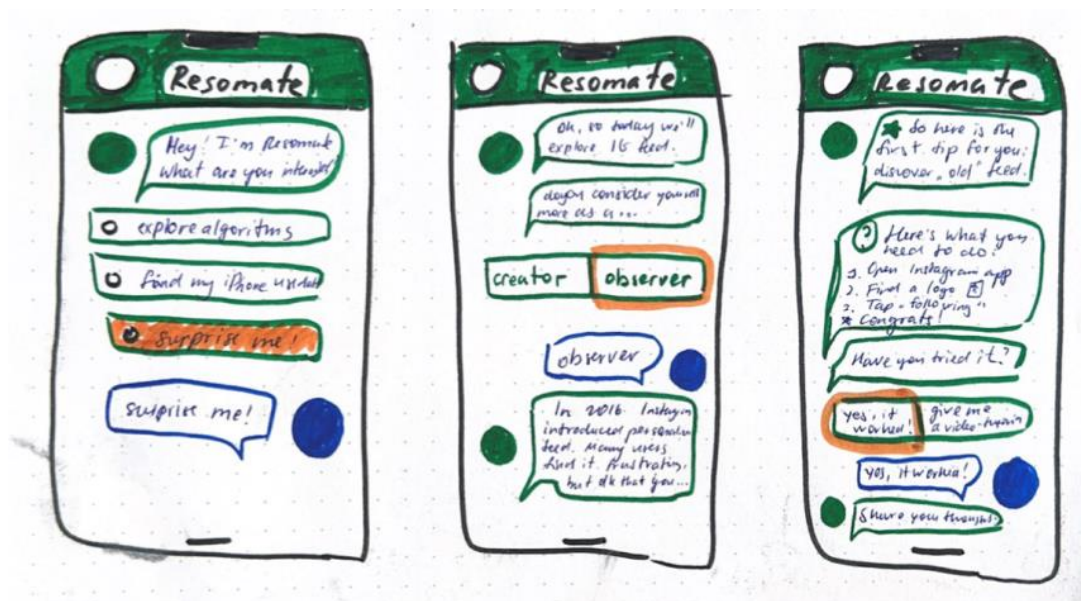


Figure 15 ResoMate paper prototype.



Figure 16 ResoMate storyboard.

Each prototype, from the Synclet bracelet to the ResoMate chatbot, encapsulates a unique approach to addressing the challenges of the digital age. However, it's imperative to note that these prototypes are in their nascent stages. Rigorous testing is essential to refine their functionalities, ensuring they effectively address the identified issues and resonate with the target audience. The journey ahead promises to be as enlightening as the research journey that paved the way for these innovative solutions.

6. Conclusion

The primary objective of this research thesis was to delve deep into the intricacies of digital media usage among Zillennials. We embarked on this journey with a clear intent: to understand the patterns, preferences, and challenges faced by individuals who face anxiety brought by the advancements of the digital era.

The research unveils a nuanced interplay between digital technology and well-being. Passive digital consumption often amplifies anxiety, while active engagement can foster a sense of connectedness. Despite the common blame on notifications, most digital interactions are user-initiated, underscoring the importance of understanding user motivations and contexts. Periodic disconnection from technology emerges as a beneficial practice, enhancing creativity and focus. Though, the absence of digital media might raise the feelings of frustration, FOMO and insecurity. Yet, societal expectations of perpetual connectivity exert immense pressure, leading many to feel they're at the mercy of their devices rather than in control. This study underscores the urgency of not merely demonizing technology but fostering healthier, sustainable digital relationships. By reshaping habits and promoting mindful use, there's potential to reclaim user agency, mitigate anxiety, and champion digital well-being. The overarching aim is to transition from a state of digital powerlessness to one of mastery and intentional engagement, fostering dialogue and sharing within the community.

In terms of our approach, the qualitative methods employed provided rich insights, capturing the nuances of Zillennials behaviour. However, there were limitations. The sample size, while diverse, may not be entirely representative of the broader Zillennials population. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data could introduce biases.

Designers, practitioners, and theorists can glean insights into the evolving digital landscape and the role Zillennials play in shaping it. The findings, while rooted in specific case studies, have broader implications. They highlight the importance of human-centric design and the need to foster genuine community engagement in digital platforms.

Next Steps:

1. **Questionnaire Development:** The immediate next step is to design a comprehensive questionnaire that delves into both qualitative and quantitative aspects of digital media usage among Zillennials. This questionnaire will aim to validate the theories and insights we've gathered so far on a larger scale.

2. **Viral Outreach:** To ensure maximum participation, the questionnaire will be designed with virality in mind. This could involve incorporating engaging visuals, interactive elements, and shareable content that encourages participants to spread the word.
3. **Collaborative Ideation:** The questionnaire won't just be about gathering data; it will also serve as a platform for collaborative ideation. Participants will be presented with some of our initial ideas and prototypes, allowing them to provide feedback and express their interest in further involvement.
4. **Focus Group Formation:** Based on the responses, a focus group will be formed comprising individuals who show genuine interest in the project. This group will play a pivotal role in the iterative design process, providing real-time feedback and insights.
5. **Prototype Testing:** Within the focus group, various prototypes and ideas will be presented for hands-on testing. This will not only help refine the prototypes but also foster a sense of ownership and involvement among the participants.
6. **Community Building:** One of the primary objectives of the focus group sessions will be to cultivate a community. This community will serve as a platform for dialogue, sharing experiences, and collective brainstorming, ensuring the project remains user-centric at every stage.
7. **High-Fidelity Prototyping:** Based on the feedback and insights gathered from the focus group sessions, high-fidelity prototypes will be developed. These will be more polished, detailed, and closer to the final product.
8. **Iterative Development with Community Involvement:** As the project progresses, the community will remain at its core. Their feedback, experiences, and insights will guide the iterative development process, ensuring the final product resonates with the target audience and addresses the challenges identified.
9. **Thesis Project Development:** With the community's active involvement and the insights gathered from the various stages, the thesis project will evolve, reflecting a deep understanding of the challenges and aspirations of Zillennials in the digital age.

As we chart the course forward, the emphasis is on actionable solutions grounded in our research findings. The imminent phase involves testing prototypes and establishing a focus group, ensuring that the insights derived directly influence the development of future solutions. Central to our approach is a shift in perspective: rather than casting digital media as the antagonist, we aim to harness its potential by integrating current anxiety-coping methods and advocating for behavioural change. The overarching goal is clear: to devise and implement strategies that empower individuals, fostering a sense of control and facilitating meaningful conversations. By doing so, we aspire to mitigate anxiety and champion a healthier, more intentional relationship with digital media.

Glossary

Attention Economy

A system that treats human attention as a finite resource that can be monetized, especially in the realm of digital products and advertising. (Experience, 2023)

Digital Anxiety

A phenomenon where individuals experience stress, dissatisfaction, and feeling overwhelmed triggered specifically by use of digital devices and engagement with digital media. (Durlinsky, 2023)

Digital Detox

Periods of deliberately reducing or avoiding use of digital devices and media. (Sreenivas, 2023)

Digital FOMO

The anxiety or apprehension one feels about missing out on digital trends, updates, or experiences happening online, often exacerbated by social media platforms, often exacerbated by social media platforms where users see others participating in activities or events they are not part of. (Alutaybi et al., 2020)

Digital Ideation

Digital ideation is an interdisciplinary approach that merges information technology and design to strategically design and implement human-centered digital experiences, products, and services, with an emphasis on innovation, sustainability, and societal relevance.

Digital Media

Refers to all electronic media content like websites, streaming services, social media platforms, computer games, etc. that can be accessed via digital devices. (Ra et al., 2018)

Digital Minimalism

A philosophy that emphasizes intentional and value-driven use of digital tools while reducing digital clutter and distractions. (Newport, 2019)

Digital Well-Being

Digital well-being refers to the state of personal physical and mental health in relation to the use of digital devices, platforms, and technologies. (Burr et al., 2020)

Digitally-Naked

An experience or period without the use or influence of digital devices.

Metamodernism

The philosophy and view of life that corresponds to the digitalized, post-industrial, global age. (Cunff, 2019)

Pattern Disruptors

Those who challenge the prevailing status quo and introduce new perspectives. (Christensen, 2015)

The Big Flat Now

A term encapsulating our current era, marked by immediacy, accessibility, and a sense of everything existing on a singular digital plane. (Self, 2018)

Zillennials

A microgeneration between Millennials and Gen Z born in the late 1990s and early 2000s. They came of age during the rapid rise of digital technology and social media. (*Urban Dictionary*, n.d.)

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Appendix

For the convenience of our readers and in an effort to embrace sustainability, all materials related to this document are stored securely in the cloud. Instead of printing and limiting the quality of visuals, storing them online allows us to provide access to high-resolution photos, videos, and other pertinent documents. To access these materials, please scan the QR code below or go via [link](#).



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