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Exploring Themes in Digital Detox Research: Insights from a Literature Review

Research Paper

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Abstract. In modern society, digital technologies have become essential tools for individuals and organizations, offering unprecedented opportunities for communication and collaboration. However, concerns about the negative effects of digital technology use, such as declined well-being or reduced work productivity, have led to the emergence of digital detoxing as a promising strategy to counteract adverse effects. Digital detoxing refers to the temporary or complete disengagement from digital technologies, including actions such as abstaining from social networking sites and taking breaks during computer work. To guide future research, we conducted a literature review with a focus on empirical research dealing with the voluntary, limited abstinence from use of digital technologies. Thematic analysis of the 61 identified studies revealed eight major themes, including behavioral change, experience, health, motivation, social interaction, strategy, stress perception, and work. Overall, this review provides a comprehensive overview of the digital detox research field.

Keywords: Digital Detoxing, Digital Stress, Literature Review, Thematic Analysis, Technostress

1 Introduction

Digital technologies are essential to modern society, providing unparalleled opportunities for communication, collaboration, and productivity (Stephanidis *et al.*, 2019) in various domains such as healthcare (e.g., Gjellebæk *et al.*, 2020), education (e.g., Bygstad *et al.*, 2022), or banking (e.g., Bastari *et al.*, 2020). However, alongside these benefits, the widespread use of digital technologies has raised concerns about their potential negative impact on well-being (e.g., Salo *et al.*, 2022) and organizational dynamics (e.g., Ayyagari, Grover and Purvis, 2011). Issues such as information overload (e.g., Ragu-Nathan *et al.*, 2008; Tams *et al.*, 2020), constant interruptions (e.g., Stangl

and Riedl, 2023b, 2023c), or the blurring of work-life boundaries (e.g., Chen and Karahanna, 2018; Benlian, 2020) underscore the need to understand the complex effects of digital technology use (e.g., Tarafdar *et al.*, 2007; Riedl, 2013; Stangl, Seiler and Riedl, 2024).

In response to growing concerns about the negative consequences, *digital detoxing* has emerged as a compelling strategy in recent years (Mirbabaie, Stieglitz and Marx, 2022). Digital detoxing can be defined as temporary or complete disengagement from digital technologies and includes actions such as voluntary, limited abstinence from social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat (Hager, Stangl and Riedl, 2023; Stangl and Riedl, 2023a, 2024). Research has shown that short-term abstinence from social networking sites like Facebook can significantly increase life satisfaction and reduce stress (Stangl *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, digital detoxing can involve reducing exposure to digital technologies (Hager, Stangl and Riedl, 2023; Stangl and Riedl, 2023a, 2024). For example, reducing daily Facebook use over a 14-day period, with participants limiting their use to 20 minutes per day, was associated with a decrease in depressive symptoms and an increase in life satisfaction (Brailovskaia *et al.*, 2020). These findings highlight the importance of maintaining a balanced relationship with digital technologies to promote well-being (Mirbabaie, Stieglitz and Marx, 2022; Hager, Stangl and Riedl, 2023).

Following the call for more research to explore the phenomenon of digital detoxing by Mirbabaie, Stieglitz and Marx (2022), this review aims to analyze the themes of existing empirical studies on digital detoxing. To the best of our knowledge, a review on the themes of empirical digital detox studies has not yet been conducted. Hence, as a companion to Mirbabaie, Stieglitz and Marx's (2022) work on conceptualizing of digital detox within the information systems discipline, we address the following research question: **What are the major themes in the existing empirical research on digital detoxing?** More specifically, our analysis focuses on voluntary, limited abstinence from digital technologies, which is supposed to serve as a theoretical foundation for a larger research project on digital detoxing (i.e., a field study examining the effects of voluntary, limited abstinence from digital technologies).

2 Review Methodology

To identify the scope, range, and nature of empirical digital detox studies, we conducted a scoping review to determine the extent of existing literature and the topics addressed therein (for an overview of the different literature review types, please see Paré *et al.*, 2015; Schryen *et al.*, 2017, 2020). To enhance transparency and methodological rigor, we followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA, see **Figure 1**) checklist for study identification, selection, and analysis (Moher *et al.*, 2009, 2010). Also, our review process was aligned with established guidelines for literature searches (Webster and Watson, 2002; vom Brocke *et al.*, 2009). Overall, our review methodology consisted of three steps, resulting in a base of 61 empirical digital detox studies relevant to our research objective.

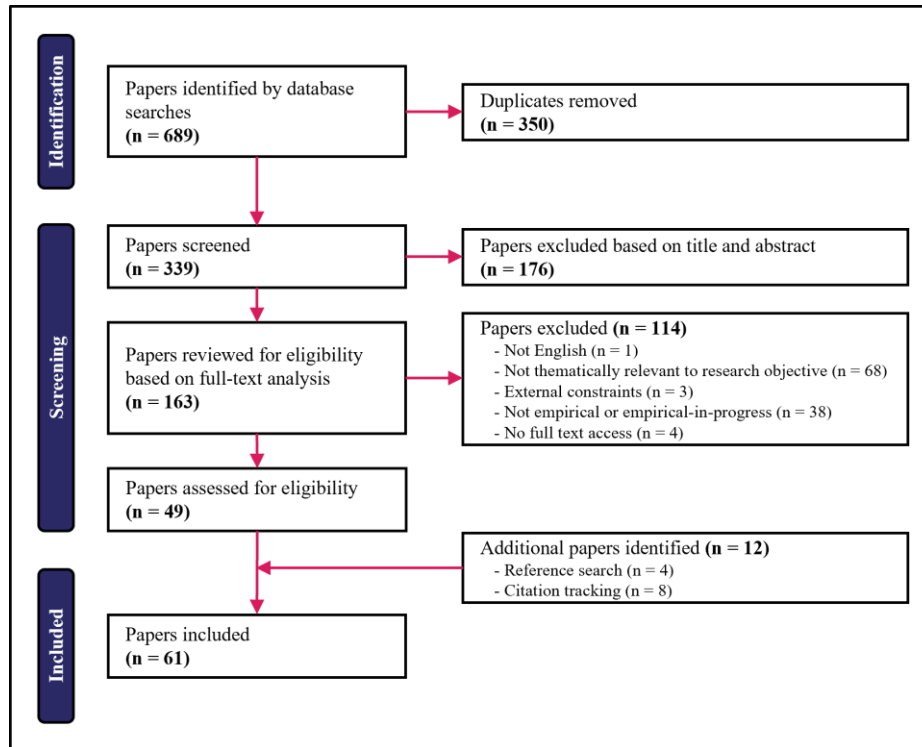


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart of Literature Search and Paper Selection

Step 1: Literature Identification – We began our literature search with a recent comprehensive review of empirical digital detox studies (Hager, Stangl and Riedl, 2023), which included 65 studies, surpassing previous reviews (e.g., Özdemir and Goktas, 2021; Radtke *et al.*, 2022). Keywords were primarily derived from this review, using terms such as "digital abstinence" and "digital disconnection", along with specific terms such as "digital free tourism" and "offline tourism". Due to the conceptual ambiguity of the field (Mirbabaie, Stieglitz and Marx, 2022), we iteratively expanded our search to include terms such as "digital diet," "digital disconnection," and "tech detox," considering variations such as "internet detox" or "online detox." This ensured a comprehensive search syntax, with asterisks indicating generalizations (e.g., detox). The full list of keywords, shown in **Table 1**, aims to standardize terminology and reduce the proliferation of synonyms (Barki, Rivard and Talbot, 1988). We searched peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings in eight databases: ACM Digital Library, AIS eLibrary, EBSCO, Emerald, IEEE Xplore, Science Direct, Scopus, and Web of Science.

Table 1. Applied Keywords for Literature Identification

Keyword Type	Keywords
Generic Keyword	Digital Abstinence, Digital Detoxification, Digital Detoxing, Digital Disconnection, Digital Reversion, Technology Non-Use, Tech Detox
Specific Keyword	Digital Diet, Digital Disengagement, Digital Free Tourism, Digital Nudge, Offline Tourism, Unplugged Tourism
Synonyms for Digital Detoxing	Internet Detox, Online Detox

Note: We asterisked the term 'digital detox' to generalize the term for the search when it can have multiple meanings (e.g., Internet Detox*, Online Detox*).

Step 2: Literature Screening – Our initial database contained 689 papers. After removing 350 duplicates, 339 unique papers were screened by title and abstract, resulting in the exclusion of 176 papers. The remaining 163 papers underwent full-text analysis based on the following Inclusion Criteria (IC) and Exclusion Criteria (EC):

- **IC1:** Papers must be in English and relevant to voluntary, limited abstinence from digital technologies.
- **IC2:** Papers must be of an empirical or empirical-in-progress nature (for an overview of the different contribution types, please see Riedl *et al.* (2020, pp. 18-21).
- **EC1:** Papers were excluded if they did not meet IC1, such as those not written in English (e.g., Külling and Süß, 2018), irrelevant to the research focus (e.g., social profile and preferences of individuals who abstain from social networking sites; Brody, 2018), or dealing with involuntary abstinence (Andersson and Danielsson, 2023). In addition, papers were excluded if they did not meet IC2, including reviews (e.g., Radtke *et al.*, 2022), methodological papers (e.g., Senabre Hidalgo and Greshake Tzovaras, 2023), or conceptual papers (e.g., Bucher, 2020).
- **EC2:** Papers without full-text access (e.g., White, 2013).

Applying these criteria, 49 papers were retained for further analysis, while 114 were excluded due to IC and 4 due to EC2. The excluded papers are listed in **Table 2**.

Step 3: Literature Inclusion – Following established guidelines for literature searches (Webster and Watson, 2002; vom Brocke *et al.*, 2009), we conducted a backward search, which identified 4 additional papers (i.e., Franks, Chenhall and Keogh, 2018; Brailovskaia *et al.*, 2020; Cai, McKenna and Waizenegger, 2020; Hall *et al.*, 2021), and a forward search that identified 8 additional papers (i.e., Stieger and Lewetz, 2018; Hanley, Watt and Coventry, 2019; Vaghefi, 2021; Lambert *et al.*, 2022; Roberts *et al.*, 2022; Schwarz *et al.*, 2022; Klingelhofer, Gilbert and Meier, 2023; de Hesselle and Montag, 2024). This brought the final literature base to 61 empirical digital detox studies published as of April 2024, including 54 journal articles (88.5%), 4 conference papers (6.6%), 2 book chapters (3.3%), and 1 early publication (1.6%).

Table 2. Overview of Excluded Papers After Literature Screening

Exclusion Criterion	Number	Reference(s)
EC1: Not English	1	Killing and Siiss (2018)
EC1: Not Thematically Relevant to Research Objective	68	Sheldon, Abad and Hinsch (2011), Helsper and Reisdorf (2013), Löchtefeld, Böhmer and Ganev (2013), Ugur and Koc (2015), Hiniker <i>et al.</i> (2016), Kour (2016), Dickinson, Hibbert and Filimonau (2016), Lee <i>et al.</i> (2017), Magee, Agosto and Forte (2017), Reinecke <i>et al.</i> (2017), Sutton (2017), Guha, Baumer and Gay (2018), Guyard and Kaun (2018), Brody (2018), Li, Pearce and Low (2018), Fan, Buhalis and Lin (2019), Harley (2019), Melton <i>et al.</i> (2019), Monge Roffarello and De Russis (2019), Dittmar and Görres (2019), Anashkina, Shmatko and Tkachenko (2020), Handa and Ahuja (2020), Kent (2020), Li, Pearce and Oktadiana (2020), Lu, Lu and Liu (2020), Muench and Muench (2020), Muench <i>et al.</i> (2020), Purohit, Barclay and Holzer (2020), Spiliotopoulos and Oakley (2020), Syvertsen and Enli (2020), Fast, Lindell and Jansson (2021), Floros <i>et al.</i> (2021), Fryman and Romine (2021), Gorokhova and Tsyganova (2021), Keller <i>et al.</i> (2021), Liu <i>et al.</i> (2021), Pawlowska-Legwand and Matoga (2021), Cesareo <i>et al.</i> (2021), Schwarzenegger and Lohmeier (2021), Tai, Yu and He (2021), Treré (2021), Vanden Abeele and Mohr (2021), Haliburton <i>et al.</i> (2022), Brailovskaia, Frahsek and Margraf (2022), Karlsen and Ytre-Arne (2022), Matthes <i>et al.</i> (2022), Mutsvauro, Ragnedda and Mabvundwi (2022), Nguyen, Büchi and Geber (2022), Phillips and Shippis (2022), Umasankar <i>et al.</i> (2022), Widdicks <i>et al.</i> (2022), Zhu (2022), Zhu, Mitchell and Zhang (2022), Díaz-Meneses and Estupinán-Ojeda (2022), Benvenuti <i>et al.</i> (2023), Enli and Fast (2023), Geber, Nguyen and Büchi (2023), Hoang, Cronin and Skandalis (2023), Jorge <i>et al.</i> (2023), Cai and McKenna (2023), Nguyen and Hargittai (2023b), Purohit <i>et al.</i> (2023), Purohit, Raggi and Holzer (2023), Syvertsen (2023), Conroy <i>et al.</i> (2023), Van Bruyssel, De Wolf and Vanden Abeele (2023), Eitan and Gazit (2024), Papa and Kouros (2024)
EC1: External Constraints	3	Liao and Sundar (2022), Andersson and Danielsson (2023), Bozan and Treré (2023)
EC1: Not Empirical or Empirical-in-Progress	38	Baumer <i>et al.</i> (2014), Fuchsberger, Murer and Tscheligi (2014), Baumer, Ames, <i>et al.</i> (2015), Serrano-Puche (2017), Hesselberth (2018, 2021), Bauwens, Thorbjörnsson and Verstryngge (2019), Kuntsman and Miyake (2019), Bhattacharya and Raghuvanshi (2019), Cecchinato <i>et al.</i> (2019), Kaun and Treré (2020), Natale and Treré (2020), Bucher (2020), Enli and Syvertsen (2021), Kaun (2021), Krischkowsky, Fuchsberger and Tscheligi (2021), Lomborg and Ytre-Arne (2021), Markham (2021), Moe and Madsen (2021), Vanden Abeele (2021), Fast (2021), Arenas-Escaso, Folgado-Fernández and Palos-Sanchez (2022), Hartmann (2022), Mirbabaie, Stieglitz and Marx (2022), Putchavayala, Singh and Sashidharan (2022), Radtke <i>et al.</i> (2022), Vanden Abeele and Nguyen (2022), Vanden Abeele, Halfmann and Lee (2022), Harmon and Duffy (2023), Nassen <i>et al.</i> (2023), Roffarello and De Russis (2023), Senabre Hidalgo and Greshake Tzovaras (2023), Trujillo Pons (2023), Trujillo Pons and Megino Fernández (2023), Gong, Schroeder and Plaisance (2023), Gray (2023), Altmaier <i>et al.</i> (2024), Vanden Abeele <i>et al.</i> (2024)
EC2: No Full-Text Access	4	White (2013), Haba-Rubio <i>et al.</i> , (2018), Vaghefi <i>et al.</i> (2018), Hu and Liu (2023)

3 Data Analysis Process of Thematic Analysis

To identify major themes in voluntary, limited abstinence from digital technology use from our literature base, we conducted a thematic analysis based on the methodology outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2023). This approach ensured a systematic analysis process to capture the nuances of the identified empirical digital detox studies. Overall, the data analysis process of the thematic analysis consisted of six phases, which we describe below.

Phase 1: Data Familiarization – In the first phase, we read and reread the 61 empirical digital detox studies to familiarize ourselves with their content. During this phase, we took preliminary notes and highlighted recurring concepts and patterns related to digital detoxing.

Phase 2: Data Coding – Next, we systematically coded the data by identifying features of interest across the dataset. This involved assigning labels to specific segments of text that captured elements related to voluntary, limited abstinence from digital technologies. We used a spreadsheet to manage and organize these codes to ensure a comprehensive coding process.

Table 3. Overview of Identified Themes

Theme	Definition	Example
Behavioral Change	This theme focuses on how digital detoxing affects individuals' behaviors and habits. It includes changes in information processing, time perception, productivity, and engagement in offline activities, with an emphasis on how digital detox interventions lead to changes in social media use or adoption of new offline practices.	Lepik and Murumaa-Mengel (2019)
Experience	This theme explores individuals' subjective experiences and personal insights during digital detoxing. It includes diverse contexts such as daily life, travel, and community involvement, and highlights how people perceive their digital detox journey, the emotional and psychological impacts they experience, and the challenges they face.	Baumer, Guha, <i>et al.</i> (2015)
Health	This theme examines the health-related outcomes of digital detoxing. It covers a range of impacts on mental and physical well-being, including reductions in anxiety or depression, as well as improvements in overall cognitive and emotional health due to reduced use of, or temporary disengagement from, digital technologies.	Brown and Kuss (2020)
Motivation	This theme addresses the underlying motivations and reasons for engaging in digital detoxing. It includes the personal, social, and health-related drivers that lead individuals to engage in digital detox activities, as well as the challenges and coping strategies associated with these motivations.	Marx, Braun and Mirbabaie (2022)
Social Interaction	This theme investigates the impact of digital detoxing on social interactions and relationships. It looks at how digital detoxing influences social connections, quality of interactions, and the ability to engage in face-to-face communication.	Megret (2024)
Strategy	This theme focuses on the strategies and methods used to achieve digital detoxing. It includes various approaches and tools used to limit or reduce the use of digital technology, such as setting time limits, creating technology-free zones, and using specific applications or settings to manage connectivity.	Nguyen (2021)
Stress Perception	This theme explores how digital detoxing affects individuals' perceptions of stress. It focuses primarily on stress, but may also examine other health-related outcomes such as mood and overall well-being, including both psychological and physiological effects of reduced use of, or temporary disengagement from, digital technologies.	Anrijs <i>et al.</i> (2018)
Work	This theme examines the effects of digital detoxing on work-related aspects, including job performance, cognitive overload, and overall well-being in professional settings, with an emphasis on how digital detox interventions affect work efficiency, satisfaction, and work-life balance.	Mirbabaie, Braun and Marx (2022)

Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes – We then organized the initial codes into potential themes. This process involved grouping related codes together to form broader categories. We identified eight major themes that represented various aspects of the digital detox research field: behavioral change, experience, health, motivation, social interaction, strategy, stress perception, and work. However, each theme contained multiple codes that shared a common thread.

Phase 4: Review and Developing Themes – The next phase involved reviewing the themes to ensure that they accurately represented the data. We checked the coherence of the themes in relation to the coded excerpts and the entire data set. This iterative process led to the refinement of the themes and sub-themes, resulting in a thematic map that represented the focus of the research.

Phase 5: Refining, Defining and Naming Themes – We further refined each theme to capture its essence and scope. Clear definitions and names were assigned to each theme to provide a structured framework for the analysis. For example, the theme "Behavioral Change" encompasses studies examining how digital detoxing affects individuals' behaviors and habits, including alterations in social media use and offline activities. **Table 3** provides definitions and examples of each theme.

Phase 6: Producing the Report – Finally, we compiled a report of our analysis, selecting illustrative examples from the dataset to highlight each theme. These themes are arranged alphabetically, with details of the identified themes presented in the following chapter.

4 Identified Themes from Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis of the 61 identified studies revealed eight major themes, including behavioral change, experience, health, motivation, social interaction, strategy, stress perception, and work. Each theme is described in detail below, incorporating elements of both a narrative review, which aims to identify existing literature on a topic or issue, and a descriptive review, which analyzes patterns or trends within a body of empirical studies (Paré *et al.*, 2015).

4.1 Behavioral Change in Empirical Digital Detox Studies

Two empirical digital detox studies were assigned to this theme. These studies examined the effects of digital detoxing on students' information behavior (Lepik and Murumaa-Mengel, 2019) and time distortion (Turel and Cavagnaro, 2019). As an example, Lepik and Murumaa-Mengel (2019) conducted a five-day digital detox study with students, resulting in 42 of 91 participants submitting diaries documenting their experiences. Content analysis revealed behavioral changes during the digital detoxing, including perceptions of slower time passing, increased productivity, and adoption of offline activities such as reading. Participants also reported experiencing boredom and fear of missing out. After digital detoxing, some changed their use of social media, unfollowing accounts and disabling notifications.

4.2 Experience in Empirical Digital Detox Studies

Fourteen empirical digital detox studies were assigned to this theme. These studies examined digital detox experiences (Vialle, Machin and Abel, 2023) in everyday life (Caron and Mays, 2021), tourism (Hassan, Salem and Saleh, 2022; Stäheli and Stoltenberg, 2024), students' perceptions of learning experiences during digital detoxing (Wood and Muñoz, 2021), experiences within digital detox communities (Sutton, 2020), experiential use of devices central to digital detoxing (Ghita and Thorén, 2021), how the digital detox experience influenced ongoing identity development (Agai, 2022), return to social networks after digital detoxing (Baumer, Guha, *et al.*, 2015), risk factors of interactive e-health interventions for digital addiction (Alrobai *et al.*, 2019), temporary abstinence from using social networking sites or digital media (Jorge, 2019), the experiential effects of abstinence from social networking sites on social connections and well-being (Franks, Chenhall and Keogh, 2018), and travel experiences during digital detoxing and associated emotional responses (Cai, McKenna and Waizenegger, 2020), and return to daily life (Zhang and Zhang, 2022). As an example, Baumer, Guha, *et al.* (2015) provide insights into individuals' return to social networks by analyzing

survey data from a convenience sample of 3,539 individuals who voluntarily abstained from Facebook for 99 days, some of whom returned before the designated period. They found that those finding it harder to stay away from Facebook were more likely to resume activity after digital detoxing. Participants' experiences during the digital detoxing were categorized, including perceived dependency and withdrawal. Participants reported missed visual content, inside jokes, or event invitations during their absence from Facebook, among other things.

4.3 Health in Empirical Digital Detox Studies

Twenty-three empirical digital detox studies were assigned to this theme. These studies examined various health-related effects: anxiety, depression, and well-being outcomes after social networking site abstinence (Lambert *et al.*, 2022), changes in cognitive functioning and emotional well-being after reduced social networking site use (van Wezel, Abrahamse and Vanden Abeele, 2021), changes in mood, anxiety, and craving following smartphone abstinence (Wilcockson, Osborne and Ellis, 2019), changes in well-being after social networking site abstinence (Tromholt, 2016), changes in well-being and cognition after reduced smartphone use (Olson *et al.*, 2022), cognitive dissonance, attitudes toward use, and affect during social media abstinence (Vaghefi, 2021), effects of digital detox programs on electronic screen syndrome in preparatory school students (Mohamed, Abdallah and Ali, 2023), fear of missing out, well-being, and social connectedness before and after abstinence from social networking sites (Brown and Kuss, 2020), health-related outcomes among university students after abstinence from social networking sites (El-Khoury *et al.*, 2021), life satisfaction, depressive symptoms, physical activity and smoking behavior (Brailovskaia *et al.*, 2020), loneliness and depression outcomes after social networking site abstinence (Hunt *et al.*, 2018), loneliness, well-being, and quality of day after abstinence or limited use of social networking sites (Hall *et al.*, 2021), mental health and well-being effects of abstinence from social networking sites (de Hessel and Montag, 2024), mental health effects of social media abstinence (Schwarz *et al.*, 2022), mitigating the negative effects of social networking sites using digital detox apps and their effects on problematic smartphone use and well-being (Schmuck, 2020), self-objectification, self-esteem, and self-compassion after abstinence from social networking sites (Roberts *et al.*, 2022), self-reported affect and motivation among moderate to heavy social networking site users following limited site use (Wadsley and Ihssen, 2023), smartphone addiction, social media addiction, and health-related outcomes after abstinence from social networking sites (Coyne and Woodruff, 2023), smartphone and social media use behaviors following abstinence from social networking sites (Stieger and Lewetz, 2018), smartphone withdrawal symptoms, fear of missing out, and mood after smartphone restriction (Eide *et al.*, 2018), and subjective well-being among passive and active social networking site users (Przybylski *et al.*, 2021; Nguyen and Hargittai, 2023a), particularly distinguishing between passive and active users of social active users of social networking sites (Hanley, Watt and Coventry, 2019). As an example, Brown and Kuss (2020) investigated the effects before and after seven days of social media abstinence on fear of missing out, mental health, and social connectedness among 61 participants using a mixed methods

within-subjects experimental design with surveys to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. Results showed that abstinence led to increased well-being and connectedness, and decreased fear of missing out and smartphone use. Participants reported coping, habit, and boredom as reasons for social media use, while notifications were a challenge to abstaining.

4.4 Motivation in Empirical Digital Detox Studies

Nine empirical digital detox studies were assigned to this theme. These studies examined motivational strategies for digital detoxing and its effects on well-being (Dias, Martinho and Jorge, 2023), motivations and experienced challenges of digital detoxing from social networking sites (Nguyen, 2023), motivations and tensions during digital detox holidays (Egger, Lei and Wassler, 2020; Syvertsen, 2022), motivations and practices as an organized activity in a commercial setting (e.g., camp, retreat), where individuals pay for digital detoxing (Karlsen, 2023), motivations for digital detoxing during holidays (Jiang and Balaji, 2022), motivations for digital detoxing in knowledge work (Marx, Braun and Mirbabaie, 2022), motivations to use digital detox applications to avoid distractions from social networking sites and their relationship to personality traits and technology-related variables (Nguyen, 2022), and situational motivations to disengage from digital technologies to avoid distractions, improve well-being, and be more present (Klingelhoefner, Gilbert and Meier, 2023). As an example, Marx, Braun and Mirbabaie (2022) conducted interviews with ten knowledge workers to identify six motivations for digital detoxing. These motivations include coping and preventing overload, coping and preventing invasion to achieve work-life separation, improving performance, and seeking a physiological reboot to counteract stress-related physiological effects such as exhaustion, reduced sleep quality, stomach problems, sweating, and tired eyes.

4.5 Social Interaction in Empirical Digital Detox Studies

Two empirical digital detox studies were assigned to this theme. These studies examined teenagers' experiences at a phone-free summer camp (Megret, 2024) and varying levels of social networking site use, including abstinence from social networking sites, on well-being, social connection, and social capital (Mitev *et al.*, 2021). As an example, Megret (2024) conducted 31 interviews (individual interviews, focus group interviews) and unstructured conversations at a smartphone-free summer camp. Analysis of the qualitative data revealed that most participants viewed the experience positively, despite significant lifestyle changes. They emphasized increased social interactions and living in the moment, although some felt pressured by constant availability. Challenges included missing personal music and staying informed, especially among older participants approaching voting age. Overall, this study shows how a smartphone-free environment can enhance social interactions, emphasizing the value of face-to-face connections and living in the moment, while acknowledging challenges such as missing personal music and staying informed.

4.6 Strategy in Empirical Digital Detox Studies

Three empirical digital detox studies were assigned to this theme. These studies explored digital detox strategies to abstain from social networking sites and messaging apps and their effects on well-being (Nguyen, 2021), digital detox strategies to optimize work and maintain well-being with the goal of preventing stress and burnout (Šimunjak, 2023), and the practice of digital detox strategies, the experience of digital well-being, along with the relationship between digital detoxing and digital well-being (Vanden Abeele and Nguyen, 2024). As an example, Nguyen (2021) conducted interviews with 30 participants and categorized digital detox strategies by device, social media platform or application, and specific features of platforms and apps by using technology to limit connectivity (e.g., through device and app settings). Digital detox strategies included creating technology-free zones, setting time limits, deactivating accounts, limiting screen time, disabling notifications, and using “Do Not Disturb” or “Airplane Mode”. Notably, some accounts were also permanently deleted because of the digital detox study.

4.7 Stress Perception in Empirical Digital Detox Studies

Four empirical digital detox studies were assigned to this theme. These studies examined the reduction in stress associated with digital detoxing (Anrijs *et al.*, 2018), the effects of abstinence from social networking sites on perceived stress, particularly among heavy users (Turel, Cavagnaro and Meshi, 2018), the effects of abstinence from social networking sites on stress, well-being, affect, and perceived loneliness (Vally and D’Souza, 2019), and the effects of abstinence from social networking sites on stress, well-being, and loneliness resulting from social disconnection (Vanman, Baker and Tobin, 2018). As an example, Anrijs *et al.* (2018) conducted a two-week experiment involving 15 participants to investigate the impact of digital detoxing on physiological stress. Participants' smartphone activities were monitored, and physiological stress was measured using wearables based on skin conductance. During the second week, participants engaged in a digital detoxing, using their smartphones only for calls or photos, with the internet connection disabled. Results showed a decrease in physiological stress during the detox period compared to the previous week.

4.8 Work in Empirical Digital Detox Studies

Four empirical digital detox studies were assigned to this theme. These studies examined the effect of digital detoxing on employees' work performance, cognitive overload, and well-being (Schmitt, Breuer and Wulf, 2021), the effect of digital detoxing on employees' individual work performance in various organizations (Basu, 2019), social connectedness in remote work arrangements (Mirbabaie *et al.*, 2020), and its support in preventing and coping with the availability demands of digital technologies for knowledge workers (Mirbabaie, Braun and Marx, 2022). As an example, Mirbabaie, Braun and Marx (2022) investigated digital detoxing among knowledge workers with a 14-day within-subjects experiment to assess digital technology availability demands,

work performance, and satisfaction under normal working conditions versus digital detox conditions. Participants chose one of four digital detox strategies: during breaks, after hours, fixed time windows during work, or notification silence. Results showed a significant decrease in digital technology demands after the detox period, but no detectable effect on work performance or satisfaction.

5 Discussion

5.1 Contributions and Future Research Avenues

The purpose of this review was to systematically examine empirical research on voluntary, limited abstinence from digital technology use to identify and elucidate major themes in digital detox research. Each theme offers valuable insights that not only contextualize current findings, but also pave the way for future research in digital detoxing.

The theme of behavioral change is supported by evidence of changes in behaviors and habits from two empirical digital detox studies (e.g., Lepik and Murumaa-Mengel, 2019). Future research could build on this by developing qualitative frameworks and longitudinal studies to document and analyze long-term behavioral changes resulting from digital detoxing. Similarly, the experience theme, enriched by fourteen studies, highlights individuals' subjective experiences and personal insights during digital detoxing while facing the challenges of re-engagement with digital platforms (e.g., Baumer, Guha, *et al.*, 2015). This theme can guide future research in designing comprehensive interview protocols and surveys that capture a wide range of digital detox experiences and related challenges.

The extensive coverage of the health theme with twenty-three studies highlights the potential mental health benefits of digital detoxing, including improved well-being and reduced anxiety (e.g., Brown and Kuss, 2020). Future research could focus on specific interventions and empirical studies to explore the health outcomes associated with digital detoxing, potentially leading to the development of targeted health-focused programs. The motivation theme, drawn from nine studies, reveals diverse motivational factors such as stress reduction and work-life balance (e.g., Marx, Braun and Mirbabaie, 2022). This theme provides a basis for exploring how motivations may vary across demographics and contexts, potentially enabling the development of motivational frameworks and behavioral models.

The social interaction theme is based on two studies that show how digital detoxing can enhance social interactions and social engagement (e.g., Megret, 2024). However, the limited number of studies suggests that more research is needed to understand, for example, how reduced screen time affects social relationships and social capital. The strategy theme, explored in three studies, examines various digital detox strategies and provides practical insights for managing technology use (e.g., Nguyen, 2021). Future research could focus on designing and evaluating comprehensive digital detox programs, using this theme to test the effectiveness of different strategies across different contexts (e.g., individuals, organizations, demographics).

The stress perception theme, highlighted in four studies, highlights how digital detoxing affects perceived stress, showing a reduction in stress levels during the digital

detox period (e.g., Anrijs *et al.*, 2018). Further research could explore the psychological and physiological mechanisms underlying these effects, which could inform studies on resilience and mental health outcomes. Finally, the work theme, explored in four studies, examines the effects of digital detoxing on work-related aspects (e.g., Mirbabaie, Braun and Marx, 2022). This theme suggests the potential benefits of digital detoxing in reducing work-related stress, and future research could focus on developing workplace policies and interventions to promote overall well-being.

Overall, by focusing on these themes, future research can provide evidence-based recommendations for managing digital consumption and promoting healthier digital lifestyles. In addition, they highlight the multifaceted nature of digital detoxing and its potential benefits, advancing the field and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of digital detox practices and outcomes.

5.2 Limitations

Our review has several limitations. Language limitation was one factor, as only empirical studies on digital detoxing published in English were included. This limitation may affect the universality of our findings and potentially miss relevant studies published in other languages (e.g., Külling and Süß, 2018). Furthermore, the focus was on voluntary, limited digital technology abstinence, in line with our aim to serve as a theoretical foundation for a larger research project. Consequently, studies on involuntary technology abstinence (see **Table 2**) were excluded. The subjectivity of the thematic analysis process is also a limitation. The themes identified represent one interpretation of the literature, and other themes could be developed as some studies may overlap across multiple themes. However, the themes identified provide a parsimonious, yet sufficiently detailed level of analysis that provides a valuable overview of the themes in the digital detox research field (see **Table 3**). Nevertheless, future research that addresses these limitations may provide additional insights into the field of digital detox research.

6 Conclusion

Digital detoxing is emerging as a promising strategy to address the challenges posed by pervasive digital technologies. As our society becomes increasingly connected, the practice of digital detox is likely to require specific digital skills, such as effective management of screen time and strategies to minimize digital distractions (e.g., Mirbabaie, Braun and Marx, 2022). Moreover, digital detoxing requires a proactive and conscious decision-making approach (Kuntsman and Miyake, 2022), which can enable to reevaluate their use of technology and cultivate a more mindful and balanced digital lifestyle. As such, it will be rewarding to see how the discourse on this relevant research topic will continue to evolve with more contributions from both research and practice.

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