

# **Exploring Digital Media and Digital Detox among University Students**

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### Abstract

**Background:** Digital Detox has recently gained popularity among young adults, particularly students. Due to the negative impacts of digital media, especially social media, more students intentionally decide to take a step back from digital media to improve their well-being. However, as students also rely on digital technologies for academic purposes, the motivation for a digital detox and the consequences of it are still unclear, as well as the participant's experiences. Therefore, this study aimed to explore digital detox among university students.

**Methods:** In semi-structured interviews, 10 students (60% female, mean age 21 years, age range 18–23 years) shared their experiences with digital media, social media, and digital detox. Participants were excluded when they did not use any digital media or were unable to give informed consent. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed to find recurring codes and themes.

**Results:** Five key themes have been identified: Why students use digital media, how they feel about it, digital media's influence on students, digital detox experiences, and behavioural and educational implications. The students used digital media in their leisure time for entertainment, and to facilitate studying for university. They reported mixed feelings about digital media, describing it both as relaxing and distressing. Many reported excessive use but highlighted that it was necessary to keep in touch with other people. Besides the negative aspects of digital media, a digital detox was carried out on vacation or to limit stress. Digital Detox showed mixed impacts: Positive were improved well-being, higher productivity, and reduced pressure to socialise. Difficulties were feelings of uncomfortableness of being away from their phone, a concern about not being available, and keeping in touch. Moreover, digital media in university was useful for communication and productivity, yet distractive. The implications of doing a digital detox in a university context were that it was helpful for more productivity but challenging because of missing communication.

**Conclusion:** The findings show mixed opinions about digital media and digital detox. Digital detox in a university setting has its benefits and drawbacks. Digital Detox offers potential benefits to cope with the negative aspects of digital media. However, considering that participants went back to their usual digital media usage and aimed for a balance, an approach is needed that fits the student's academic and social life.

**Keywords:** Digital Detox, Digital Media, University, Students, Social Media, Mental well-being, qualitative

## Introduction

Digital and social media have become prominent in everyday life, especially for university students who rely on these platforms for communication, information, and entertainment. Studies found a high correlation between high usage of Social Networking Services (SNS) and mental health in students. To prevent mental health issues an increasing number of students have reported participating in a period of digital detox, where they are purposely staying away from digital media to reduce excessive media use and its consequences. However, the necessity of digital media in university raises questions about how students balance academic media use and the negative impacts of excessive media usage on their well-being. Therefore, this study aims to explore digital detox among university students, including their digital media use in university settings.

### Social Media and Mental Health

Almost 60 % of the world's population uses social media (Kemp, 2023). Thereby, the term social media is defined as a digital technology which allows its users to share information and other personal content with others (Dollarhide, 2024). Social media has been found to have both positive and negative impacts on people's mental well-being. For example, it is easy to feel connected within a community and making it easier for people to stay in touch (Seabrook et al., 2016). Furthermore, social media use can enhance well-being by expressing oneself creatively, interactions with like-minded peers, and finding acceptance of others (OSG, 2023). However, social media also correlates with higher levels of anxiety, unhappiness, and symptoms of depression (Rajesh & Priya, 2020). Thus, although many people use social media to communicate, keep in touch, and find inspiration, it also has negative impacts on people's well-being.

Next to social media use, studies have also shown a correlation between higher screen time and mental well-being. A recent study by Coe et al. (2023) revealed that while every generation uses social media, Generation Z has the most screen time. They show to have an average of 3 hours of screen time per day, whereby higher screentime likely also means the use of more social networking services (SNS) which can lead to higher levels of anxiety (Rajesh & Priya, 2020) and symptoms of depression (Pantic, 2014). Furthermore, more screen time was found to lead to less sleep quality in students (Nestler & Böckelmann, 2023), and late-night digital media use in students showed poor sleep quality which led to higher daytime tiredness (Kortesoja et al., 2023). In conclusion, higher screen time in Generation Z is often connected with the usage of more SNS, whereby its excessive use is linked to increased anxiety, symptoms

of depression, lower sleep quality, and higher daytime tiredness. These findings are important to understand the negative impacts of digital media that might challenge its use in the university context.

Apart from the screen time itself, a systematic review (Karim et al., 2020) explored the effect of social media on mental health and found high correlations with depression and anxiety. Further correlations are the fear of missing out (FOMO), isolation, a negative body image, a higher risk of addiction, and mood impairments (Murphy, 2023). Moreover, several studies show negative mental health consequences among university students: A higher screen time is often linked with lower grades, and students who use social media a lot tend to engage more in social comparison which affects the students negatively (Ilić-Živojinović et al., 2023; Wilson & McDarby, 2023). These findings show how social media use can have a negative impact on student's mental health and their academic performances. Although correlation is not causation, these studies emphasize the importance of understanding the potential risks of excessive social media use.

### **Digital Detox**

As previously discussed, excessive use of SNS is correlated with negative mental health impairments, such as anxiety and symptoms of depression (Pantic, 2014; Rajesh & Priya, 2020). Thus, a digital detox is of growing interest for people who find themselves using digital media excessively and is a tool to reduce it to lower its risks. Thereby, digital detox is “a period of time during which you do not use mobile phones, computers, etc., because you usually use these devices too much” (Oxford Dictionary, 2013). Thus, it is a method where people voluntarily and intentionally take a step back from digital media, especially social media, with the implication that high use of it has a negative impact, and thus attempt to increase one's well-being and productivity (El-Khoury et al., 2021). This can look like being away from one's digital media and phone or limiting time spent online on social media aiming to improve one's mental and/or physical health (Sreenivas, 2023). The term was first added to the Oxford Dictionary in 2013, and since then the amount spent online has risen (Howarth, 2023).

### **Digital Media and Digital Detox in University**

Because of the negative impacts of social media and screen time, young adults often decide to try out a digital detox. Research suggests that higher SNS use is often correlated with lower productivity (Ramírez et al., 2021; El-Khoury et al., 2021). Besides a higher overall screentime in students and a higher use of SNS, students also live in a digital age where a lot of online applications are used for academic purposes, for example using interactive media designs in the classroom to engage more students or using productivity apps that block notifications and

reward you for staying focused (Oliveira et al., 2021). Studies on digital detox in students so far have suggested that higher digital media use might lead to lower grades in school, however, the exact role of academic platforms in this is still unclear. A study by Siew et al. (2017) found that higher smartphone usage correlates with lower grades in Malaysian students, even when the smartphone was used for productivity or academic purposes. Another study showed that using academic platforms was not a predictor of academic performance, but leisure activities such as SNS led to lower performance (Lau, 2017). Therefore, although the usage of overall digital media can be a helpful tool in university, studies suggest that it might lead to lower productivity.

A more recent study by El-Khoury, Haidar, Kanj, et al. (2021) showed that although it was difficult for students to start a digital detox, it was mostly beneficial in terms of reducing anxiety and improving the perceived benefit of being more productive in university. However, the participants stated how they found it hard to quit SNS and the study reported how it was uncertain to know what happened with the participant's SNS use after their digital detox period, as this study only followed them during it. To fill this gap, Coyne & Woodruff (2023) studied digital detox in students with a final assessment after their intervention and showed that the students went through a post-detox binge period after finishing their detox. Furthermore, a literature review found overall mixed results on the consequences of a digital detox, considering that there are both potential benefits and challenges of disconnecting from digital media (Radtke et al., 2022). In that review it became clear how digital detox interventions were successful, however, it was not clear why exactly people would want to turn back to their digital media use, although they initially reported negative outcomes associated with it before their period of digital detox. It was unclear how the findings could be mixed, and whether to recommend digital detox interventions. Understanding digital detox and digital media use in students to its fullest might be insightful for mental health interventions that could implement the outcomes into their program to help students with the negative impacts of digital media to improve overall well-being.

### **Present Study**

In conclusion, digital media has a big influence on young adults, especially students. High screen time and high use of digital media, especially SNS highly correlate with anxiety, unhappiness, distress, and symptoms of depression (Rajesh & Priya, 2020), and can lead to lower grades and lower productivity in the university (Siew et al., 2017; Ramírez et al., 2021). Therefore, some students are interested in a digital detox to reduce the negative impacts of digital media.

In summary, there are mixed results on the impacts of a digital detox in a university setting: some studies found students increase in well-being and productivity during a detox (El-Khoury et al., 2021), yet another study found that while the usage of SNS negatively impacts academic performance, there were no findings that productivity-related digital media such as productivity-supporting apps would improve one's productivity (Siew et al., 2017). This mixed finding is supported by a recent literature review (Ratdke et al., 2022). Furthermore, the exact motivations behind doing a digital detox, its consequences and why people turn back to their usual digital media use, still need more insight. Plus, studies on this field lack insightful perspectives of those who have participated in a digital detox and of those who engage with digital media in university daily. This is an interesting aspect of digital detox, considering its ubiquitous application in today's university, and how a digital detox would influence this.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the exact motivations of students participating in a digital detox and getting insight into the benefits and challenges of participating in a period of digital detox in the university context. Understanding the role of digital media and digital detox in university is important as digital media has been proven to have negative impacts on students' well-being whereas digital media in university is a rising topic. By focusing on the students' perspectives, this study aims to gain insight into students' digital media use and how it influences their well-being and academic performance. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following question: How do digital media and digital detox affect university students' well-being and academic performance, considering the relevance of digital media in university?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The target group are university students. Inclusion criteria for the participants were to be fluent in English, a university student, and to use digital media. Having done a digital detox period was not an excluding criterion, as this study explored the motivations behind people doing a digital detox, and getting important insights from participants who cannot imagine doing one.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 university students (6 = female, 4 = male). The average age was 21.8 years ( $SD = 1.03$ , range = 20 – 24). As shown in Table 1, the participants studied Psychology ( $n = 7$ ), Communication Studies ( $n=2$ ), and Law ( $n=1$ ). The participants were recruited through SONA and by convenience sampling. The link to the study was shared in university group chats and flyers were hung on the campus. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, the names were pseudonymised.

**Table 1***Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Participant	Gender	Age	Nationality	Study
Olivia	Female	20	German	Psychology
Noah	Male	24	German	Psychology
Amelia	Female	22	German	Communication Science
Isla	Female	22	German	Psychology
George	Male	22	Dutch	Psychology
Leo	Male	22	Dutch/ German	Psychology
Ava	Female	21	German	Law
Lily	Female	22	Ukrainian	Communication Science
Theo	Male	21	Dutch	Psychology
Willow	Female	22	German/ Kurds	Psychology

**Materials**

The data were recorded on a digital audio recorder and transcribed using Express Scribe. To emphasise the key content, non-verbatim transcription was used. After that, atlas.ti was used to code the transcribed data. Overall, the six-phase framework of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2008) was used to analyse the data and generate themes. With this approach, the guideline helps to identify common themes and apply an iterative approach. The six steps are familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and locating exemplars.

The semi-structured interview had three parts: the warmup, the main content, and the closing. First, the warmup included general questions about digital media use to get insight into the participant's habits using digital media, discussing both digital media in general and social media. Also, the questions aimed for their perspectives, feelings, and experiences with it. For example, one question for this was "Could you give me some insight into your digital media usage habits?", to get insights into the participant's typical usage. Then digital detox-related questions, aiming at getting insights into previous periods of having done a digital detox, for example, "Have you ever done something that could be described as Digital Detox or something

similar?”, as well as their overall opinions on it, and if they could imagine doing a digital detox again. Furthermore, for those participants who have not tried a digital detox previously, questions aimed at getting insight into why they did not do it, if they could imagine doing one, and what would they think to be the benefits and/or challenges of doing so. Finally, digital media use was explored in a university context, plus the impacts of digital detox on one’s productivity. Exemplary questions are “Considering the role of digital media in your studies, how would you think a digital detox period influence your studies?” and “How do you perceive digital media, such as smartphones, laptops, and online platforms, and Digital Detox within the university context?”. Next to the open questions, probes were used to ensure long answers by the participants. All questions can be found in Appendix A.

### **Procedure**

The data collection took place in April and May 2024. The interviews ranged from 17 to 35 minutes, of which 8 were conducted face-to-face and 2 online via Teams. At the beginning of the interviews, the participants read the informed consent form and had the opportunity to ask questions. Then, the audio recording started. All interviews were conducted in English. At one interview, the audio recording unexpectedly stopped after 13 minutes. To account for the missing audio, a summary was written about the rest of the interview that was sent to the participant who read through this and explicitly consented to the further use of the summary for the coding.

### **Results**

Based on the interviews, 5 common themes were found: Purpose of Digital Media, Feelings about Digital Media, Behavioural Impact and Attitudes Toward Digital Media, Experience with Digital Detox, and Educational and Behavioural Implications. An overview of the themes, with their subthemes and codes can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Overview of the Themes, Subthemes, and Codes.*

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Purpose of Digital Media	Personal	Entertainment Keeping in Touch Social Media
	University	Communication Getting Information Online Lectures and Materials Studying



Feelings about Digital Media	Impact on Well-being	Annoyance
		Decrease Mental Health Distressing Enjoyment Exhausting Feeling Guilty Relaxing Digital Media Unhappiness
	Social Media Pro	Getting Information Inspiration Keeping in Touch
	Social Media Con	Distressing Social Comparison Harmful Content Online data Concern Social Expectations
Behavioural Impact and Attitudes Toward Digital Media	Dependence	Background Usage/ Routine/ Habit
		Affects all Aspects of Life Addictive
	Usage and Attitude	Forget Real World Excessive Screentime No Added Value Boredom Nice Distraction in the Moment
	Productivity/ focus	Waste of Time Decreased Focus Distracting from Studying Lack of Motivation
Experience with Digital Detox	Purpose of Digital Detox	Negative Aspects of Digital Media before Overusing Digital Media Vacation
	Methods of Doing a Digital Detox	Limiting Stress Finding Alternatives
	Difficulties	Getting Rid of Phone Limiting Distractions Limiting Screentime Distance Anxiety Checking Notifications Concern about Availability Fomo Post-detox Binge Struggle with Consistency Uncomfortable

	Positive Impact	Work-Related Media Digital Detox Enjoyment Feeling Accomplished Increased Well-being Increased Awareness Increased Confidence Increased Energy Meeting Friends Offline Reduced Pressure to Socialise Relaxing Digital Detox Easy Accessible
Educational and Behavioural Implications	Digital Media Helpful in University	Efficient Facilitates Organisation Facilitates Studying Authentication
	Unhelpful Aspects of Digital Media in University	Decreased Focus Digital Distraction Loss of Handwriting Skill Being Uninformed
	Negative Impact of Digital Detox on Productivity	Communication Issues Work-related Media Increased Focus
	Positive Impact of Digital Detox on Productivity	Increased Motivation Increased Productivity Balance
	Mental and Behavioural Changes	Mindful about Content Mindful about Distractions Physical Books Purposeful Communication Selective Reduction

### **Purpose of Digital Media**

All participants reported using digital media for leisure and in university. This applies to both phone usage and laptops. Participants shared using digital media in their leisure time for entertainment, for example watching videos or playing video games. While social media was often reported as being important, all participants mentioned how they use digital media to keep in touch with other people. Furthermore, students use digital media in university to communicate with peers and professors, for example, to discuss group work or ask questions about an assignment. Moreover, with digital media online lectures and material was accessed.

### ***Personal***

For personal/ leisure activities, it was very common for participants to be engaged. Social media was reported to be very common to use to find enjoyment in or to communicate with others. More about why people used social media and their experiences with it will be discussed in depth under the theme “Feelings about digital media”.

Participants who used digital media in their free time for entertainment often watched movies, were gaming, or listened to music. Some people reported how they actively take time to watch a movie, alone or with someone else, whereas other participants mentioned having a video or some kind of music always in the background when they are doing another task, for example, cooking dinner or eating breakfast.

All students reported how keeping in touch is, next to entertainment, one of the biggest reasons for using digital media. It was important to stay in touch, and this applied to people living together, talking online with friends, or keeping contact with people who live further away. Furthermore, it is important to mention that keeping in touch was not only a reason for digital media use in general but also for social media usage. The following quote shows what digital media Lily mostly uses.: “I can't really imagine my life without digital media at all, because, yeah, I think the most important part is the communication with others, like WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Snapchat, whatever.”

This shows how Lily finds it very important to use social media to stay in touch with other people, and that it is so important that she cannot imagine not using digital media because of it.

### ***University***

All students reported using digital media in a university context. Mostly, students used it for studying, where participants used their phones or laptops to go through online materials, look at notes from their lectures, or use productivity apps to keep focused. For example, Ava uses a flashcard app that helps her study. She reports it to be “really innovative”, and that she enjoys using it.

Furthermore, students were using digital media to get information online and to communicate with peers for a group project or with teachers or professors.

Isla described how she constantly engaged with the student website, where she needs to “check the required readings, you need to download the readings and then the readings are just on your iPad”. She continued explaining how important communication via digital media is in university, especially when she needs to be in contact with professors, or her supervisor when she is writing her bachelor’s thesis.

### **Feelings and Opinions about Digital Media**

This theme focuses on the impacts on the student's well-being, and how the participants feel about using digital media. Furthermore, this theme reflects positive and negative aspects of using social media respectively. This does not only describe feelings but also the purposes, opinions, and doubts of using social media.

### ***Impact on Well-being***

The students mentioned having mixed feelings about using digital media. In general, media use was reported to be joyful and relaxing. Leo described how he, after a long day of studying, liked to relax in the evening by engaging in digital media. Having been productive before, he mentioned how purposefully taking time for TV shows is joyful for him:

And then really like the time I can chill down kind of in the evening watching some TV shows or something and then I have to say like that doesn't feel like a really waste of time for me or something it's more like I have been productive okay I can relax now. (Leo)

Furthermore, the participants often described joy when communicating with friends. Here, George mentioned how that “feels quite good because you are somewhat engaged”.

However, the participants reported negative impacts as well. For example, the students reported a decrease in mental and physical health. Willow described how she dislikes how she feels after spending excessive time scrolling through social media:

Sometimes I start to get a headache or I feel very tired and I want to lay in bed all day. So it really can be draining. And also I cannot finish a lot of tasks then throughout the day. And this makes me feel very bad about myself as well then. (Willow)

She continued how she has not understood her behaviour, and how she keeps excessively engaging with social media despite feeling guilty about it. Further participants explained how digital media use can decrease their mental health, and how they feel exhausted or stressed by their use. Additionally, some participants reported being annoyed by digital media. Olivia shared how she found it “quite annoying to always be reachable on email because you feel like, oh why I have to respond to this and then it's really difficult to get working on something that requires high concentration “. More students shared their dislike about being connected and the expectations to answer immediately. Also, it is noticeable how digital media in university leads to distractions, and checking things online might distract from working on university related tasks.. This will also be visible under the theme “educational and behavioural implications”, where the code “digital distractions” will be discussed in detail under the subtheme “unhelpful aspects of digital media in university”.

### ***Social Media Pro***

Most participants were using social media, both passively and actively. This could either look like them mindlessly scrolling through their social media feed and looking at their friends or celebrities posts, or actively posting and sharing posts and commenting on other people's content. In fact, keeping in touch was frequently mentioned as a reason to use social media. For example, Willow described how she enjoys social media:

So it's, of course, possible to live without it, but it also gives you some benefits by feeling more connected to your people when you see Instagram stories of your friends and everything. So I like this and it gives me a positive feeling. (Willow)

This comment highlights the positive impacts of using social media when it is used to keep in touch with friends.

Additionally, social media was used to get inspiration. Participants commented they sought new ideas on room decoration or creativity, which added to their overall affection towards their social media consumption. Amelia described how she finds inspiration for leisure time and university, such as daily hacks:

I sometimes look for like hacks or something like that on TikTok, like also productivity hacks or yeah, how to structure your bachelor thesis, for example. There's a lot of creators do content like that, but I think I'm looking more for inspiration maybe there for my creativity than really that the app is helping me with the creativity. (Amelia)

Another positive aspect of social media is getting information. The participants shared how they like to keep updated on either friends' lives or political news. Furthermore, the participants also reported to engage in educational content. For example, Leo shared how he likes to get educational information about self-love and Willow mentioned how she likes to inform herself on psychological topics that add to her study's contents.

### ***Social Media Con***

Despite the positive parts of social media use, participants also reported negative aspects. They found it distressing and did not like the social expectations that induced pressure to share something online. Therefore, some participants mentioned how they only use social media passively without sharing any personal information. In relation to this pressure to post something personal, a few participants also shared concerns about their online privacy. Here, Noah expressed his concerns: "So I don't really feel comfortable with me sharing myself, my information online. I like to have my privacy especially online because data, online data and online privacy is a big concern for me". Along with Noah, other participants also decided to show limited information online.

Similarly, participants mentioned harmful online content. One participant shared a negative experience that happened in high school, where he got in trouble for mindlessly sharing a harmful video with other students. He mentioned how this shaped his attitude toward online media usage and since then is extra cautious with online interactions.

Furthermore, several participants discussed social comparison on social media platforms and how it affects them negatively. For instance, Ava explained how she dislikes seeing other people's "perfect life" and does not see the necessity of sharing everything on social platforms. Similarly, Theo mentioned how he feels bad when comparing himself with other people online:

It's like it's just bad because you keep looking at what other people are doing in their lives and you know you're always comparing yourself to others because like oh my friends are partying while I'm here or you know this person my age is extremely rich so I'm not so it's a kind of bad thing. (Theo)

Finally, another participant shared how she did not like the presentation of body image on social media, and how she usually compares herself to these unrealistic standards and then feels bad about herself.

### **Behavioural Impacts and Attitudes Toward Digital Media**

This theme focuses on the behavioural impacts of digital media on students and reflects their attitude towards its use. Many participants noted excessive use, saying how it can be addictive. They normally found digital media relaxing, but although it was a nice distraction at the moment, many students said it would be a waste of time but could not stop using digital media excessively. Most usage happens out of boredom or in the background when doing another task, such as cooking dinner. Furthermore, many participants reported that digital media usage is often paired with a lack of motivation that hinders them from studying or being productive.

#### ***Dependence***

Most participants reported having a negative attitude towards media usage as it affects all aspects of life. One participant explained that she knew she had been using her phone too much when she starts dreaming about her media content. Furthermore, people noted how their media consumption felt addictive and like they were dependent on their phones. For example, Noah described how he would get lost in another city without his phone, and how he relies on his phone to navigate him and thus would always need it. Isla mentions how she uses her phone for everything she does in her daily life. She adds: "I think I did not even make it one day without my phone."

Many participants described how they felt like they were engaging with media too much, that they overuse digital media and use it excessively.

Some participants mentioned how they forget the real world when they engage with media. Noah described how he tries not to engage much with digital media as it is not the real world.

I feel the more you spend online the more you see the online reality as the real world in a way and I think we all can agree that that's not the case and that's why I try to keep my head in the real world. (Noah)

### ***Usage and Attitude***

The participant's usage often became a habit, where the media is always continuing in the background. Lily described how she always has a video running in the background when she is doing something else:

I spend in TikTok is like 18 hours per week, so, yeah, it's quite a lot, I think, but it's quite addictive for me because I watch TikTok or Reels on Instagram when I brush my teeth, when I cook something, I watch YouTube, so, yeah, it's like when I do something, I always use digital media in one way or another. (Lily)

Later in her interview, she mentioned how she feels embarrassed that turning to social media has become a habit for her.

Many participants reported that, although they liked spending time online, they only found it to be a nice distraction at the moment, and it would not give them any value. Some participants mentioned they see their own media usage as a "waste of time". Olivia described how she likes spending time online, but does not like how she feels about it afterwards:

So overall, I feel in the moment I'm like, this is nice, but then afterwards I'm like, now I just spent half an hour of my life just scrolling through stuff and I don't feel like it really improved my life quality. And it's just a nice distraction in the moment, or like a nice passing of time, time to time in the moment, but doesn't really increase my happiness very much. (Olivia)

Some people used media out of boredom and report being unhappy about their media use because of excessive screen time. Here, Theo reported spending time on social media out of boredom and not enjoying spending time online.

### ***Productivity/ Focus***

Next to personal dissatisfaction, media also impacts the student's university life. The participants reported how using media usually resulted in lower productivity when using digital media led to getting distracted from what they were originally about to do. A few participants shared how they find themselves lacking motivation when they have consumed digital media the whole day. When it comes to social media, they often find it too addictive to stop and continue working on their tasks for university. Noah described how he went home from

studying because he was excited about playing video games and how he probably would have stayed in university if he had not had his console:

As a concrete example I had an exam yesterday and I didn't study as much as I could have which is okay but I still remember when I was at the library studying and then I was like damn I've been studying a lot. This is really hard. Why not just go home and relax a bit? Relaxing means play some video games which is okay. I guess you can freely play some video games after a study session, no harm with that but I also think or I'm thinking yeah did I go home to play video games or if I haven't had my console at home would I have stayed at the university? (Noah)

The negative aspects of digital media in the university will also be in-depth discussed under the theme “Behavioural and Educational Implications”, under the subtheme of “Unhelpful Aspects of Digital Media Use in University”.

### **Experience with Digital Detox**

The student’s experiences of digital detox focus on having done a period of digital detox on purpose, and students who tried to limit their media usage. This theme explores the motives behind people doing a digital detox. The participants shared how they wanted to limit the negative aspects that come with their digital media use, such as stress. Limiting their media usage was beneficial for exam periods or on vacation. Furthermore, for common methods to reduce their media consumption, participants listed apps that limit or block certain apps for certain amount of time. Another common method was getting distance from the phone, for example by putting it in another room when people wanted to focus on studying. Additionally, this theme explores the positive and negative impacts of the digital detox.

### ***Motivations behind Digital Detox***

For almost all participants who tried out a digital detox period or actively tried to limit their media usage, the reasons were consistent with the negative aspects of media use that were explored before. For example, the participants found digital media to be distressing and were unhappy about using it constantly without having control over it. Besides these negative aspects, more reasons were found that specifically led towards a digital detox. Most people reported that they were only able to or wanted to limit their usage while on vacation. Theo explained how he likes limiting his digital media use on vacation, as he is not that dependent on communicating with other people outside of the university. There, he has no obligations and can “take time away from all this”.



Additionally, participants mentioned how they find severe stress in their daily life, that they hope to reduce with a digital detox. Isla described how a digital detox would be helpful when she feels stressed because of constantly checking her notifications:

I think [digital detox] can be extremely useful if you're too stressed about stuff. Like if you're like constantly checking, like, okay, I need to check this, I need to check this. It's kind of, I would say, like getting a burnout that is related to digital media use. (Isla)

Another big aspect of participating in a digital detox is studying. Many participants reported how they usually find their digital devices distracting from studying and often reduce their usage to concentrate on their work. Amelia described how she gets distracted by digital media when studying:

And, if you maybe focus too much on [digital media] and then not focus maybe on the things that you're supposed to do, like get too distracted by it too much. Like when you're supposed to write on your bachelor thesis, for example, where you always get distracted from it, then I think it can get too much social media. (Amelia)

She continued how helpful it is for her to turn off her phone when she wants to work on her bachelor's thesis so she would not get distracted.

Furthermore, overusing digital media comes with the negative impacts mentioned before but is mentioned on its own because most participants reported having reached a point where they noticed how they used media too much, being exhausted of it and thus needed a break. Leo shared how a digital detox is helpful when he has a high screen time and other people tell him how he is constantly on his phone. He continued saying how digital detox then would improve his mental well-being. Finally, Ava shared that “when it affects every aspect of your life, then you maybe should reduce your use of social media”.

### ***Methods of Digital Detox***

While on vacation, the participants found it easy to just get rid of their phones, as it was usual to not have Wi-Fi and often had no work obligations, so they often took this as a chance to limit their media usage. Ava reported how easy that was for her while on vacation: “I think I just shut my phone off. And I think that worked really well.”

For daily life, one common method was limiting screen time, for example by blocking notifications or specific apps. Several participants used this method to either purposefully block social media, or notifications when they wanted to focus on studying and did not want to get distracted. Lily explained how she used an app to block certain notifications to keep focusing on studying:

I use the app Forest that blocks, like, you can't use your phone if you set a timer when I need to do the assignments or, yeah, just, you know, I need to have some time dedicated to my studies. (Lily)

Another common method to reduce digital media use in daily life was finding alternatives for the participant's media use. They often mentioned engaging more with hobbies, for example reading physical books or finding creative ways to spend their time. Willow described how she tries to limit her phone behaviour after excessively using it by finding alternatives: "the last couple of days I really used my phone too much, then I also try to do more other activities so my screen time becomes less." Isla also mentioned how she usually tries to read a book when getting stressed after interacting on social media. She likes reading but sometimes has to remind her of it again when she gets distracted by her media use:

You want to finish it. You like the storyline. Just do something more useful with your time instead of scrolling to some weird-ass comments and get mad about that. (...) So I tried to put the phone away, put the Wi-Fi off and just try to read a book. Yes, that's how I normally try to do it. (Isla)

Finally, participants limited their digital media use by physically distancing from their phone, for example by putting it into another room when studying. Theo explained how he turned off his phone whenever he is in social settings so he would not check his notifications regularly. Furthermore, he describes putting his phone into another room for studying, because the phone would be too distracting for him otherwise:

I try to you know instead of just leaving my phone on my desk and so I have to just say okay just leave my phone downstairs and I'll just study upstairs just because you know you need to study and you need to pass. (Theo)

### ***Positive Impacts of Doing a Detox***

During the period of a detox, or when participants were actively staying away from their phones, they reported finding enjoyment in this time. Many participants found it relaxing and peaceful to not be on their phones.

Furthermore, participants often reported increased well-being and confidence. Noah mentioned how he feels "really good" about himself when not using any media, "which also increases [his] confidence". Other participants reported having more time in the day when they are not using their phone, which often led to them being more productive. This in turn led to participants mentioning higher well-being, and how they felt peaceful and accomplished. Amelia supported this by mentioning how she had time to be productive during her detox and felt it had positively impacted her well-being:

At the end of the day, I really have the feeling, okay, I got something done and I was productive and I worked on my things, the actual not using social media part had a positive impact on my mental health, I would say. (Amelia)

Some participants reported reduced pressure to socialise. This would occur by the students not having to check their notifications and thus feeling calmer about their media usage, especially when they are normally used to regularly use their phones. For instance, Olivia explains how she enjoys the time not using her phone because of this:

In general, I think it's relaxing to be away like from my phone (...). But I did feel like very relaxed while doing it because I didn't have the pressure of always getting back to people.

Furthermore, some participants reported meeting more friends offline. They mentioned how turning off their phones improves the quality of spending time together. Moreover, a few students mentioned how they kept going with this new habit even after their period of digital detox had ended.

Students who started tracking and limiting their screen time often mentioned having a higher awareness of how much time they were spending online. Olivia shared: "I think that's nice because it gives me an actual overview of oh, this is actually how much time I'm spending on Instagram or something." For some participants, this new insight was often their starting point for digital detox, as they felt bad about their perceived high amount of screen time and thus started to reduce it.

### ***Difficulties of Doing a Detox***

Most participants reported anxiety and being uncomfortable when staying away from their phones or by the idea of it. Lily mentioned how especially the beginning of a digital detox would be challenging:

I think that I would behave like a drug addict, you know, first few days, first few weeks, because I think it's like the daily routine for me, you know. And if I change something, like in the beginning, I would feel like super uncomfortable and stressed. (Lily)

Additionally, some participants mentioned having FOMO, that they fear they are missing out on something that is going on online. Isla mentioned how this was distressing for her because she often wanted to check her phone and then missed it. George also expresses his distress and how he would miss something when doing a detox: "At the same time, it's also kind of like you're missing something. That you need it. So in that sense, it's a bit stressing."

For another difficulty, people were concerned about not being reachable and of not being available to other people when needed. This is what Ava thought about that: "I think because everyone is communicating hugely with social media or digital media, it really can impact your

life, your daily life, when nobody can connect you” Lily also mentioned: “So if you, for example, turn off your device completely, you're kind of inaccessible for other people. And if it's something urgent, they can't reach you. So that's a big problem, I think”

When doing a full period of detox, some participants struggled with consistency because they missed certain parts of engaging with media and went back to using their phones. Often, going back to digital media use after a detox was perceived as relaxing, even if the digital detox period was also described as relaxing. Furthermore, one participant also shared how he “[fell] back into the habit after some time” (Noah).

Two students reported a post-detox binge, in which they went back to mindlessly using media, “even more” (Lily). People who tried to block notifications or certain apps, or just tried to limit their screen time had difficulties with not checking their notifications regularly.

Furthermore, a big difficulty with a digital detox was work-related media. Most participants struggled to combine the digital detox with media use that was necessary for university purposes. Ava described how she missed digital media during her detox, as she was dependent on it for university:

I could imagine it [digital detox] if I was at a different point in my life because I'm using it [digital media] hugely for university or to contact different people. I really need it in my daily life. But if I were to not have to do these things, then I could imagine not using it at all.  
(Ava)

### **Educational and Behavioural Implications**

This theme is about combining digital media with university as well as digital detox. First, participants reported digital media in the university context as both helpful and unhelpful:

While certain apps could facilitate studying or productivity, and online material would make studying easily accessible, using digital devices often led to distractions. Then, doing a digital detox had a direct impact on productivity in the university context. Here, while it improved well-being and facilitated studying digital detox often led to communication issues in the university. Finally, students reported behavioural and mental changes after having done a digital detox, for example trying to balance digital media in university instead of aiming for a period of a digital detox.

#### ***Digital Media Helpful in University***

Students reported finding digital media helpful in a university context, for example as it was reported to be easily accessible. Ava mentioned how she can take her laptop everywhere and can study any place she wants to. Furthermore, digital media in university was seen as effective. Ava continued to explain how working digitally saves her time: “But if I'm talking about myself,

I think it just helps me. It's very effective. I think I'm really, really time-saving. I'm reducing the time that I would need to do that manually.” Moreover, another positive aspect of digital media in university is that it facilitates organization. Many participants mentioned having online platforms to meet up, e.g., Teams, or using an online calendar to get an overview of one’s study plan, to “not forget everything” (Olivia).

Finally, digital media facilitates studying in university. Many students mentioned using specific apps that would either help them plan their studies or help them stay productive. For instance, two participants described how their flashcard app helped them study for their exams.

### ***Unhelpful Aspects of Digital Media in University***

Many students reported finding digital media unhelpful in university context. Some said it would decrease their focus and they are prone to digital distractions. This happens when they use the same device for personal and university purposes, and it gets too easy to start engaging with entertainment when wanting to be productive. Theo described how he easily gets distracted by his phone when he wants to study and only turning off his phone would help with being focused. Additionally, a lot of participants get distracted by content on their laptop, when using it for studying, for example in a lecture. Willow mentioned how she saw people booking flights during lectures and also likes to shop online. She mentioned how this might be when you are too dependent on digital media and are used to do everything with the same device. Furthermore, Isla mentioned how she regularly checks her phone when studying to see if she has missed something important, but often gets distracted by it:

It is distracting if you constantly want to check or if you're constantly thinking about, hey, when I will receive the message, like the reply to an e-mail, I think that can be distracting. Because every time a notification pops up, you check, oh, is it that one I was looking for? And then you get out of the studying mode. (Isla)

Then, two students did not like digitalisation they think digital media in university leads to a loss of one’s handwriting skills. One thought that you would “learn better from it” (George) and that using too much digital media in university would impair that learning.

Finally, two students mentioned how the authentication app to log in to your accounts online was unhelpful. They reported that they don’t like being dependent on their phone when they want to be productive, it often leads to distractions, and they would rather get distance to their phones when studying. George expresses his dislike about that because he prefers to not use his phone at all when studying: “If you want to access the university site, then you always need your phone for an authentication. That's very annoying. “

### ***The Positive Impact of Digital Detox on Productivity***

All students reported having positive impacts on productivity when doing a digital detox or purposefully staying away from their phones. One impact is an increased focus, as blocking notifications, and apps or keeping a distance to your phone can limit possible distractions. Amelia supports this, explaining how using an app to block notifications and specific apps makes her more productive, especially shortly before a deadline or an exam:

I think especially like now when having really a project that needs to be done in time, I think for me personally, [the app and notification blocking app] helps me to focus really on the things I have to do because then I don't get that easily distracted because also if you have the limit, you don't get any notifications or anything from those apps anymore. (Amelia)

Furthermore, Amelia elaborated on her increased productivity and how not engaging in specific digital media made her feel better:

(...) but more that at the end of the day, I really have the feeling, okay, I got something done and I was productive and I worked on my things rather than, okay, the actual not using social media part had a positive impact on my mental health, I would say. (Amelia)

Leo also mentioned how blocking apps and notifications helps him study, and how he feels good and accomplished about that:

It feels pretty good because I get in like when I block things then I get also automatically in that focus for myself so if my focus is on work then I put my work focus on my phone and then I really see myself doing that what I'm doing and what I want to do and that feels pretty good because you also don't get the messages and stuff and you're not missing out on something and then you get really productive and that feels pretty good. (Leo)

### ***The Negative Impact of Digital Detox on Productivity***

Besides the positive impacts, a few negative aspects were mentioned as well. The students reported being uninformed and having communication issues, especially when it comes to work/university-related media. Olivia mentions that she would like to limit her media use and would like to participate in a digital detox, however does find it difficult because “people kind of expect you to be connected”. Furthermore, Theo shares how it would become a problem for his studies when he would participate in a digital detox during the academic year:

Well in the sense of you know if someone wants to reach me they can't so like for instance for my study group if they want to discuss something and I'm like well I'm taking detox it's gonna be a problem I suppose. (Theo)

### ***Mental and Behavioural Changes***

After having done a period of digital detox, students often learned something out of it. Mostly, they reported wanting a balance between enjoying digital media use and limiting it

because of discomfort after excessive use. Amelia mentioned that a digital detox can be “beneficial” if she would balance the benefits of doing a digital detox with the benefits of using digital media in university, e.g., the communication. This could look like focusing on in-person meetings while also limiting free-time media use and digital distractions.

Moreover, a few students found physical books to be helpful, both in personal and university settings. One student added how he thinks that this would be a more effective learning method, whereas other participants found physical books helpful to limit digital distractions while studying or during lectures. Also, two students mentioned physical books as a way to spend more time offline, as a result of finding alternatives to their phones during their digital detox.

Two students reported having more purposeful communication and meeting friends offline more often after having done a digital detox. One participant mentioned how he learned that connecting in person is much more valuable than “chitchat or catching up” (Noah) on WhatsApp.

Finally, most participants wanted to be more mindful of the content they consume online, as well as digital distractions, for example, separating media necessary for university from personal enjoyment. This is coded as selective reduction: The participants wanted to limit the media that had a negative impact on them but did not show motivation to give up on media to communicate in the university setting. George explained how he could only imagine himself doing a digital detox again outside of university, for example during vacation. Then, he finds it beneficial: “But not in like university life or if you have a job. I think then it's not convenient. But in a vacation or a holiday, for example, when you don't have obligations, I think it's quite nice.”. Noah added how he would reduce selectively: he would only limit digital media that was found to be distracting and distressing, but keep up with the applications he is dependent on in his daily life: “For me for example if I wanted to go for a detox I wouldn't get rid of my phone. But I would definitely try to get rid of YouTube. Maybe even video games”.

### **Discussion**

This study focused on gaining insight into student’s digital media use and how it influences their well-being and academic performance. Additionally, this study aimed at answering the following question: How do digital media and digital detox affect university students’ well-being and academic performance, considering the relevance of digital media in university?

#### **Main findings**

The interviews have shown that students seem to have mixed opinions about digital media, and digital detox in a university setting, a common pattern throughout the dataset. Students reported positive and negative impacts of using digital media in university and leisure settings.

Many of them tried out a period of digital detox or found other methods to limit their media usage. The main finding of this study is that students often think that a digital detox does not apply to them, at least while in university, although something similar is needed to manage excessive digital media usage. The main themes identified were why students use digital media, how they feel about it, digital media's influence on students, experiences with digital detox, and behavioural, mental, and educational implications of a digital detox.

### ***Why People Use Digital Media***

Next to using digital media for their leisure in the form of using social media, keeping in touch with friends and family, and for entertainment, the participants also used digital media in university contexts. This can look like using online materials, getting information, or watching online lectures, but also using digital media for studying specifically by example through flashcards or notetaking apps. Furthermore, the participants reported using digital media to communicate with professors or their project groups. This is similar to the findings that students often engage with university content through digital media (Oliveira et al., 2021).

### ***How They Feel About Digital Media***

The participants often reported digital media use to be joyful and relaxing, although it can be exhausting to use for an extended time. Moreover, most students felt unhappy and guilty about their media usage. Similar results were found for Social Media: In line with previous research, social media was useful to keep in touch and get information (Seabrook et al., 2016), as well as mindlessly scrolling was exhausting and the students expressed concerns about online data privacy and social comparison (Wilson & McDarby, 2023).

Looking at digital media's influence on the participants, it is evident that they often feel dependent on digital media when they use it excessively. High amounts of screen time were reported as having no added value and being addictive, which is consistent with previous research, where high screen time and high SNS use were found to correlate with negative health impairments, such as anxiety and symptoms of depression (Pantic, 2014). Furthermore, although describing their media use as a nice distraction at the moment, students often referred to it as a waste of time and were using it out of boredom. These findings align with previous research on how social media has both positive and negative impacts on its users. In addition to the findings described by Rajesh and Priya (2020), the negative impacts such as anxiety and dependence on digital media, this study provides additional suggestions that excessive SNS use can be linked with mental health issues, as the participants shared their negative impacts with excessive media use. However, as Seabrook et al. (2016) suggested, SNS users might enjoy social media particularly to keep in touch and to keep updated on each other's lives. This finding



is important to understand the ambiguity of social media, which also applies to digital media in general when looking at how it is used for academic purposes. While excessive use is linked to negative mental health impacts, digital media is crucial to stay connected. This suggests that future educational programmes do not focus on digital detox interventions that aim to get full distance from all digital devices, but rather aim to help students find a balance and a mindful handling of digital media use.

### ***Experience with Digital Detox***

A similar ambiguity was notable for Digital Detox: While all students wanted to take a break from digital media to limit its negative impacts on their well-being, most of them stopped after a while or concluded that they needed to balance their media use for leisure and university. Nevertheless, a finding consistent with previous research shows that the positive effects of a digital detox period were improved well-being, motivation, energy, and confidence (El-Khoury, Haidar, Kanj, et al., 2021). The students reported the detox as relaxing and having reduced pressure to socialise. Contrary to the study by El-Khoury et al. (2021), anxiety was not found to be reduced through the detox. Although similar positive impacts were recorded, anxiety was also mentioned as a negative impact of the detox, where staying away from digital media was seen as distressing. Further difficulties with the digital detox were people being uncomfortable and struggling with consistency. Furthermore, the phenomenon of a post-detox binge within this study is in line with a previous study by Coyne & Woodruff (2023), where students after a 2-week detox period were found to use more media than before.

Unlike a previous study (Murphy, 2023), the fear of missing out (FOMO) was not mentioned frequently, however the concern of not being available was. It was not about fearing what they might miss without their communication, but about not being available when something happened, or they are needed for important things. This applied in university settings and for leisure, for example when wanting to keep in touch with friends and family. Notably, a study by Hunt et al. (2018) found similar findings on FOMO: after a period of digital detox, the participants showed significantly less FOMO than before. Moreover, looking into articles on how to overcome FOMO, research suggests that limiting time spent online plus mindfulness in general might help (Gupta, 2016).

Overall, these findings on digital detox add to the systematic literature review by Radtke et al. (2022) who found overall mixed results on students, how digital detox interventions were found to have both positive and negative impacts. Interestingly, this study suggests that these results might be explained by focusing on limiting all digital media. The results of the positive impacts of digital detox and its difficulties showed, that while students found it relaxing, too

much of it was not helpful because of missing digital communication and how the approach was not feasible to continue in daily life. The outcome of these interviews suggests that balanced and mindful handling is helpful for students to navigate the benefits and challenges of digital media and digital detox.

### ***Educational Implications***

The role of digital media in the university setting was shown to have both benefits and challenges, which is in line with previous research (Siew et al., 2017) . On the one hand, media could facilitate learning and organisation and was shown to be easily accessible and efficient. On the other hand, media in universities led to digital distractions, where the participants could often not distinguish between work and leisure.

Furthermore, staying away from the phone, or limiting its usage, was reported to be unhelpful for communication in university settings, for example with professors, thesis supervisors, or the students in project groups.

Interestingly, many participants concluded that they nevertheless wanted and needed a break from digital media, but only under certain circumstances. Firstly, they reported wanting to keep in touch with other people. This means, they would not want to fully get away from their phones but limit their notifications or delete only apps that are unhelpful to them, e.g., social media. Some people referred to this as having a balance, knowing what digital media use would be beneficial for them and limiting only the negative aspects. Secondly, most students reflected how a digital detox would only be possible on vacation, where they would not be dependent on work or university-related media. The students coming back to using digital media mainly because of communication purposes, aiming to find a balance between relaxing media use and the benefits of being away from the phone, have not been reported by previous research, thus this study contributes to a better understanding of digital detox among university students.

### **Practical Implications & Future Research**

Important findings of this study have shown that using digital media often negatively impacts student's well-being and productivity. Furthermore, although a digital detox can help with both aspects, the participants usually struggle with consistency and end their period of detox for enjoyment, and to keep in touch with people in private and in university. A solution would be finding a balance and only limiting aspects of digital media that have a negative impact on someone. It is not necessary to suggest a full digital detox when dealing with negative aspects, either on an individual basis or as a health care intervention. Instead, it might be important to educate more on the impacts of digital media and provide methods and tools to achieve a healthy approach to digital media usage.

Furthermore, the interviews found contradictory data. For example, few students reported having FOMO when participating in a digital detox. Others mentioned quite the opposite: the concern about not being available to others. Additionally, few people reported being anxious and uncomfortable when away from their phones, and some students expressed reduced pressure to socialise. Within the impacts of digital detox lies a range of answers that might be interesting for further studies to explore personality traits or other underlying reasons why these answers differ so widely, and thus support healthcare interventions with this extra knowledge.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study investigated student's experiences of a digital detox that focuses on the motivations behind it and its educational consequences of it. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allowed for an in-depth insight into student's experiences with digital media and digital detox in an academic setting.

A limitation of this study is that most interviewed students studied psychology or communication science. It would have been insightful to have a wider range of studies, also investigating those who incorporate more or less technology into their study structure than the current participants. Furthermore, the study was advertised as exploring digital media among university students. While it was helpful to not have "having done a digital detox" as an exclusion criterion, some opinions and experiences on digital detox were merely hypothetical. Plus, in line with the official definition of digital detox, the participant's understanding varied from limiting notifications to not using all kinds of media for several days. This might be interesting to compare similar experiences to widen one's understanding of digital detox. How exactly would only limiting certain notifications affect one's mental health, and how might it differ from people who spend a week without their phones? Additionally, the interviews were based on students' self-reported experiences with digital detox and therefore might be prone to bias in their answers.

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to explore digital detox behaviour among university students. Previously, it was unclear why exactly people wanted to do a digital detox when there are positive experiences of digital media use. Besides that, the exact motivations behind a digital detox were still unexplored, particularly why people would stop doing a detox despite its benefits. Furthermore, this field of research lacked participant experiences, especially in the university setting, where digital media is ubiquitous. Therefore, this study gives valuable insight into these aspects.

Overall, the findings show how, aligned with previous research, the participants perceived digital detox as helpful for their productivity and well-being (El-Khoury et al., 2021), and that digital media shows mixed results on productivity in university settings (Siew et al., 2017). Mixed results in this study showed how the participants perceived digital media as positive such as enjoyment, or relaxation, as well as negative, i.e., feeling unhappy and guilty about the use. Additionally, this is also seen in the results of doing a digital detox. Students enjoyed a digital detox and found it to be more productive, yet they felt distressed about not being in contact with friends or family. Nevertheless, students who did try out a digital detox period came back to using their phones again, and students would only try out another digital detox if it was on vacation or if they could still use digital media for important tasks, e.g., communicating with other people. All participants concluded to aim to find a balance between university and personal media usage, and only limit the digital media that affects them negatively.

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## Appendix A

### Questions Interviews

#### Part 1: Digital Media use (Warming up)

Let's first start with talking about digital media use in general. Digital media covers any digital tool that we use such as email, podcasts, apps etc. and not restricted to social media.

Can you start by telling me a bit about your daily digital media use in general?

Topics to discover with probes:

- Purpose of use, apps used etc.
- study related?
- -For entertainment?
- Gaming, watching videos/films?

Could you give me some insight into your digital media usage habits?

- What are some of the main activities you engage in when using digital devices?
  - This includes productivity apps, social media, university-related activities, texting, or any other

(if not discovered in the previous question):

How do you feel about **social media** use?

What kind of a user you are? (passive: just scrolling, actively sharing etc.)

Do you think there is such thing as too much digital media use?

-when do you think it is too much?

-Why?

-when do you think it is "normal amount"?

(Considering these definitions you made,) how would you place your daily use?

How long do you think do you spent daily on your phone?

- (Have you tried to do something before to reduce the usage in general?)



- How do you perceive your level of media use?
  - o How do you evaluate it?
- What do you think looks the ideal media usage like?
- How do you feel when you are using your phone?
  - o or how do you feel when you engage with digital devices?
  - o Do you see a difference between digital media and social media?

### Main content

Some people find it very uncomfortable when they are away from their phone or when they are uninformed, and some find it very relaxing. Where would you place yourself?

When do you think it could be difficult to stay uninformed?

How would you feel? Any examples?

Have you ever heard of digital detox?

How would you define it?

- My definition: digital detox when you actively try to reduce your media usage.
  - o Including: total “detox” for a few weeks
  - o Limiting your usage time for certain apps

How/when would you think it could be useful/necessary?

How/when would you think it could create problems?

Have you ever tried digital detox?

Certain times you avoided your phone or certain apps/games?

During exam-weeks or challenges you participated in?

Can you tell me how did you decide to do that and what happened?

If not at all, can you tell me more about how you see the necessity of digital detox?

- (same Q) Have you ever done something that could be described as Digital Detox or something similar?
  - o Yes:

- Could you elaborate on that?
- Please explain your experience with Digital Detox.
  - Probes:
  - How long was this?
  - What methods or tools did you use to support your Digital Detox? (such as blocking apps?)
  - What was your motivation behind it? Why did you do it? What were you hoping to gain from the experience?
  - Looking back at the experience, what do you believe were the effects on your overall well-being or daily life?
  - Did you notice any changes in your phone behaviour or digital habits following the Digital Detox? How would you describe them?
  - Are you still doing it? Why so/why not? Please elaborate.
    - Did you experience any challenges or advantages during the process?
- No:
  - could you explain why you haven't tried it?
  - Could you imagine doing a Digital Detox?
    - what do you think might happen if you did?

#### Digital media/detox in university context?

- We have talked about digital media use and digital detox in general so far. Let's now focus more on digital media in university context. Can you tell me your study-related media use?
  - Based on your own experiences, what has been the role of digital media in university settings?
    - What are the areas you find it helpful?
    - What are the areas you find it distracting or unhelpful?
    - How have you personally utilized digital media for tasks like studying, communication, or accessing course materials?
  - Considering the role of digital media in your studies, how would you think a digital detox period influence your studies? How do you perceive digital media,

such as smartphones, laptops, and online platforms, and Digital Detox within the university context?

- Can you provide examples of how these technologies are integrated into academic life?
- Based on your experience, how did digital detox impact your productivity?
- From your perspective, what are some potential advantages and disadvantages of using digital media in university settings?
  - How do these factors impact your overall academic experience?

### Closing

- We are coming to the end of the interview, is there something else you would like to address?
- Do you have any further questions?