

Digital Disconnection in Everyday Life: Young Women's Experiences

Victoria A. E. Kratel

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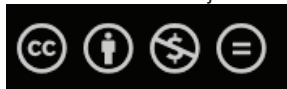
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Abstract

At a time when technological innovation continues to break new ground while also provoking increasing criticism, this article-based PhD thesis offers insight into young women's experiences of digital disconnection in Germany and Norway. Situated within the field of digital disconnection studies, the thesis' underlying project examines how people navigate hyperconnectivity by calibrating their digital media use through practices of reduced use and non-use (Syvertsen, 2022a; Vanden Abeele & Syvertsen, 2025). As the field has increasingly turned its attention to sociodemographics, scholars have also begun to explore the relationship between digital disconnection and women. However, such research has largely focused on women in formalized caregiving roles, such as mothers (Beattie, 2020; Bozan & Tréré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023; Ytre-Arne, 2023), leaving the experiences of young women without such obligations comparatively underexplored. Addressing this gap, the project is guided by the main research question: *How do young women experience digital disconnection in their everyday lives?*

The project is theoretically guided by the framework of everyday life (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2022; Ytre-Arne, 2023), combined with utopian thought as an analytically contrastive and emancipatory lens (Benjamin, 2024; Levitas, 2013), and further informed by key concepts from digital disconnection studies. Empirically, it is situated within a focus on women as a socially constructed category based on self-identification, the life stage of emerging adulthood spanning ages 18 to 29 (Arnett, 2004), and the national contexts of Germany and Norway.

Using a mixed-methods design (Greene, 2002, 2015; Johnson et al., 2007), the project integrates findings from a quantitative and a qualitative study presented across three articles. The quantitative study consisted of a survey conducted among 552 women and 590 men in Norway (N= 1,142). Drawing on a quantitative description of these data, Article I identifies small but statistically significant gender differences in experiences of digital disconnection. The qualitative study included a creative prompt exercise in which 20 women in emerging adulthood from Norway (n=10) and Germany (n=10) imagined an ideal world and the role smartphones would play within it, followed by semi-structured interviews. Article II focuses on these imaginings, while Article III analyzes gendered

dimensions of the data, abductively drawing on the UN Women (2023) definition of technology-facilitated violence against women (TF VAW).

The thesis makes three key empirical contributions. First, by employing the framework of everyday life, it highlights how young women experience digital disconnection both individually and in ways that reflect broader societal dynamics. On an individual level, digital disconnection was articulated both as an integrated everyday practice and as an aspiration. By identifying preemptive practices aimed at avoiding TF VAW, the thesis further develops the concept of digital disconnection and contributes to ongoing discussions about the involuntary dimensions of disconnective practices (Bozan & Tréré, 2023; Hartmann et al., 2025). On a societal level, the findings suggest that public sentiment has shifted toward a longing for reduced device use, with collective action yet to take place. Second, the thesis offers a nuanced perspective on gender within digital disconnection studies. It demonstrates that, although the quantitative study identified statistically significant gender differences, these differences were generally small. Similarly, participants in the qualitative study often decentered gender in their reflections. At the same time, gendered experiences of TF VAW remained highly consequential. Third, by deliberately centering women beyond formalized caregiving roles, the thesis broadens digital disconnection studies' perspectives on care. It highlights how caregiving obligations shape lives beyond heteronormative relationships and how care can emerge in more collective and solidaristic forms among women. Methodologically, the combination of a creative prompt exercise and semi-structured interviews contributes to the development of creative methods within digital disconnection studies and provides a practical example of speculative research more broadly.

Overall, this thesis demonstrates the value of centering young women's experiences in digital disconnection research and contributes to a deeper understanding of digital disconnection in everyday life.

Sammendrag

I en tid preget av stadig ny teknologisk innovasjon og økende kritikk av dens konsekvenser, gir denne artikkelbaserte avhandlingen innsikt i unge kvinners erfaringer med digital frakobling i Tyskland og Norge. Avhandlingen er forankret i forskningsfeltet digital disconnection studies. Feltet undersøker hvordan mennesker regulerer sin bruk av digitale medier i en tid preget av hypertilkobling, inkludert hvordan de begrenser eller velger bort slik bruk (Syvertsen, 2022a; Vanden Abeele & Syvertsen, 2025). Forskningen har i økende grad rettet oppmerksomheten mot sosiodemografiske forhold, herunder også forholdet mellom digital frakobling og kvinner. Denne forskningen har imidlertid i stor grad fokusert på kvinner i formaliserte omsorgsroller, særlig mødre (Beattie, 2020; Bozan & Treré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023; Ytre-Arne, 2023), noe som har gjort erfaringene til unge kvinner uten slike forpliktelser relativt lite belyst. For å undersøke dette kunnskapsgapet tar prosjektet utgangspunkt i følgende overordnede forskningsspørsmål: *Hvordan opplever unge kvinner digital frakobling i sitt hverdagsliv?*

Avhandlingen er teoretisk forankret i et hverdagslivsperspektiv (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2022; Ytre-Arne, 2023), samtidig som utopisk tenkning anvendes som et analytisk grep for å synliggjøre alternative forståelser (Benjamin, 2024; Levitas, 2013). Den er videre informert av sentrale begreper fra digital disconnection studies. Avhandlingen kontekstualiseres også gjennom et søkelys på kvinner som en sosialt konstruert kategori basert på selvidentifikasjon. I tillegg inngår livsfasen emerging adulthood (18–29 år) (Arnett, 2004). Empirien som avhandlingen bygger på, er hentet fra Tyskland og Norge.

Gjennom et mixed methods-design (Greene, 2002, 2015; Johnson et al., 2007) integrerer avhandlingen funn fra en kvantitativ og en kvalitativ studie, presentert i tre artikler. Den kvantitative studien besto av en spørreundersøkelse gjennomført blant 552 kvinner og 590 menn i Norge. Med utgangspunkt i en kvantitativ beskrivelse av disse dataene identifiserer artikkel I små, men statistisk signifikante kjønnsforskjeller i erfaringer med digital frakobling. Den kvalitative studien besto av en kreativ oppgave der 20 kvinner i emerging adulthood fra Norge (n = 10) og Tyskland (n = 10) ble bedt om å forestille seg en idealverden og hvilken rolle smarttelefoner ville ha i den, etterfulgt av semistrukturerte intervjuer. Artikkel II fokuserer på disse forestillingene, mens artikkel III

analyserer kjønnede dimensjoner ved datamaterialet med et abduktivt utgangspunkt i UN Women (2023) sin definisjon av technology-facilitated violence against women (TF VAW).

Avhandlingen gir tre sentrale empiriske bidrag. For det første viser den, med utgangspunkt i hverdagslivsperspektivet, hvordan unge kvinner opplever digital frakobling både individuelt og på måter som reflekterer bredere samfunnsmessige dynamikker. På individnivå fremstår digital frakobling både som en integrert hverdagspraksis og som en aspirasjon. Ved å identifisere forebyggende praksiser rettet mot å unngå TF VAW, videreutvikler avhandlingen forståelsen av digital frakobling og bidrar til pågående diskusjoner om hvordan frakoblende praksiser også kan være preget av ufrivillighet (Bozan & Treré, 2023; Hartmann et al., 2025). På samfunnsnivå antyder funnene at den offentlige diskursen har beveget seg i retning av en lengsel etter digital frakobling, uten at dette foreløpig har resultert i kollektiv handling. For det andre tilbyr avhandlingen et nyansert perspektiv på kjønn innen forskning på digital frakobling. Den viser at selv om den kvantitative studien identifiserte statistisk signifikante kjønnsforskjeller, var disse forskjellene gjennomgående små. Tilsvarende tonet deltakerne i den kvalitative studien ofte ned betydningen av kjønn i sine refleksjoner. Samtidig forble kjønnete erfaringer med TF VAW svært betydningsfulle. For det tredje utvider avhandlingen perspektivene på omsorg innen forskning på digital frakobling ved bevisst å rette oppmerksomheten mot kvinner utenfor formaliserte omsorgsroller. Den viser hvordan omsorgsforpliktelser former liv også utenfor heteronormative relasjoner, og hvordan omsorg kan komme til uttrykk i mer kollektive og solidariske former blant kvinner. Metodologisk bidrar kombinasjonen av en kreativ oppgave og semistrukturerte intervjuer til utviklingen av kreative metoder innen forskning på digital frakobling, samtidig som den gir et praktisk eksempel på spekulativ forskning i en bredere forstand.

Samlet viser prosjektet verdien av å sette unge kvinners erfaringer i sentrum for forskning på digital frakobling, og bidrar dermed til en dypere forståelse av hvordan digital frakobling formes og utspiller seg i menneskers hverdagsliv.

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List of Publications

Article I

Kratel, V. A. E. (2025). Gender and digital disconnection: Experiences in Norway. *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media (JQD:DM)*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.51685/jqd.2025.005>

Article II

Kratel, V. A. E. (2026). Reimagining Life With a Smartphone: A Creative Inquiry Into Women in Emerging Adulthood in Germany and Norway, *Mobile Media & Communication*, OnlineFirst. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20501579261449047>

Article III

Kratel, V. A. E. (under review). Handling What Hurts: Digital Disconnection in the Context of Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women.

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1 Introduction

On April 11, 2026, the astronauts of the Artemis II lunar flyby mission set a new record by traveling farther from Earth than any humans in history (Taveau, 2026). While this PhD thesis remains firmly grounded in everyday life on Earth, this space mission offers a lens through which to consider several of the conditions that shaped the context of the underlying research activities.

One such condition is women's roles in society, which have seen significant progress but remain a work in progress. In the 1950s, around the time of the earliest lunar missions, crews were entirely male (Launius, 1994). Women in the launching country, the United States, as well as in countries directly relevant to this thesis, Germany and Norway, were predominantly homemakers (Hagemann & Roll-Hansen, 2005). On Artemis II, with Christina Koch aboard, one of the three crewmembers was a woman (Taveau, 2026), marking significant progress, though not achieving parity.

Artemis II also reflects humanity's ambivalent relationship with technology. On the one hand, the mission symbolizes a society committed to continuous technological innovation, not only by setting new records but also by positioning this achievement as an early step in a broader strategy to establish a sustained human presence on the Moon (Taveau, 2026). On the other hand, such ambitions have attracted criticism for their multibillion-dollar cost at a time of global economic uncertainty. They further raise questions about whether humanity should prioritize caring for the planet it already inhabits, which is increasingly strained by the same drive for technological progress that Artemis II embodies (Deudney, 2020; Huesemann, 2011).

This ambivalence is evident not only in grander technological developments such as the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) (Crawford, 2021), but also in individual experiences of hyperconnectivity (Albris et al., 2024). This condition is reflected in Artemis II as well, albeit indirectly, revealing its limits. It was precisely at the moment when the crew set the record, when people around the world followed the mission, that communication was temporarily lost, with the Moon blocking all signals (Taveau, 2026). In contrast, life on Earth remains continuously mediated: an estimated two out of three people own a smartphone, one out of three has a Facebook account, and much of the planet is interconnected through the World Wide Web (Kemp, 2025). This condition of terrestrial life, which is not without its downsides, lends relevance to practices of stepping away

from digital connection, referred to as *digital disconnection* (Albris et al., 2024; Altmaier et al., 2024; Fast, 2021; Syvertsen, 2020). It is these associated practices, alongside related debates and scholarship, that lie at the heart of this thesis. In accordance with its title *Digital Disconnection in Everyday Life: Young Women's Experiences*, it seeks to illuminate how especially young women experience digital disconnection in their everyday lives. Its empirical work is situated in Germany and Norway, two highly hyperconnected societies where gender equality has advanced, yet inequalities persist, and where commitments to continuous innovation coexist with growing awareness of its negative consequences.

The thesis brings together the research activities and findings of its underlying PhD project. Employing a mixed-methods research design (Greene, 2002, 2015; Johnson et al., 2007), the project comprises a quantitative study reported in one article and a qualitative study presented across two articles. The PhD project itself forms part of the larger research project *Intrusive Media, Ambivalent Users, Digital Detox (Digitox)*, which is dedicated to “studying the quest for attention in the media industry, the motives and strategies for digital disconnection, and societal implications” (Syvertsen, n.d.). The project was funded by the Research Council of Norway (FRIPRO grant no. 287563) from 2019 to 2024, with networking and research activities continuing beyond this period (Syvertsen, n.d.).

This introductory chapter sets the stage by situating digital disconnection within scholarly and societal debates, explaining the project's focus on young women, and presenting the research motivation, research questions, and structure of the thesis.

1.1 On Digital Disconnection

To understand digital disconnection in the present day and its particular relevance to specific demographics, it is useful to first consider its historical context.

Media non-use has long been perceived as a problem to be overcome. Accordingly, questions of access and literacy in relation to digital inequalities have received significant attention from researchers, nation-states, and international organisations, all aiming to close what is commonly referred to as the *digital divide* (Syvertsen, 2017; van Deursen & Helsper, 2015; Van Dijk, 2020). Within this perspective, technological progress has largely been framed as inherently positive, and active

resistance has often been dismissed as irrational (Syvertsen, 2017). However, with societies becoming increasingly digital, deliberate non-use has begun to receive more serious attention. This shift is reflected in Wyatt et al.'s (2002) *Taxonomy of Non-Use*, which distinguishes four types of internet non-users: the *excluded*, who never had access; the *expelled*, who lost access; the *resisters*, who never wanted to use it; and the *rejecters*. The latter group refers to individuals who once adopted the internet but later chose to discontinue its use voluntarily. In this sense, they are emblematic of users who had access and were initially open to adopting technology but subsequently decided to step back. The reasons underlying such deliberate disengagement are diverse. In their review of digital disconnection literature, Nassen et al. (2023) identify a range of such motivations, including feelings of diminished control, concerns about neglecting offline relationships, stress, productivity issues, privacy concerns, and a broader questioning of the overall usefulness of digital technologies. These concerns have contributed to a growing shift toward viewing “refusal, restricted use, and non-use of digital media and communication tools” as “something valuable and worthwhile” (Bagger, 2024, p. 111).

In common parlance, these practices are often referred to as *digital detox*, a term that has become culturally recognizable, sparked public debate, and contributed to the expansion of the self-help sector (Syvertsen, 2020; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). In scholarly contexts, in turn, the term digital disconnection has become established (Albris et al., 2024; Altmaier et al., 2024; Bagger, 2024; Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Nassen et al., 2023). While the term may appear more balanced, as it does not imply that digital media are toxic, it can still suggest a simple opposition between connection and disconnection. It is therefore important to emphasize that digital disconnection, although it can refer to total forms such as non-adoption or complete abandonment, is often far more nuanced than a strict divide between use and non-use (Karlsen, 2023; Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021). Syvertsen (2022a), for instance, outlines various disconnective practices, including “smartphone breaks, time and space restrictions, deleting platforms (such as Facebook), muting and blocking, installing cut-off apps, and switching to lighter (retro) technology” (p. 658), none of which necessarily imply abandoning digital technologies altogether. Another example of the interplay between disconnection and continued use can be found in Mannel's (2019) study of disconnective affordances, which highlights how mobile messaging platforms themselves enable forms of disengagement. These affordances

include practices associated with *unfriending*, such as severing digital friendship ties, as well as muting and blocking (John & Agbarya, 2021; Zhu, 2023). Users can thus enact forms of digital disconnection even as they remain active on online platforms.

Reflecting this complexity, some scholars adopt the term digital dis/connection, using an added slash to foreground the constitutive entanglement of disconnection and continued use (e.g., Jorge et al., 2024; Treré, 2021; Vanden Abeele & Syvertsen, 2025). In this thesis, however, digital disconnection is already understood as inherently nuanced and intertwined with ongoing forms of digital engagement, making such additional signposting less necessary.

In addition to conceptualizing digital disconnection as encompassing a broad range of practices, scholars emphasize that it is experienced differently across individuals. Albris et al. (2024), for instance, note that “there does not exist any uniform or unilateral way that people practice disconnection or take a critical stance towards digital devices, technologies, or platforms” (p. 15). Taking a more critical approach, Treré (2021) seeks to unsettle “universalistic and taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the meanings and motivations of dis/connection” (p. 1674). Focusing on Global South contexts, both this study and a later study by Bozan and Treré (2023) highlight how individuals in such settings often experience limited access and overconnection simultaneously. Capturing a similar interplay between voluntary and imposed forms of digital disconnection among roofless individuals in Germany’s capital Berlin, Hartmann et al. (2025) introduce the concept of the “disconnection divide” (p. 379). In contrast to portrayals of digital disconnection as a primarily voluntary practice (e.g., Nassen et al., 2023), these studies demonstrate that, much like the relationship between use and non-use, the boundary between voluntary and involuntary forms of disconnection is often far more complex.

Related to questions of voluntary and involuntary disconnection, research has also begun to examine more involuntary forms of connection across sociodemographic lines. A central theme in this work is that practices of disconnection may not be equally feasible for everyone, with Nguyen and Hargittai (2023) proposing that such unequal capacities should be understood as a distinct dimension of digital inequality. With regard to social class, for instance, Portwood-Stacer (2012) found that Facebook abstainers tend to openly display their choice to distinguish themselves from others. Drawing on Veblen’s

(1908) concept of “conspicuous consumption” (p. 68) as a class marker, she coins such performative acts of abstention “conspicuous non-consumption” (Portwood-Stacer, 2012, p. 1044). In terms of age, Jorge et al. (2024), as well as Nguyen et al. (2021), found that adolescents often face intense expectations from peers to be constantly available online, expectations that are less pronounced among older age groups. Regarding ability status and health, Beattie (2025) seeks to stimulate discourse on the feasibility of such practices for neurodivergent individuals and their implications for framing cognitive differences in society. Focusing on chronic diseases, Klausen (2024) argues that affected patients can only ever partially disconnect from a “digital infrastructure of distributed responsibility and care” (p. 159).

It is precisely this body of work on digital disconnection, which recognizes its potential sociodemographic dimensions, that underpins this thesis. Contextualizing its focus on young women, the following section reviews prior research on digital disconnection and gender in greater detail.

1.2 On Digital Disconnection, Gender, and Care

Previous research on sociodemographic differences and digital disconnection has indeed begun to address the role of gender. Beattie (2020), for instance, critiques the role of hegemonic masculinity in *The Manufacture of Digital Disconnection*. Building on the premise that men occupy a dominant position in society, he conceptualizes the “ideal disconnected subject” (p. 168) as completely independent, “free to disconnect at any time to make autonomous decisions” (p. 174). This condition is ultimately grounded in a disregard for social relations. Accordingly, Beattie presents this hyperbolic male figure to underscore the absence of responsibilities toward others as a key condition for achieving complete autonomy over digital media use, including the ability to disconnect at any time. An example of this can be found in the aforementioned study on conspicuous non-consumption, in which a man bragged about not needing Facebook, in contrast to his wife. She, in turn, relies on the platform, with the caveat that she maintains their social connections there for both of them (Portwood-Stacer, 2012). Fast (2021) describes such a dynamic as “irresponsibilization” (p. 1624): when one person avoids a task, it simply shifts to someone else, often without further thought from the one who avoided it.

In their discourse analysis of marketing communications for digital disconnection retreats, courses, and gadgets, Van Bruyssel et al. (2023) identify similar gendered patterns. Products associated with keywords such as business and money, leadership, peak performance, and resilience are frequently paired with images of men, reinforcing stereotypical associations of masculinity with authority and control. In contrast, campaigns targeting women frame digital disconnection as an act of self-care and a means of reclaiming time. Importantly, this self-care is not portrayed as benefiting women alone but is implicitly linked to sustaining energy and time that can be redirected toward others in a socially reproductive capacity.

The link between digital disconnection, women, and caregiving is particularly captured in Fast's (2021) rhetorical figure of the "post-digital housewife" (p. 1616). Inspired by Jarrett's (2016) concept of the "digital housewife", a metaphor for social reproductive labor conducted in the digital sphere predominantly by women, Fast (2021) conceptualizes digital disconnection as work. In this view, the post-digital housewife is tasked with maintaining a healthy boundary between the online and offline spheres for the entire household to ensure invigoration for current and future workforces. While Fast acknowledges that such acts of disconnective work can also be performed by men, she emphasizes that these responsibilities have historically remained largely with women. Navigating such responsibilities is also among the findings in Bozan and Tréré's (2023) study of Turkish villagers, in which mothers describe wanting to spend quality time with their children offline while also feeling the need to remain readily available to their children's teachers online. Similar tensions appear in Ytre-Arne's (2023) study of new mothers in Norway, who report that, after giving birth, a strict cultural norm encourages them to put their smartphones away, sometimes reinforced by signs in postnatal wards. At the same time, family and friends expect frequent updates and often show little understanding when they are not included digitally.

Taken together, previous research tends to portray men as relatively autonomous and independent in their digital disconnection, largely unburdened by the expectations of others. For women, caregiving for another person emerges as an omnipresent and contradictory motif: digital disconnection both sustains and forms part of caregiving yet is also constrained by caregiving obligations online. Although not without nuance, this body of research can thus be interpreted as presenting two contrasting vignettes along a

gender binary: the carefree man on the one hand and the caregiving woman on the other. Still, it should be noted that this depiction emerges from a relatively young body of research, in which figures such as the “ideal disconnected subject” and the “post-digital housewife” are deliberately constructed as hyperbolic rhetorical devices. Moreover, gender is often only a secondary aspect, as in the work of Portwood-Stacer (2012) and Bozan and Treré (2023). Consequently, despite offering valuable arguments, the stark contrasts drawn between women and men should be approached with some caution and suggest the need for further research.

1.3 Research Motivation

Against this backdrop, the underlying project of this PhD thesis sought to contribute additional empirically grounded research on digital disconnection by focusing on young women’s experiences. Certainly, other avenues of inquiry would also have been possible, including questioning whether men are in fact as independent as they are often portrayed, or expanding research on digital disconnection and gender beyond a binary understanding to include the experiences of genderqueer, non-binary, and trans* individuals. Yet this focus was motivated not solely by a generalized need for further research on digital disconnection and gender, but also by the identification of a distinct analytical gap within the existing body of scholarship on women.

More specifically, research on digital disconnection and women rarely appears to center women themselves. Whether examining wives managing Facebook accounts on behalf of their husbands, post-digital housewives sustaining present and future workforces, mothers caring for children in rural Turkey, or new mothers in Norway navigating expectations from family and friends in postnatal wards, women are consistently framed in relation to others. As a result, even though existing studies provide important theoretical arguments, valuable empirical insights, and compelling feminist critiques, they often approach women primarily through formalized and heteronormative caregiving roles.

A central premise in studying women’s lives is the recognition that women do not constitute a homogeneous group. Rather, women encompass a wide range of identities and experiences, from housewives to astronauts, all deserving academic attention. Thus, although gender norms and societal expectations undoubtedly shape women’s lives,

each woman's experiences remain distinct and are often informed by intersecting factors such as sexuality, class, and education (Crenshaw, 1989; Harvey, 2019; Weiss, 2021). Accordingly, women's lives cannot be equated to caregiving roles alone. This is further highlighted in Fisher and Tronto's (1990) *feminist theory of caring*, which, in addition to the dimensions of *caring about*, *taking care of*, and *caregiving*, also conceptualizes *care-receiving* as a key phase of caring. While they too problematize that the main share of caregiving is carried out by women, they also emphasize that women themselves are recipients of care, especially within friendships and feminist sisterhoods. This perspective also foregrounds women who may never have children or pursue marriage to men, as well as those who are open to such possibilities but are not yet at that point in life. Women aged 18 to 29, in particular, are understood to occupy a life stage characterized by heightened self-focus and relatively limited obligations to others, captured in the concept of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Motivated by the aim of extending research on digital disconnection and women beyond formalized caregiving roles, this project therefore focuses on young women.

1.4 Research Questions

Grounded in the research motivation outlined above, the project seeks to address the following overarching research question:

How do young women experience digital disconnection in their everyday lives?

The research question deliberately centers young women as an understudied group and foregrounds their experiences of digital disconnection. Moreover, it incorporates everyday life as the primary analytical framework through which these experiences unfold. Importantly, by acknowledging the diversity and complexity within the category of young women (Crenshaw, 1989; Harvey, 2019; Weiss, 2021), the research question prioritizes a deeper understanding of their varied experiences over the pursuit of a singular answer.

To understand young women's experiences from multiple perspectives and address the main research question, five additional sub-research questions are examined across the three articles, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Overview of the Articles and Sub-Research Questions*

Article	Research question
I	How do men and women experience digital disconnection differently within the context of Norway?
II	How do women in emerging adulthood in Germany and Norway imagine an ideal relationship with their smartphones? Who do women in emerging adulthood perceive as being responsible for making their imaginings a reality?
III	How do women in emerging adulthood experience digital disconnection in the context of their gender? How do women in emerging adulthood experience digital disconnection in the context of technology-facilitated violence against women?

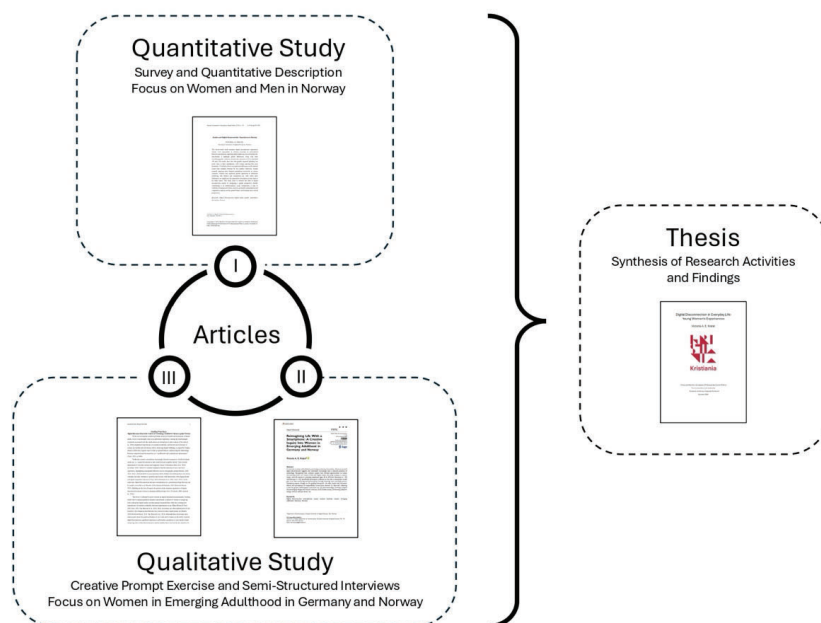
The first article draws on quantitative data to examine gender differences between women and men in Norway more generally, thereby establishing an empirical foundation for the project's overall research topic. Articles II and III, both based on the same qualitative data collection, build on this foundation by focusing on women in emerging adulthood from Germany and Norway. Article II examines how these women imagine an ideal relationship with their smartphones and how they understand questions of responsibility associated with these visions. Because this article approaches participants' experiences without an explicit focus on gender, Article III subsequently re-examines the interview material through a gendered lens. This prompted an abductive analytical process that led to the incorporation of UN Women's (2023) definition of technology-facilitated violence against women and the inclusion of an additional research question.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis forms one of two parts of the overall PhD project. Its objective is to synthesize the research activities and findings presented in the other part, namely the three articles based on quantitative and qualitative studies. Figure 1 provides an overview of the articles and the thesis as project components.

Figure 1

Overview of the Project Components



The thesis spans seven chapters and includes the three articles in the appendix. This first chapter, the introduction, provides an overview of the project's central topic (sections 1.1 and 1.2), its research motivation (section 1.3), and the main and sub-research questions guiding the project (section 1.4).

The second chapter presents the theoretical perspectives. It begins by outlining the project's academic positioning within digital disconnection studies (section 2.1), before introducing central terms, concepts, and theoretical approaches within the field (section 2.2). It then presents everyday life, complemented by utopian thought, as the central analytical framework (section 2.3).

The third chapter introduces the project's focus on women (section 3.1), the conceptual life stage of emerging adulthood (3.2), and the contexts of Germany and Norway (section 3.3) in greater depth. It thus explains how gender, age, and national contexts shape the overall project, and which assumptions, concepts, and contexts further inform it.

The fourth chapter details the methodology, including its mixed-methods design and paradigmatic positioning (section 4.1), quantitative and qualitative studies (sections 4.2 and 4.3, respectively), and ethical considerations (section 4.4).

The fifth chapter presents the key findings from the three articles and discusses their role within the project (sections 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3, respectively), functioning as the thesis's equivalent of a findings chapter.

The sixth chapter integrates the project's findings, outlining its empirical and methodological contributions to digital disconnection studies and related fields (sections 6.1 and 6.2, respectively), while also addressing the project's limitations and directions for future research (section 6.3).

Finally, the thesis closes with a brief conclusion (chapter 7).

2 Theoretical Perspectives

Extending the introduction's discussion of key terminology, historical context, and previous research on digital disconnection, the first section of this chapter explicitly positions the project within the field of digital disconnection studies. The second section presents further terms, concepts, and theoretical approaches integral to the field, before the third section establishes everyday life, complemented by utopian thought, as the project's central analytical framework.

2.1 Academic Positioning: Digital Disconnection Studies

Digital disconnection has received increasing scholarly attention, with research focusing on examining associated practices, identifying which technologies and platforms people disconnect from, analyzing the characteristics of those who engage in such practices, gauging their motivations, and exploring the contexts in which disconnection occurs (Altmaier et al., 2024; Bagger, 2024; Nassen et al., 2023). This body of work is highly interdisciplinary, often located on the “home turf of media and communication” (Moe & Madsen, 2021, p. 1596), yet extending well beyond to encompass anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, computer science, psychology, tourism studies, and more (Albris et al., 2024; Bagger, 2024; Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Moe & Madsen, 2021).

While media resistance has long attracted scholarly interest, Fast (2021) suggests that a “wider disconnection turn in society” also encompasses an “upsurge in studies of deliberate ‘non-use,’ ‘withdrawal’ from, ‘disengagement’ with, or ‘resistance’ against digital media” (p. 1615). Despite its interdisciplinary breadth, this body of research shows signs of consolidation, particularly in its terminology: although the terms listed in Fast's account remain in use, research has increasingly converged on the term digital disconnection (Altmaier et al., 2024; Bagger, 2024; Nassen et al., 2023). It is this convergence around a shared term that raises the question of whether this body of work should be understood descriptively as *digital disconnection research* or whether it already constitutes its own research field, *digital disconnection studies*. In their introduction to the *Convergence Special Issue: Digital Disconnection*, Lomborg and Ytre-Arne (2021) explicitly engage with this question. As editors, it might seem likely that they would argue in favor of establishing a distinct field, especially since the issue itself contributes to the consolidation of this line of research, fittingly in a journal titled *Convergence*. Nevertheless, Lomborg and Ytre-Arne refrain from doing so, hoping that

“the issue will stand not as an attempt to establish digital disconnection as a distinct subfield within media studies, but rather as an encouragement to utilize disconnection as a productive entry point for understanding baseline questions in media and communication research” (p. 1532).

Five years later, the consolidation of research activities has progressed further, a development that is evident in literature reviews on digital disconnection. The earliest of these, authored by Nassen et al. (2023), cautiously frames its contribution as a review of literature in the “emerging field of digital disconnection studies.” A year later, Altmaier et al. (2024) review “empirical contributions to disconnection studies,” referring to it as established without further explanation. Even more assertively, Bagger (2024) seeks to delineate “the existing boundaries and research interests within disconnection studies over the past decade” (p. 110), implying not only that digital disconnection constitutes a recognizable area of inquiry, but also that it has developed a decade-long trajectory. In addition, an increasing number of research contributions claim affiliation with (digital) disconnection studies, often without explicitly justifying this designation (e.g., Bozan & Tréré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Klausen, 2024; Ross et al., 2024). In parallel, a range of collective efforts has emerged, including research projects, special issues, anthologies, and conferences, all contributing to the development of a distinct field (Albris et al., 2024; Vanden Abeele & Syvertsen, 2025). This PhD project actively engages with these efforts, particularly through its use of the literature, and seeks to contribute to them not only by being part of the Digitox project, but also through its own research activities. Accordingly, the project positions itself within digital disconnection studies, approaching it as a subfield of media and communication studies that remains fundamentally interdisciplinary.

The positioning within digital disconnection studies offers two distinct advantages. First, it provides a clear topical grounding, avoiding a more diffuse placement across loosely connected research areas. Second, the inherently interdisciplinary character of digital disconnection studies is particularly valuable given the project’s focus on women, as it enables the integration of perspectives from gender studies, feminist media studies, and feminist science and technology studies (feminist STS) without requiring a shift in its core disciplinary orientation. However, positioning this PhD project within digital disconnection studies also entails a degree of theoretical fragmentation, as

the field lacks a unifying framework or grand theory (Vanden Abeele & Syvertsen, 2025). The project addresses this theoretical instability in two ways. First, it draws on established terms and concepts, as well as proposed theoretical approaches within the field. Although scholars are often cautious not to overstate the significance of their proposals (e.g., Ross et al., 2024; Vanden Abeele & Syvertsen, 2025), these efforts nonetheless foster greater theoretical coherence. Second, the project employs everyday life, complemented by utopian thought, as an analytical framework for understanding young women's experiences. In doing so, this framework weaves a theoretical thread through the project as a whole.

2.2 Theorizing Digital Disconnection

This section presents central terms, concepts, and proposed theoretical approaches within digital disconnection studies. It is specifically structured around how digital disconnection unfolds from the individual to the societal level, drawing on Vanden Abeele and Syvertsen's (2025) five axioms at the intersection of media resistance and mobile media studies, as well as Ross et al.'s (2024) pluralistic continuum of digital disconnection scholarship.

An integral concept within digital disconnection studies, even referred to as digital disconnection's twin concept (Vanden Abeele & Syvertsen, 2025), is *digital wellbeing*. It is defined by Vanden Abeele (2021) as "a subjective individual experience of optimal balance between the benefits and drawbacks obtained from mobile connectivity" (p. 938), and aligns with earlier discussions of digital media in relation to the good life (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Syvertsen, 2020; Vorderer, 2016). Further, Vanden Abeele and Syvertsen (2025) foreground wellbeing in their first of their *five axioms at the intersection of media resistance and mobile media studies*: "ubiquitous connectivity lends its value from how it reinforces and undermines well-being" (p. 10).

Given the emphasis in digital wellbeing on an optimal balance, it is somewhat implied that such a balance is frequently disrupted by digital media. Still, digital media is not only an intrusive force that can distance individuals from the good life but also, as acknowledged in the concept of digital wellbeing as well, a source of benefits. Digital wellbeing is thus closely tied to another term frequently appearing in digital

disconnection studies: *ambivalence*, which is explored in the literature through a range of different manifestations.

Ytre-Arne et al. (2020), for instance, argue that smartphone users experience temporal ambivalence, as incoming notifications interfere with other activities in their daily routines. Similarly, Syvertsen (2022) distinguishes between digital ambivalence and screen ambivalence. The former “describes ambiguous sentiments over being reachable and (always) connected,” while the latter “covers mixed feelings regarding the presence of smartphones and screens” (p. 197), thus capturing conflicting feelings toward digital technologies. Taken together, these perspectives on ambivalence foreground that “the experience of using digital media is both positive and negative for users” (Syvertsen, 2020, p. 9). This dialectical tension between connectivity and disconnection is also central to Vanden Abeele and Syvertsen’s (2025) second axiom “[a]mbivalence characterizes the contemporary media experience” (p. 11). Digital disconnection, in turn, is understood as the ongoing calibration between connectivity and disconnection, leading to the third axiom: “Dis/connection is the negotiation of ambivalence” (p. 11), which is in line with the general understanding of digital disconnection as a spectrum of practices between use and non-use, rather than a binary (see section 1.1). The fourth axiom then situates these negotiations, positing that “Dis/connection is localized in everyday life” (p. 12), a perspective that is revisited in greater depth in the following section on everyday life as an overarching framework (see section 2.3).

Whereas digital wellbeing and ambivalence are theorized on the individual level, Vanden Abeele and Syvertsen (2025), through their fifth axiom—“The negotiation of dis/connection is a dynamic process” (p. 12)—extend the perspective to the societal level. Here, they argue that “digital media and human values are moving targets” (p. 12), shaped by societal forces such as legislators, schools, employers, and the tech industry, thereby inviting further research considerations. Hence, while digital disconnection may appear as a set of practices at the individual level, it is deeply embedded in wider societal dynamics. This perspective also foregrounds considerations of power, as the condition of ubiquitous connectivity is itself deeply structural, captured in terms such as “culture of connectivity” (Van Dijck, 2013), “digital-by-default society” (Kuntsman & Miyake, 2022), or “digital enforcement” (Díaz Andrade & Techatassanasoontorn, 2021). These terms point to the broader force of digitalization, in which governments firmly embrace

technological progress (e.g., BMDS, n.d.-b; DFD, 2024) and industries subscribe to “techno-utopianism” (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996; Turner, 2006), where continuous innovation is both the means and the end of an ideal society.

Addressing the challenges introduced by these ongoing, large-scale developments, Syvertsen (2020) argues in her book *Digital Detox: The Politics of Disconnecting* that they are closely tied to the deregulation of industries by nation-states. Although efforts to shield adolescents from the pull of digital technologies do exist (see section 3.3), there remains a general hesitancy to impose stricter oversight. As a result, Syvertsen observes that the focus has shifted from industry practices and technology design to improving user’s behavior. She links this shift to *responsibilization*, a concept from governmentality literature in which individuals are expected to devise solutions to structural problems (Wakefield & Fleming, 2009). In terms of digital disconnection, Syvertsen (2020) further argues that this neoliberal dynamic gives rise to a “prevailing culture of self-optimisation” (p. 7), a development she sees reflected in the expansion of digital detox discourse within the self-help industry. Hence, while the pursuit of a good life through more balanced digital media use resonates as “meaningful and authentic,” it is also shaped by processes of “commodification and commercialization” (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021, p. 1532), with digital disconnection taking on the character of a “biopolitical instrument of (self-) governance” (Fast, 2021, p. 1624). Such structural conditions thus further complicate interpretations of digital disconnection as a fully voluntary, individual choice.

The description of contemporary societal dynamics and the place of digital disconnection within them may read as somewhat dystopian. This impression can be reinforced by the growing number of former Silicon Valley employees who have come forward, admitting to having contributed to a techno-dystopia in which technologies intentionally exploit users’ attention as part of their business models (Karppi & Nieborg, 2021). Yet it should also be noted that digital disconnection studies portray contemporary society as increasingly self-aware, describing a broader shift in the zeitgeist away from technological optimism toward more critical scrutiny of the “hegemonic notion that digitalisation always leads to something good” (Albris et al., 2024, p. 16). Cramer (2014), for instance, refers to the “post-digital condition,” describing it as “a contemporary disenchantment with digital information systems and media gadgets or as a period in

which our fascination with these technologies has become historical” (p. 12). The post-digital condition thus does not denote a state beyond digital technology, but one in which “the disruption brought about by digital information technology has already occurred” (p. 17). This disruption, as Cramer further argues, prompts a reconsideration of technologies, reflected in a growing appreciation for nostalgic media such as typewriters and vinyl records. Building on the post-digital condition, Fast (2021) describes the aforementioned “wider disconnection turn in society” (p. 1615), encompassing not only a surge in related research, but also growing societal debates and an increasing orientation toward digital disconnection practices among users. In a similar vein, Albris et al. (2024) refer to a “digital backlash” to capture “critiques of the role that digital devices, technologies, and platforms play in contemporary society” (p. 12), leading to interrogations of “digital habits, consumption, and behaviour” (p. 13).

The post-digital condition, the disconnection turn, and the digital backlash all describe shifts in cultural sentiment, but they also highlight how these shifts manifest in “mundane, reflexive responses” (Albris et al., 2024, p. 12) by individual media users. Hence, while these practices can still be interpreted as manifestations of responsabilization, they may, through their cumulative effects, form part of a larger countermovement that contributes to human values remaining a moving target. Consequently, whereas the lenses of individual and societal levels offer distinct perspectives, they are ultimately intertwined. It is this insight that is integral to Ross et al.’s (2024) *pluralistic continuum of digital disconnection scholarship*, in which they emphasize an ontological understanding that spans from individually functional to socially meaningful considerations. From the individually functional perspective, digital disconnection is conceptualized as “behavior directed by an isolated, agentic, and responsible individual, whose decision-making regarding digital disconnection can yield instrumental and intrinsic benefits such as productivity and well-being” (p. 854). The socially meaningful perspective, then, “examines digital disconnection as a symbolic act that emerges from, and takes place within, forces of social imbrication, power, marginalization, technological affordances, and resistance” (p. 854). Understanding both perspectives along a continuum thus illustrates the scope, timeliness, and relevance of digital disconnection as a scholarly subject. However, it also underscores the challenge that digital disconnection research faces: recognizing that individual practices are always

embedded in a broader societal context, while analyses of that broader context must, in turn, account for the implications of those dynamics for individuals.

2.3 Framework: Everyday Life meets Utopian Thought

Positioned within digital disconnection studies and aiming to firmly account for the impact of digital disconnection at both individual and societal levels, this project examines women's experiences of digital disconnection through the framework of everyday life. This section outlines everyday life as a productive framework for understanding people's media use and non-use, traces its theoretical roots in Schutz and Luckmann's (1973) sociological-phenomenological theory of the lifeworld, and demonstrates how utopian thought helps to illuminate everyday life experiences.

2.3.1 On Everyday Life

Everyday life is a recurring framework in the field of media and communication, with the capacity to emphasize the relevance of its work, as every human being has one (Silverstone, 1994; Ytre-Arne, 2023). However, understandings of what everyday life actually encompasses vary. In his work on radio use in Denmark in the 1990s, Larsen (2000), for instance, defines everyday life as people's day-to-day existence, with a particular emphasis on the routines that structure it. Researching digital media use in everyday life in Norway, Ytre-Arne (2023) adopts a more literal approach, focusing on the span of a single day, from morning to night. Reflecting the perspective of this project are Bengtsson and Johansson (2022), who, in their work on everyday social media use in Sweden, conceptualize it as a "state of mind" (p. 3) that extends beyond spatial and temporal boundaries to encompass all moments and contexts in which people have access to media.

Despite their differences in focus and the media they examine, these perspectives ultimately converge in placing ordinary people's experiences at the center. It is through the framework of everyday life that the focus shifts from the medium itself to a phenomenological approach centered on lived experience, as "everyday life presupposes a focus on the human being who lives it" (Bakardjieva, 2005, p. 39). In terms of media use, everyday life thus offers a way to understand technologies through people's experiences. Here, Sandvik et al. (2016) argue that mundane contexts are the very settings in which

“encoded meanings and affordances of media and media technologies are translated into lived experiences” (p. 9).

Everyday life also occupies a prominent place in digital disconnection studies. Moe and Madsen (2021), for instance, argue that “it is not just the media that are pervasive in society and everyday life, but also the disconnection from such media” (p. 1596). Likewise, as noted in the previous section, Vanden Abeele and Syvertsen (2025) theorize the statement “Dis/connection is localized in everyday life” (p. 12) as a central axiom for researching digital disconnection. This emphasis is further reflected in the introduction to the anthology *The Digital Backlash and the Paradoxes of Disconnection*, whose editors identify as a central aim understanding public debates on digital disconnection and “how they relate to people’s everyday experiences with using digital technologies and disconnecting from them” (Albris et al., 2024, p. 17). Similarly, in the introduction to *Convergence*’s special issue on digital disconnection, Lomborg and Ytre-Arne (2021) state that the “study of digital disconnection, and the current surge of studies on this topic, can be seen as a response to the ‘backbone’ role of digital technologies and communication in everyday life and in the functioning of society” (p. 1530). Together, these contributions highlight the specific analytical value of everyday life, extending beyond the individual level to encompass broader societal dynamics, including the aforementioned public debates and the functioning of society at large.

A key reference point for work on media use and everyday life that helps illuminate how this framework spans both the individual and societal levels is Schutz and Luckmann’s (1973) sociological phenomenological *Theory of the Lifeworld*. Here, lifeworld refers to the taken-for-granted background of experience in which people live, that is, the arena of human action. It is typically experienced as self-evident, as simply how the world is. At the same time, individuals rely on a stock of knowledge, formed through past and present experiences, including those shared with others, to navigate it. While this lifeworld is experienced intersubjectively as natural and self-evident, its taken-for-granted character rests on socially shared and historically sedimented stocks of knowledge (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). From this perspective, the lifeworld offers a way of understanding not only the spatial and temporal dimensions of media use and digital disconnection but also their social dimension, including shared meanings, cultural norms, and institutionalized knowledge. Drawing on this theory in her work on internet

use in North American homes, Bakardjieva (2005) thus argues that “everyday life cannot be reduced to the private sphere and the processes of consumption” (p. 37). Similarly, Ytre-Arne (2023) suggests that it is everyday life “where political dimensions of media are experienced, interpreted and acted upon” (p. 6), where “societal norms meet personal circumstances” (p. 75), and where “communicative dilemmas are experienced” (p. 75). Consequently, when considering digital disconnection as spanning from individual experiences to broader societal levels, this framework offers a particularly useful analytical lens. Ytre-Arne (2023) also emphasizes variation in lived experiences, noting that “inequalities and divides are fundamental to the role that media play in different everyday lives” (p. 14), including dimensions such as class, age, and ethnicity, as well as, central to this project, gender. It is precisely here that this perspective becomes especially valuable for understanding how young women experience digital disconnection.

2.3.2 On Utopian Thought

The framework of everyday life is complemented by the additional framework of *utopian thought*. The term originates from a sixteenth-century novel depicting an island society with seemingly ideal conditions. Its author, Thomas More, used *Utopia*, derived from Greek meaning “no place,” as the title of the novel and included a poem titled *Eutopia*, meaning “good place” (More, 1516/2020). Their combined meanings provided the name for a broader intellectual tradition concerned with imagining ideal societal settings across academic disciplines (Levitas, 2013; Tower Sargent, 2010; Wells, 1906).

Within this project, utopian thought is approached from two perspectives: an emancipatory one and a sociological-analytical one. The emancipatory perspective is based on the premise that, even though imaginations of life with technology are collectively shaped, they tend to be dominated by corporations and nation-states. This premise is grounded in the concept of *socio-technical imaginaries*, developed by Jasanoff and Kim (2009) in relation to nation-states and later extended by Jasanoff (2015) with a focus on industries. It further resonates with Syvertsen’s (2020) line of argument on responsabilization presented in the previous section (see section 2.2), in which states and industries make decisions while the consequences are placed on the citizen/user. In her work *Imagination: A Manifesto*, Benjamin (2024) problematizes such dynamics in the

context of human imagination. She critiques how elite actors hold a monopoly over visions of ideal technological futures, with direct consequences for people's everyday lives. She thus argues that everyone has a right to imaginative spaces. Recognizing that women's experiences are recurrently overlooked, this project follows that argument by seeking to open imaginative spaces for the women participating in the project.

Utopian thought also offers a clear analytical benefit. Dating back to the early 20th century, Wells (1906) argued that utopias and their exhaustive criticism constitute a foundational sociological method. Building on this, Levitas (2013) contends that, regardless of whether a utopian vision is situated in a distant future or imagined elsewhere, it invariably functions as a critique of the present. In other words, it is through imagined alternatives that "the reasons for the ills of contemporary society" (p. xiv) become perceptible. Accordingly, from a sociological perspective, utopian thought serves as a productive tool for analyzing contemporary conditions, that is, everyday life, through imagined, more ideal alternatives. This project draws on this analytical potential in two ways: first, by examining women's formative desires underlying conceptions of ideal relationships with their smartphones, thereby revealing challenges within their current everyday experiences; and second, by considering who is deemed responsible for realizing these imaginaries, thereby shedding light on perceived responsibilities and power structures in everyday life. In this way, utopian thought becomes an integral part of the project's overall framework of everyday life.

3 Project Focus

In addition to the theoretical perspectives outlined in the previous chapter, this PhD project is grounded in a set of deliberate and theoretically informed choices regarding its focus. This chapter presents the implications of focusing on women, emerging adulthood, and the contexts of Germany and Norway. Each is addressed in a separate section, with relevant points of overlap highlighted throughout.

3.1 On Women

By focusing on women, this project inevitably raises the ontological question of what a “woman” is. This section presents the project’s understanding of women as an inherently diverse social category, approached through self-identification. Building on this, the section further examines how the project engages with existing scholarship on women and digital media, particularly the UN Women (2023) definition of technology-facilitated violence against women.

Gender studies commonly distinguishes between “woman” as a social category of gender and “female” as a biological category of sex, while recognizing that both categories are interpreted through historical and social contexts (Butler, 1990; Harrison, 2006; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In the seminal work, *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir (1949/2011) challenges essentialist understandings of an “eternal feminine” (p. 3), describing such assumptions as mythic thinking. Instead, she famously argued that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 293), thereby highlighting gender as a socially situated process of “becoming.” Her work inspired further feminist thinkers, such as West and Zimmerman (1987), who conceptualize gender as a “doing,” produced and reproduced through interaction and shaped by normative expectations. Extending this line of thought, Butler (1990) conceptualizes gender as performatively constituted through repeated social practices shaped by relations of power and normative regulation. These processes are further inflected by intersectional structures such as race¹, class, sexuality, and education, which are central concerns within Crenshaw’s (1989) framework of *intersectionality*. Together, these works are foundational to researching

¹ The term “race” is used here and in other parts of the thesis in line with established research traditions that conceptualize race as a socially constructed category. Similar to gender, the term does not denote a biological reality but a socially and historically consequential dimension that shapes lived experiences (e.g., Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Freelon et al., 2023; Weiss, 2021).

women, particularly in advancing the understanding that the category of “woman” is socially constructed and therefore neither natural nor universal.

This points to a central challenge: while “women” does not denote a stable or homogeneous group, shared gender norms and structural conditions nonetheless shape lived experiences. To address this tension and illuminate women’s diverse everyday lives, the present study approaches individuals who self-identify as women as holders of situated knowledge about women’s experiences (Haraway, 1988; Weiss, 2021). This prioritization of self-identification allows for the exploration of diverse experiences among women without imposing a fixed or biologically determinist definition of what a woman is.

Considerations of women’s experiences have received increasing interdisciplinary attention. Regarding women’s experiences with technology and digital media, subfields such as feminist science and technology studies (feminist STS) and feminist media studies have emerged. Over several decades, such scholarship has addressed questions of access and digital literacy, representation within key industries, and practices of representation and self-presentation in media content through which gendered power relations are produced and negotiated (Harvey, 2019; Subramaniam et al., 2017; Suchman, 2008).

Research on women within digital disconnection studies aligns with this tradition but shifts its analytical focus from questions concerning participation in digital connectivity to the gendered conditions and possibilities of digital disconnection (Beattie, 2020; Fast, 2021; Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023). Yet, as noted above (section 1.2), such research has tended to focus predominantly on women in formalized caregiving roles. Although caregiving is also a highly relevant theme within feminist STS and feminist media studies, it constitutes only one dimension among many and does not occupy a singularly privileged position within these fields (Harvey, 2019; Subramaniam et al., 2017; Suchman, 2008; Wajcman, 2015). A stronger point of convergence between feminist media studies, feminist STS, and digital disconnection studies thus appears to lie in their shared attention to ambivalence. In *TechnoFeminism*, for instance, Wajcman (2004) argues that women are not merely passively affected by technology but also actively engage with and transform it. In other words, gender relations both shape and are shaped by technological systems. From this perspective, the full range of gendered experiences, both positive and negative, is present within digital environments. On the

one hand, this may include opportunities for women's political expression, representation, education, employment, leisure, as well as feminist and broader activism (Harvey, 2019; UN Women, 2023). On the other hand, women's access to and visibility in online spaces do not inherently translate into greater gender equality but are often met with online violence. These acts of violence take different forms, such as misogynistic insults, harassment through online exhibitionism, the non-consensual sharing of private images, and targeted harassment campaigns, all of which deny women the opportunity to fully participate in and enjoy online spaces (Blandini, 2021; Harvey, 2019; Massanari, 2017; Mortensen, 2018; UN Women, 2023).

While the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women, 2023) acknowledges that technology-facilitated violence can affect anyone online, it emphasizes that such violence disproportionately affects women, who are often deliberately targeted. To address this, UN Women developed a definition of *technology-facilitated violence against women* (TF VAW), not only to establish a shared framework for understanding these harms, but also to support efforts toward their dismantling:

Technology-facilitated violence against women (TF VAW)^[2] is any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms (UN Women, 2023, p. 4).

The definition is deliberately broad so as to accommodate forms of TF VAW that may emerge alongside new technologies. Contemporary examples include nonconsensual pornography victimization, in which explicit images of a person are distributed without their consent (Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019), and the receipt of unsolicited explicit images, often referred to as "dick pics" (Hayes & Dragiewicz, 2018). Both forms are found to not only disproportionately affect women, but particularly those in the life stage of emerging adulthood (Das NETTZ et al., 2024; Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019).

² "Noting violence against women can be substituted with gender-based violence (TF GBV), whilst maintaining the common definition describing the phenomenon" (UN Women, 2023, p. 4).

In examining the gendered dimensions of digital disconnection, the project draws on this definition to explore disconnection practices as a means of circumventing these forms of violence (see section 5.3). Against this backdrop, the project recognizes a range of shared concerns across gender studies, feminist STS, feminist media studies, and related fields. Approaching the project through these lenses not only helps clarify its ontological understanding of women, but also provides important points of departure for examining how women experience digital disconnection. In this way, the project remains firmly situated within digital disconnection studies and understands engagement with these fields as part of the interdisciplinarity inherent to this positioning.

3.2 On Emerging Adulthood

Concerning its focus on young women, the project specifically draws on the conceptual life stage of emerging adulthood. This section introduces the features of emerging adulthood in depth and explains how this conceptual life stage informed the overall project.

Emerging adulthood refers to a transitional life stage in which individuals have moved beyond childhood and adolescence but have not fully assumed the responsibilities typically associated with adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004). Individuals in this phase are therefore understood as *emerging* into adulthood. Arnett (2000) initially defined this stage as spanning the ages of 18 to 25 and later expanded it to 18 to 29, observing that increasing median ages at marriage and parenthood in the United States have extended this state of emergence. He further argues that emerging adulthood cannot be defined by age alone, proposing five characteristic features that distinguish this phase of life (Arnett, 2004).

The first feature is *identity exploration*, during which emerging adults seek to figure out who they are and what they want from life, particularly in relation to work and love (Arnett, 2004). In terms of media use, this might include trying out possible selves by posting different types of content online (Coyne et al., 2016).

Such explorations and their experimental character indicate the second feature: *instability*. During this period, career paths, relationships, and places of residence are often still taking shape and remain open to reconsideration and revision (Arnett, 2004).

Likewise, this instability leads to the third feature: *self-focus*. Emerging adults

generally have not yet committed to long-term careers, married, become parents, or established other enduring social roles, leading scholars to characterize this period as one of the most carefree stages of life. Consequently, they often have relatively few daily obligations and commitments to others while simultaneously learning to navigate life as self-sufficient adults (Arnett, 2004). This also extends to media use, as emerging adults, with diminishing parental influence, are largely free to choose both the content they engage with and when they consume it. Even though this freedom can be empowering, it can also become overwhelming (Coyne et al., 2016). For example, in a speculative design study conducted by Kopecka-Piech (2025), emerging adults highlighted digital disconnection as a challenging process. Similarly, a study by Tiidenberg et al. (2017), examining self-reflections on lived experiences of social media among participants aged 18 to 30, describes social media as being “concurrently celebrated and vilified” (p. 6) in participants’ narratives.

The fourth feature is *feeling in-between*, which reflects the sense that emerging adults are no longer adolescents but do not see themselves as fully adult either. Thus, they are gradually meeting the criteria associated with adulthood: accepting responsibility for themselves, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent (Arnett, 2004).

Finally, the fifth feature is the age of *possibilities and optimism*. Many different life paths remain open, leading emerging adults to generally view the future with excitement and anticipation (Arnett, 2004).

Notably, the characteristic features of emerging adulthood describe general trends within this life stage rather than fixed realities that apply to everyone between the ages of 18 and 29. This means that one person in their early twenties can already meet most of the criteria associated with the subsequent life stage of established adulthood (Mehta et al., 2020), whereas another person in their late twenties may still strongly identify with emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004).

The concept is also deeply embedded in cultural contexts. As reflected in Arnett’s (2004) reference to U.S. data on the median ages of marriage and parenthood discussed above, his work primarily draws on the U.S. context. In this regard, he explicitly notes that the transition from adolescence to adulthood can differ across the globe and encourages research on emerging adulthood in different national contexts. Arnett also stresses the

need to consider additional sociodemographic characteristics that potentially shape emerging adults' lives, including gender (Arnett, 2000, 2004; Arnett et al., 2014).

Considering the project's focus, emerging adults constitute a compelling sociodemographic group through which to examine experiences of digital disconnection, as they are often navigating both their media use and their ambivalent feelings toward it independently for the first time in their lives. In relation to the project's methodology, specifically the creative prompt exercise (see chapter 4.3.2), the characteristically optimistic outlook on the future and the assumption of multiple available options may also support participants in engaging in utopian thinking. The project's focus also aligns with calls to consider emerging adulthood in different national contexts, as well as to examine intersecting sociodemographics, with women as the focus here (Arnett, 2000, 2004; Arnett et al., 2014).

The core argument for adopting emerging adulthood as one of the project's focal points, however, lies in the opportunity it provides to direct the analytical lens toward women beyond caregiving roles. Its characteristic feature of heightened self-focus informed the selection of emerging adult women presumed to have relatively limited obligations to others. An alternative approach could certainly have been to focus on women who are unmarried and/or childfree. Yet this approach would have paradoxically centered marriage and childbirth once again, potentially even framing them as the default. Here, emerging adulthood allows for a more nuanced approach that does not define women solely according to whether they have children. Rather, it recognizes that, irrespective of such roles, all women undergo a transition from adolescence into adulthood, making this life stage universally relevant.

Within the research activities, the age range of 18 to 29 constitutes a key inclusion criterion for the qualitative study (see subsection 4.3.1). Moreover, the concept of emerging adulthood also informed the consideration of age groups in the quantitative study (see section 4.2). Further age groups were then defined following Mehta et al. (2020), who, building on the concept of emerging adulthood, proposed the following distinctions: *Established adulthood* is defined as ages 30 to 44 and understood as one of life's most demanding periods in terms of career, intimate relationships, and potential children. Following Lachman's (2004) work on midlife, *middle adulthood* refers to ages 45 to 64, a stage in which various demands coincide with the psychological and

physiological changes associated with aging. *Late adulthood* encompasses ages 65 and above and marks the final stage in the human life course (Mehta et al., 2020).

3.3 On Germany and Norway

This section provides insight into the national settings of Germany and Norway, in which the project's studies are situated. It begins with general information on their national settings, their commitments to digitalization, and their approaches to regulation in light of international trends, followed by an outline of women's status in their societies. The section concludes with a reflection on how these national contexts inform the overall project.

Norway, with a population of 5.6 million (Statistics Norway, 2026), is a small Scandinavian country, whereas Germany is a Central European country with 83.5 million inhabitants (Destatis, 2025a). Both countries are welfare states that promote and protect the economic and social well-being of their citizens (Halvorsen & Stjernø, 2008; Zacher, 2013). Regarding their national media systems, this includes the maintenance of publicly funded broadcasting systems designed to provide independent information via radio, television, and the internet (ARD, 2024; NRK Kommunikasjon, 2026).

In Germany and Norway alike, the internet is highly accessible and widely used: 100 percent of Norwegians aged 16 to 79 have used it within the past three months (Statistics Norway, 2025b), as have 95 percent of Germans aged 16 to 74 (Destatis, 2025b). As a result, digital disconnection due to limited access is less salient in both contexts. Additionally, both countries are committed to advancing digitalization and further developing their technological infrastructure, including bureaucratic processes. Norway established the *Ministry of Digitalisation and Public Governance* in January 2024 and published a report outlining its goal of becoming the world's most digitalized country by 2030 (DFD, n.d.). The report presents technological developments as positive while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of adhering to privacy regulations and acknowledging the potential risks of AI (DFD, 2024). Germany also established a dedicated ministry for digitalization, the *Federal Ministry for Digital Transformation and Government Modernisation*, in May 2025 (BMDS, n.d.-a). Its aims include expanding digital infrastructure, making German bureaucratic procedures available online, and

contributing to the development of AI products under the quality seal “Made in Germany” (BMDS, n.d.-b).

The ambitions of Germany and Norway to not only maintain their high level of digitalization but to become even more digital align with the broader global trends among nation states (Jasanoff, 2015; Jasanoff & Kim, 2009). At the same time, discussions around a “right to disconnect” gain traction, raising the question of whether individuals should have safeguarded opportunities for non-use (Hesselberth, 2018). Policymakers have begun to recognize and address the perceived disadvantages of hyperconnectivity, with some countries already taking tangible action. France set an early precedent by introducing a law which protects employees from being expected to remain available online outside official working hours (LOI N° 2016-1088 Du 8 Août 2016, 2016). Beyond labor rights, governments are currently focusing on preventing negative effects of smartphone and social media use among minors. Examples include Australia, which has banned social media use for those under 16 (Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024 No. 127, 2024), and Brazil, which has restricted the use of smartphones in schools (Lei N° 15.100, 2025).

Similar legal considerations exist in Germany and Norway. In February 2024, the Norwegian government published a recommendation to keep smartphones out of classrooms (GSSO, 2024), preceding the project’s qualitative data collection. The German governing party SPD released a position paper in February 2026, after the qualitative data collection had been completed, advocating a social media ban for children under the age of 14 (Pfeffer, 2026). Although the Norwegian recommendation is non-binding and the German position paper represents only an initial step toward potential legislation, each reflects an awareness of international regulatory trends while adopting a cautious approach. A striking feature of both initiatives is that they are directed exclusively toward minors. By contrast, the use of technology by adults remains largely unregulated and is safeguarded by commitments to freedom of expression (Art. 5 GG, 2025; § 100 Grunnloven, 2024). Still, Norwegian as well as German state bodies acknowledge that certain forms of online expression can contribute to online violence that fall outside the scope of protected speech. Both countries therefore recognize the need to balance freedom of expression with the protection of individuals, particularly members of vulnerable groups, including girls and women (BMFSFJ, 2022; UDI, 2021).

Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021) has expressed interest in legislative measures and in frameworks developed in international collaboration to address these challenges. Germany, for its part, has already enacted the *Network Enforcement Act*, which obliges platforms to remove illegal content (§ 3 NetzDG). Additionally, both Germany and Norway have existing legal provisions that can be applied to certain forms of technology-facilitated violence, such as the sending of unsolicited explicit images (e.g., § 184 StGB; § 298 Straffeloven).

Regarding women's status in society, both countries entered legal commitments to gender equality: Norway through *The Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway* (§ 98 Grunnloven, 2024) and Germany through its *Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany* (Art. 3(2) GG, 2025). Yet persistent issues such as intimate partner violence (GIWPS & PRIO, 2025) and pension gaps (OECD, 2025) continue to disproportionately affect women in either country. To address such issues at an institutional level, Norway maintains a *Ministry of Culture and Equality* (n.d.) and Germany has established a *Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth* (n.d.).

Despite sharing similar legal commitments to gender equality, the two countries differ in their historical trajectories and present-day perspectives. In Norway, the struggle for women's rights led to the founding of the *Norwegian Association for Women's Rights* in 1884. Through its political influence, the organization helped position Norway as an early leader of state feminism (Hernes, 1987) and continues to influence political debates today (NKF, n.d.). Germany experienced a similar historical development, with women receiving suffrage in the early twentieth century, an uptick in feminist movements in the 1970s, and contemporary campaigning (Drüeke & Zobl, 2016; Gerhard, 2020). Nevertheless, Germany does not exhibit as strong a feminist identity as Norway. Particularly in recent years, women's rights activism in Germany has often encountered severe pushback and public ridicule, driven by right-wing political actors (Fangen & Lichtenberg, 2021; Hajek & Dombrowski, 2022). Their positions can be understood as either antifeminist beliefs, characterized by an outright rejection of gender equality (Bridges, 2021), or postfeminist beliefs, which assume that gender equality has already been achieved and that further advocacy would go too far (Gill, 2007). In a global context, however, both countries continue to demonstrate comparatively high levels of gender equality. Norway's stronger historical and sustained commitment to addressing gender

inequality is reflected in international rankings. For example, in the *Global Gender Gap Report 2025* Norway ranks third, whereas Germany ranks ninth (World Economic Forum, 2025). Similarly, in the *Women, Peace, and Security Index*, Norway again ranks third, whereas Germany ranks twenty-first (GIWPS & PRIO, 2025).

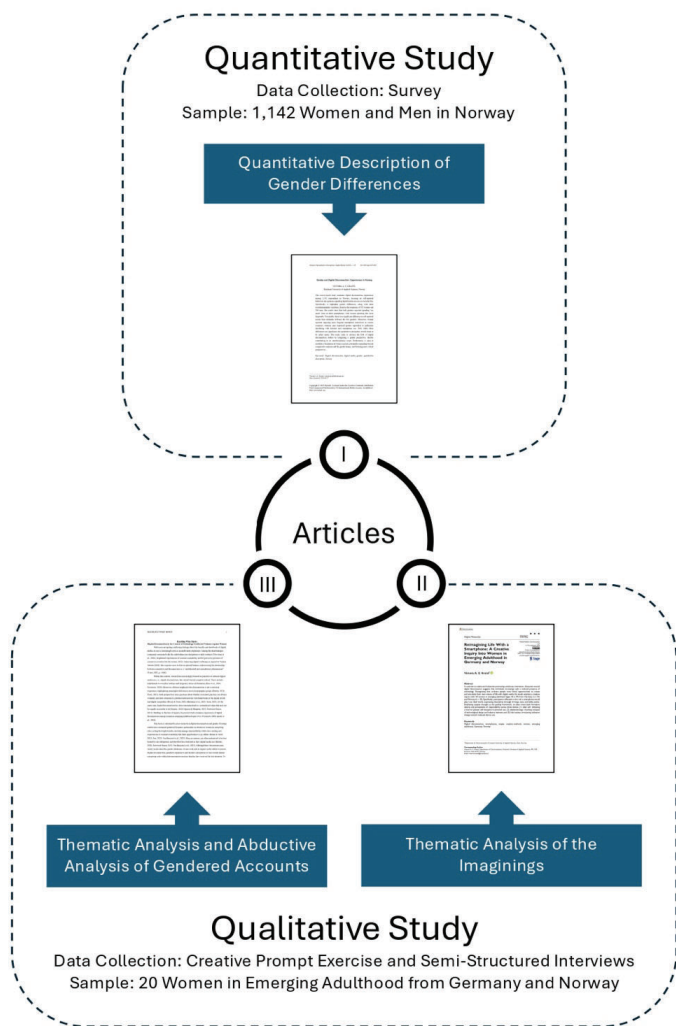
In terms of formalized caregiving roles, the average age of mothers at first birth in 2024 was 30.4 in both Germany and Norway (Destatis, 2024; Statistics Norway, 2025a). Women's average age at first marriage was 35.2 in Norway (Statistics Norway, 2025c) and 32.9 in Germany (Destatis, 2025c). These figures resonate with Arnett's (2004) observation that marriage and childbirth increasingly occur later in life, reinforcing a prolonged transition period between adolescence and established adulthood that typically does not involve formalized caregiving obligations.

Within the project, Germany and Norway constitute similar but distinct national contexts in which young women's experiences of digital disconnection are embedded. As such, the project does not merely juxtapose Norway as a smaller country with Germany as a larger one. Rather, it focuses on two national contexts that share overarching trends but differ in their digitalization ambitions, the pace of contemporary debates, and the status of gender equality, resulting in distinct cultural settings.

4 Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology in detail. It begins with an introduction to the mixed-methods design and paradigmatic positioning underpinning the overall project. The following section outlines the research design, with dedicated subsections for its two main components: the quantitative study and the qualitative study. Figure 2 provides an overview of the research design. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations.

Figure 2
Overview of the Research Design



4.1 Mixed-Methods Design and Paradigmatic Positioning

The project is grounded in an original methodological constellation that brings together quantitative and qualitative forms of inquiry. This combination is commonly described as a mixed-methods approach and is argued to foster a deeper understanding of social phenomena through the integration of multiple forms of data (Johnson et al., 2007).

A mixed-methods approach is well-suited considering the project's aim of illuminating young women's lives, particularly its intention to recognize and engage with the complexity and heterogeneity of people's experiences. In this regard, the project aligns with Greene's (2002) conception of mixed methods as a way of thinking that "inherently engages in the challenges of human diversity and does so with profound respect for human difference" (p. 24). Greene further argues that each way of knowing is inherently partial, and that insight emerges through the complementarity of different forms of knowledge. This perspective provides a useful framework for studying complex social contexts through multiple methods (Greene, 2002). In this way, the project seeks to make sense of diverse experiences shaped by a range of social, cultural, and personal conditions (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Haraway, 1988; Weiss, 2021), rejecting the notion of a "universal young woman." Within this approach, mixed methods provide a useful way of engaging with the situated and diverse nature of women's experiences through different, yet complementary, forms of inquiry.

However, employing a mixed-methods research design also introduces challenges. As Crotty (1998/2015) lays out in his seminal work, *The Foundations of Social Research*, quantitative and qualitative methodologies are associated with different ontological assumptions about the nature of reality and epistemological assumptions about how knowledge of that reality is produced. Quantitative research is generally linked to positivist stances, which assume the existence of an objective truth, or to more moderate post-positivist positions, which hold that truth can be approached, though never with complete certainty. Qualitative research, by contrast, is often associated with constructionist epistemologies and interpretivist approaches, which emphasize that meaning is socially constructed (Crotty, 1998/2015). These differences have contributed to the so-called "science wars," in which researchers align themselves with one school of thought or the other (Hacking, 1999). Mixed-methods researchers, in turn, challenge this divide by emphasizing the value of combining different ontological and epistemological

perspectives. Such an approach allows not only for their pragmatic coexistence (Cheek & Øby, 2023; Greene, 2015; Johnson et al., 2007), but also for the possibility of mutual enrichment (Greene, 2002). This position also underlies Ross et al.'s (2024) aforementioned pluralistic continuum of digital disconnection scholarship (see section 2.2). They emphasize that the continuum should not be interpreted as a call for researchers to position themselves rigidly along ontological, epistemological, and methodological dimensions. Instead, they advocate avoiding disciplinary silos and fostering collaboration across paradigms within digital disconnection studies (Ross et al., 2024).

While mixed methods often prioritize complementarity between paradigms rather than hierarchy, competition, or contradiction, they do not require paradigms to be fully integrated on equal footing either. In practice, Johnson et al. (2007) argue, one orientation often remains dominant. For this project, that dominant orientation is situated within a social constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology. This paradigmatic stance is particularly relevant given the project's focus on women, which is grounded in a social constructivist understanding of gender (Butler, 1990; de Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Hacking, 1999; Harrison, 2006; West & Zimmerman, 1987), as detailed in section 3.1. Moreover, the project centers on women's experiences in their everyday lives. As mentioned in section 2.3.1, the framework of everyday life draws closely on Schutz and Luckmann's (1973) sociological phenomenological theory of the lifeworld, which, although experienced as taken for granted, is nonetheless socially constituted. The emphasis on experience also resonates with phenomenological approaches in a wider sense. Here, Weiss argues that "[p]henomenology seeks to provide comprehensive descriptions of our lived experiences without relying on taken-for-granted presuppositions" (Weiss, 2021, p. 63). She further emphasizes that feminist phenomenology recognizes that neither descriptions nor experiences are gender-neutral or race-neutral (Weiss, 2021).

Through the inclusion of quantitative data, the project also recognizes that aspects of lived experience related to digital disconnection can be meaningfully captured through surveys. The project therefore incorporates a moderate post-positivist stance, acknowledging the fallibility and provisional nature of knowledge claims while still recognizing observable patterns within a population (Crotty, 1998/2015; Johnson et al.,

2007). This perspective is especially useful when examining the societal effects of social constructs such as gender and ethnicity (Freelon et al., 2023). Within this study, such patterns are interpreted as indications of how lived experience may vary across sociodemographic variables, in this instance gender, rather than as fixed or objective truths. Beyond informing Article I, the project also draws on population-wide quantitative data in additional ways. A prominent example is the project focus subsection 3.3, “On Germany and Norway,” which presents nationwide data to contextualize the project's findings. Likewise, the findings of Article III, grounded in qualitative analysis, are discussed alongside additional sources describing global trends related to TF VAW (see Appendix B).

4.2 The Quantitative Study

The first activity in the project's research design involved a quantitative description of survey data, resulting in Article I. The survey was administered by the market research company *Kantar TNS* between 13 and 21 February 2023 as part of Digitox, the parent project of this PhD project (see section 1.1).

The survey included responses from 1,142 Norwegians, including 552 women and 590 men. Table 2 details their gender, age, and education. Although survey weights were available to enhance representativeness with respect to the Norwegian population, the analyses reported in Article I were conducted using unweighted data. Applying the weights resulted in inconsistencies across statistical calculations, as the sample size (N) was recalculated between analyses, reducing analytical clarity. Consequently, the sample slightly overrepresents men, older participants, and individuals with higher levels of education but still broadly reflects key demographic characteristics of the Norwegian population.

Table 2*Characteristics of the Quantitative Study Sample*

	Percent	M	SD	n	N
Gender					1,142
Women	48.3			552	
Men	51.7			590	
Age		55	16.6		1,142
Emerging adulthood (18–29 years)	9.1			104	
Established adulthood (30–44)	21.1			241	
Middle adulthood (45–64)	35.8			409	
Late adulthood (≥65 years)	34.0			388	
Education					1,142
Primary school	4.2			48	
Secondary education	23.5			268	
Vocational school	8.7			99	
University education	63.6			727	

The survey included a range of questions concerning practices, motivations, contexts, and attitudes related to digital disconnection, reflecting the diverse research interests of the Digitox project. This breadth also contributed to content validity by ensuring that digital disconnection was approached from several different angles. However, given that the survey was conducted prior to the start of this PhD project, the questions were neither directly informed by nor primarily focused on gender. Participants nevertheless reported their gender identity as part of a control variable, indicating whether they identified as “kvinne” (Eng. woman) or “mann” (Eng. man). The survey also allowed participants to identify beyond the gender binary; however, none of the participants did so.

Regarding question format, the survey consisted of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items concerning self-reported behaviours and opinions. Reliability was strengthened through the professional and standardized administration of the survey, as all participants were presented with the same set of questions and response options. Given that the data rely on self-reports, they may be subject to recall errors or other biases and should therefore be understood as participants’ own accounts.

The quantitative description served as an organically evolved starting point for this project. At the outset of the PhD project, access was granted to the Digitox project’s

resources, including the complete dataset of 1,142 survey responses. While the main focus of the project concerns young women, an initial aim was to gain an in-depth overview of matters surrounding gender and digital disconnection, for which this dataset provided a valuable opportunity. Applying a comparative analysis, the dataset was examined for differences between participating women and men, with attention to divergent response patterns. Using the software *SPSS*, this examination led to an extensive analysis involving mean scores, frequency distributions, as well as binary logistic and multiple regression analyses.

This approach to examining numerical data is referred to as *quantitative description*. Scholars argue that it is through this form of analysis that foundational trends, which are often overlooked amid the broader focus of quantitative research on causal analysis and complex statistical modeling, become visible (Freelon et al., 2023; Munger et al., 2021). This is especially relevant for demographic patterns, including gender, where it is often this “mere description” that provides greater oversight (Freelon et al., 2023). Hence, quantitative description engages with numerical data by first asking *what* before moving on to the causal inquiry of *why* (Munger et al., 2021).

For this project, this approach can be understood as taking stock of gender differences in self-reported behaviors and opinions regarding digital disconnection in everyday life. This also explains the reversal of the more established mixed-methods research sequence, in which qualitative data typically precede quantitative data in order to explain causal relationships (Cheek & Øby, 2023). Given that gender is an understudied topic within a relatively young field of research, the project did not require fully developed explanations in advance to make sense of the data, such as hypotheses to be tested through a deductive approach. Instead, insights were inductively generated from the numerical dataset at an early stage of the project. Obtaining such an in-depth overview of the forms that gender differences take within the Norwegian context thus provided a point of departure for the qualitative study, as well as foundational knowledge for the project as a whole.

4.3 The Qualitative Study

Building on the quantitative study and its comparative approach between women and men, the project next sought to gain more in-depth qualitative insights by focusing specifically on women in emerging adulthood in Germany and Norway. In this regard, the second part of the research design consisted of a qualitative data collection that combined a creative prompt exercise with semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis focusing on the creative material resulted in Article II and a later thematic analysis combined with an abductive approach, drawing more closely on the interview data, resulted in Article III. This section outlines the sampling, data collection, and analytical processes in the following subsections.

4.3.1 Sampling

The sampling strategy was guided by three inclusion criteria: participants had to (I) self-identify as women, (II) be between 18 and 29 years old, and (III) live in either Norway or Germany. These criteria are directly grounded in the project focus outlined in chapter 3. By centering participants who self-identify as women, the sampling strategy aligns with the project's understanding of gender as a social construct. Similarly, restricting the sample to individuals aged 18 to 29 draws on emerging adulthood as an analytical framework for understanding age-related experiences. Including participants from Germany extended the quantitative study beyond the Norwegian context by incorporating a national setting that was similar in many respects, yet distinct and more populous. The aim was not to conduct a systematic comparison between the two countries, but to illuminate young women's experiences within an additional national context.

The sampling followed a purposive and network-based recruitment strategy. Purposive sampling was conducted through settings such as universities and a nursing school, acknowledging that emerging adults are often engaged in education (Arnett, 2004; Arnett et al., 2014). Network-based sampling involved the circulation of information through various personal and academic contacts. Access to the two national contexts was relatively straightforward, as the PhD project is affiliated with a Norwegian institution and the researcher is German. A limitation of the recruitment strategy is that both approaches tended to reach individuals with higher levels of education.

The final sample consisted of 20 participants, with 10 young women from each national context. Corresponding to Braun and Clarke's (2022) emphasis on data richness

rather than predetermined sample sizes or saturation, the resulting dataset was considered sufficiently rich to support the subsequent analyses. The balanced distribution also ensured that both national contexts were equally represented in the dataset. Table 3 details the participants’ age, country of residence, and occupation.

Table 3

<i>Characteristics of the Qualitative Study Sample</i>				
Pseudonym	Age	Country	Occupation	
Anneliese	27	Germany	Paramedic	
Ares	26	Norway	Nursery aid, BA student	
Elin	25	Norway	BA student, healthcare assistant	
Emily	28	Norway	PhD student	
Emma	29	Norway	MA student	
Freyja	27	Norway	Museum receptionist	
Friederike	22	Germany	BA student	
Hind	26	Norway	Marketing manager, BA student	
Kine	23	Norway	Content creator	
Laura	29	Germany	Educational coordinator	
Lilly	19	Germany	Nursing trainee	
Liv	22	Norway	BA student, waitress	
Luka	27	Germany	Research assistant, PhD student	
Mia	24	Germany	Massage therapist	
Michelle	20	Germany	Nursing trainee	
Nora	29	Germany	AI advocate, PhD student	
Romy	27	Germany	Research assistant, PhD student	
Sara	29	Norway	Advisor	
Sydney	20	Germany	Nursing trainee	
Vilde	29	Norway	Advisor, MA student	

In addition, it is worth noting that the participants reflected many characteristics commonly associated with emerging adulthood, as detailed in section 3.2. None occupied formal caregiving roles: none had children, only one participant was married, and another was divorced. This profile also aligns with demographic trends regarding marriage and childbirth among women under the age of 30 in Germany and Norway, as discussed in section 3.3 (Destatis, 2024, 2025c; Statistics Norway, 2025a, 2025c).

4.3.2 Data Collection

Following a short eligibility and background survey, which was not included in the analysis, the qualitative data collection consisted of two parts: first, a creative prompt exercise and, second, semi-structured interviews. Inspired by the capacity of utopian thought to make the conditions of everyday life visible through imagined alternatives (see subsection 2.3.2), the creative prompt exercise was specifically developed within this project to explore women's ideal relationships with smartphones and the responsibilities associated with them. To that end, the study draws on prior research that similarly sought to access people's inner worlds in relation to technology. Markham (2021), for example, conducted a performance ethnography using speculative interventions in museums to encourage visitors to critically reflect on technology. One of her key findings, however, was that many participants struggled to imagine viable alternatives. Similarly, in the aforementioned speculative design study by Kopecka-Piech (2025), participating emerging adults struggled to move beyond contemporary ideas when asked to conceive of something novel. By contrast, Timár's (2023) study, which invited participants to write either a love letter or a breakup letter to technology, enabled them to articulate deep emotional and often ambivalent feelings toward it. Informed by these methodological approaches, this project invited participants to engage with artistic forms of expression, such as visual art and creative writing, which have been argued to foster imagination (Cole & Knowles, 2008; McNiff, 2011). Specifically, the data collection involved a creative prompt exercise in which each participant received a sheet of paper presenting the following prompt:

Imagine living in an ideal world.
What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?
Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!

Participants responded using a range of provided materials, including pencils, sharpeners, erasers, pens, four different markers, and ten multicolored felt tip pens. Fifteen participants completed the exercise within the allocated 15 minutes, two finished slightly earlier, and three required a few additional minutes, having been informed in advance that they could take more or less time if needed. Additional in-person

instructions emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and encouraged participants to have fun.

The prompt exercise was refined through five pretest versions before a sixth version was adopted for the data collection. Besides indicating that the task would take about 15 minutes to complete, a key insight from the pretests was that the phrasing required a clear breakdown of the exercise: first, establishing the setting of the ideal world; second, posing the question of what role the smartphone would play; and finally, encouraging participants to express this creatively. The pretests also explored how potential participants responded to different phrasing, whether framed around digital media more broadly or around the smartphone more specifically. Here, framing the exercise around the smartphone proved more tangible, while the interview stage later allowed the conversation to expand to participants' wider media repertoires. This approach also aligns with research on digital disconnection that focuses on technology and digital media in the broader sense yet repeatedly highlights the central role of the smartphone (e.g., Fast & Syvertsen, 2024; Ytre-Arne et al., 2020). It also resonates with findings from the quantitative study, in which women reported spending too much time on smartphones rather than on other devices (see chapter 5.1). Apart from these specifications, the prompt was deliberately phrased to leave space for women to determine what mattered to them, including whether to foreground their gender identities. This decision is informed by Benjamin's (2024) advocacy for the demonopolization of imaginative spaces, which is interpreted in this project as a call not to confine imagination to sociodemographic lines.

The creative prompt exercise resulted in four drawings, six written texts, and ten combinations thereof. Once the exercise was completed, qualitative interviews were intentionally incorporated as a complementary method, serving two purposes. First, they enabled a more in-depth exploration of the women's imaginings and added context to the prompt outcomes. Second, they provided insights into the women's individual everyday experiences of digital disconnection that extended beyond the creative prompt exercise itself. Even though interviews rely on participants' ability to articulate their experiences, constituting a limitation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), they nonetheless facilitate access to aspects of experience that cannot readily be observed (Patton, 2015). This is particularly

valuable in the context of digital disconnection, which is often characterized by non-action and relative invisibility (Kaun, 2021; Ross et al., 2024).

Together, these two purposes structured the design of the seven thematic blocks included in the interview guide (see Appendix E). The first block focused on the prompt exercise, asking participants to describe their drawings and/or read their texts aloud, followed by reflections on the thoughts and ideas that informed them. Topic blocks two to six explored how women experience digital disconnection in their everyday lives. Departing from the survey instrument used in Article I, these questions aimed to provide a more in-depth understanding of both positive and negative experiences with smartphones, as well as more specific aspects of digital disconnection. Only after participants had been given the opportunity to raise issues of their own choosing did the interview guide introduce questions concerning the potential role of gender, alongside related aspects of self-perception and relationships. This decision was guided by the aforementioned argument that women's accounts should not be reduced to their gender. It was also informed by the findings of Article I, which suggested that gender plays a meaningful role in experiences of digital disconnection, while not necessarily being the most salient aspect of participants' accounts. The final, seventh topic block integrated speculative questions about future personal smartphone use and responsibility for smartphone use, again resonating with the overall focus of the prompt exercise and allowing the interview to come full circle. The interviews lasted between 44 and 67 minutes. Recordings were transcribed using *Autotekst*, a program provided by the University of Oslo, and each transcript was subsequently cross-checked and anonymized by the researcher. Throughout the data collection process, interview protocols were also maintained to document the interview setting, atmosphere, and personal reflections.

The data collection was further shaped by language considerations. Communication with Norwegian participants took place in English, with all participants confirming beforehand that they were comfortable to do so. Interviews with German participants were conducted in German, which also provided a useful point of reference for assuring that the English-language interviews achieved a comparable level of depth.

4.3.3 Data Analysis

After completion of the data collection, the qualitative dataset consisted of 20 prompt outcomes, comprised of drawings, bullet points, and written texts, alongside the interview transcripts. These different forms of data were understood as distinct semiotic modes, together constituting a multimodal dataset (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). An initial thematic analysis focusing on imaginative aspects formed the basis of Article II, while a subsequent analysis centering on gendered aspects led to the adoption of an additional abductive approach for Article III.

To develop the analysis of women's imaginings presented in Article II, the prompt outcomes and interview transcripts underwent a *thematic analysis* by the researcher. Following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase framework, the researcher inductively identified patterns of shared meaning across the qualitative data through (1) familiarization with the dataset, (2) coding, (3) generating initial themes, (4) developing and reviewing themes, (5) refining, defining and naming themes, and (6) writing up. The use of the software *MAXQDA* facilitated the consistent application of codes across all forms of data, including drawings, written texts, bullet points, and transcripts.

Although the drawings and written materials could also have lent themselves to more art-focused interpretations, this study deliberately centers on the process through which participants developed their thoughts. This approach aligns closely with the core idea of *critical making* (Ratto & Hockema, 2009; Ratto & Ree, 2012). Rather than treating the artefact as the primary outcome, the central focus lies on the prompt exercise as a channel for "conceptual exploration, reflection, and criticism" (Ratto & Ree, 2012). Here, the interview material, including participants' in-depth reflections on both their prompt outcomes and the thought processes behind them, provided further, invaluable context.

Focusing on gendered aspects within the dataset for Article III, the analysis built on the previously conducted familiarization process and the development of initial codes. However, during the searching for themes, participants' accounts of gendered experiences were interpreted as fragmented and difficult to consolidate. As a result, the phases of searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining themes were revisited several times.

Ultimately, digital disconnection as a means of protection was identified as a central theme. This prompted an additional review of relevant literature and inspired the

integration of an abductive approach. *Abduction* refers to a secondary qualitative analytical process in which an inductive approach is complemented by a deductive one, allowing the analysis to move iteratively between data and theory (Vila-Henninger et al., 2024). For Article III, this led to the integration of UN Women's (2023) definition of TF VAW (see section 3.1) as a conceptual anchor, as well as to the addition of another research question. The data were subsequently analyzed for accounts that both (a) fell within the definition of TF VAW and (b) elicited some form of disconnective behavior, resulting in the identification of four recurring instances.

Notably, conventional quantitative quality criteria (i.e., representativeness, validity, and reliability) cannot readily be applied to qualitative research, as such inquiry is guided by a different methodological logic and does not seek to meet these criteria in the same way (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Yardley, 2000). Likewise, alternative quality criteria developed for qualitative research are not universally applicable across all such approaches. Given that the qualitative study drew on Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach to determining sample size and involved two thematic analyses guided by their approach, it also adopted their emphasis on reflexivity as a key marker of quality. In line with their call to interrogate their "positions, values, choices and practices within the research process" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 15), reflexivity was embedded throughout the study through the aforementioned interview protocols, as well as through ongoing processes of review and analytical refinement. Further attention to reflexivity is provided through a personal reflection statement included in the following section on ethical considerations (see subsection 4.4.3).

4.4 Ethical Considerations

This section outlines the project's formal ethical considerations, an AI statement on the responsible and transparent use of assistive AI tools, and a personal reflection statement written from a first-person perspective.

4.4.1 Formal Ethical Considerations

The project adheres to the ethical guidelines of the *Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities* (NESH), which are aligned with the European Union's *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR). Especially when conducting research involving participants, as in this project, NESH requires researchers to “respect their human dignity and safeguard their personal integrity, safety, and well-being” (NESH, 2022).

Regarding the quantitative study, the Digitox project ensured the ethical handling of data collection, including informed consent and anonymization procedures. For the qualitative study, formal ethical approval was granted by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT) under reference number 378655 following a review of the consent form (Appendix D) and study materials (Appendix E).

The participants' data were and continue to be handled with the utmost care, stored securely until December 2030, with access restricted to the researcher. Research data and personal information are stored separately. Participants had the right to access, correct, and delete the research data as long as it remained identifiable, i.e., before full anonymization. It was ensured that the outcomes of the creative prompt exercise did not contain any identifiable information. The interviews were transcribed and anonymized, and the recordings were deleted immediately afterward. To enhance transparency and participant involvement, participants were informed about the use of pseudonyms and invited to choose their own. This decision was informed by Pretorius and Patel (2025), who found this practice to promote epistemic justice by capturing participants' identities more authentically, as well as fostering trust and collaboration throughout the research process. Seventeen participants chose their own pseudonyms, and three participants agreed to suggestions.

The anticipated risk was minimal, as no sensitive data, such as political or religious views or health information, were intentionally collected. Still, given the project's focus on gender, it inevitably engaged with vulnerable aspects of participants' identities.

This was accounted for through the semi-structured interview approach, ensuring that questions on gendered experiences were covered while allowing participants to determine the depth to which they wished to engage with the topic. Similarly, in line with contemporary feminist theory, this project embraces intersectionality, acknowledging that individuals' experiences are shaped by a multitude of characteristics beyond gender, such as ethnicity, disability, and social class (Crenshaw, 1989; Harvey, 2019). Here, too, participants' comfort and personal boundaries were prioritized. They were given space to introduce intersecting socio-demographic dimensions where they felt these were relevant, and their choice not to do so was equally respected. This was crucial in ensuring that participants did not feel recruited solely on the basis of a particular characteristic distinguishing them from others, thereby avoiding dynamics of tokenism or othering. As a result, several participants chose to discuss topics such as sexual orientation or health status when these were meaningful to their lived experiences. However, other socio-demographic dimensions often foregrounded in intersectional research, such as race or social class, played a less prominent role.

4.4.2 AI Statement

At the time of writing this thesis, the assistive use of AI tools has become widely accepted in the academic sphere, but there is no single standard for disclosure. The academic publishing house SAGE Publications (n.d.), for instance, does not mandate disclosure, whereas Taylor & Francis requires authors to provide a statement (Informa plc, n.d.). There are also currently no clear guidelines at Kristiania University of Applied Sciences for doctoral research.

In the interest of ensuring the highest possible level of transparency, it is hereby disclosed that this project made assistive use of AI tools. Specifically, applications such as GPT 5.5 and DeepL were used to support the language, grammar, and structure of the writing. These tools also aided in the translation of the English abstract into the Norwegian *sammendrag*. Full intellectual responsibility for the content, and therefore full authorship of the project, remains solely with the author.

4.4.3 Personal Reflection Statement

As a woman from Germany who, for most of the research process, was in the life stage of emerging adulthood, I was effectively researching my own sociodemographic group. My awareness of the research gap concerning women beyond formalized caregiving roles is inextricably linked my recognition of the absence of experiences resembling my own in research on digital disconnection. Feminist scholarship, in particular, acknowledges that such personal observations can serve as a meaningful starting point for rigorous research (Harvey, 2019). At the same time, I made a deliberate effort to ensure that the project remained focused on people like me rather than on my own experiences and therefore did not adopt autoethnographic approaches or similar methods. In this regard, I firmly embraced the role of the researcher: curious about what participants had to say and committed to listening attentively.

Nonetheless, I am aware that this does not place me outside the research process, and I continuously reflected on my own assumptions, influences, and positionality throughout the study. For instance, I was initially highly focused on identifying ways in which women may be disadvantaged, but I have since developed a more open approach to participants' experiences and remain receptive to accounts I may not have anticipated. I also reflected critically on my interviewing practices by consciously monitoring my interview style and working to strengthen my ability to tolerate silence so as not to interrupt participants' narratives.

Moreover, I realized that sharing the same demographic background as my participants likely helped them feel comfortable opening up to me and may have reduced social desirability bias. The participating women were candid about various experiences, from describing themselves as too lazy to engage in digital disconnection to recounting instances of sexual harassment. However, being perceived as "just like them" also meant that participants occasionally struggled to view me as a researcher and to regard my PhD data collection as a serious undertaking. This manifested in behaviours such as interrupting me while I explained the interview setup or wanting to take a seat at the far end of the meeting table, not realizing that the prepared materials were indeed intended for them. In these instances, assigning them the prompt task and leaving the room for 15 minutes helped establish a more professional dynamic, positioning me in the role of the researcher and them as participants.

Throughout my PhD work, I found that colleagues in other fields, as well as people in my everyday life, often assumed that my research interests made me a strong advocate of digital detox, or even a guru. However, I do not have a personal stake in how women, or people more generally, choose to use or not use digital media. Rather than seeking to identify ideal ways of engaging with digital media, my interest lies in fostering deeper reflection on contemporary digital life, including both its opportunities and its challenges. More specifically, I am interested in how people reflect on their own digital media consumption, how they shape practices of digital disconnection, and how these experiences manifest in the lives of young women.

5 Articles

This chapter presents the project’s three articles and their respective findings, thus functioning as the equivalent of a findings chapter. Table 4 provides an overview of the articles and their publication status.

Table 4

Overview of the Articles and Publication Status		
No.	Title	Status
I	Gender and Digital Disconnection: Experiences in Norway	Published in <i>Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media</i>
II	Reimagining Life with a Smartphone: A Creative Inquiry into Women in Emerging Adulthood in Germany and Norway	Published in <i>Mobile Media & Communication</i>
III	Handling What Hurts: Digital Disconnection in the Context of Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women	Under review

Each article stands as an independent publication and serves a distinct purpose within the overall project: Article I takes stock of the research topic, clarifying the dimensions of gender differences regarding digital disconnection experiences in Norway. Article II focuses on women in emerging adulthood and creates space to explore their imaginings from a broader perspective. Article III, in turn, reintroduces a gender focus, identifying how TF VAW shapes young women’s digital disconnection.

5.1 Article I

The first article is titled “Gender and Digital Disconnection: Experiences in Norway.” It draws on the quantitative survey data, examining experiences of digital disconnection among 1,142 participants in Norway, comprising 552 women and 590 men. Building on and seeking to extend previous scholarship on gender in digital disconnection studies, the article was guided by the following research question:

How do men and women experience digital disconnection differently within the context of Norway?

The article's findings reveal small but significant gender differences across the Norwegian sample. Both women and men reported spending "too much" time on their smartphones, although women and younger participants did so more frequently. However, whereas younger participants went on to self-report higher screen time estimates, no significant gender differences emerged. This suggests that women do not necessarily spend more time on their devices but may instead be more critical of their respective usage patterns.

Significant differences again emerged, with women being more likely to report frequent smartphone restrictions in social contexts, including around family and friends, and in leisure contexts such as nature and holidays. Potential explanations for these differences could lie in normative expectations toward women to be more attentive to others, resonating with previous literature on women being subjected to expectations of attentiveness in caregiving tasks both online and offline (Bozan & Treré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023). Men, in contrast, are understood to be more independent in their media use, which may lead them to establish fewer restrictions (Beattie, 2020; Portwood-Stacer, 2012). This would also be in line with men expressing greater resistance to authority interference of personal internet and smartphone use in the survey. Yet importantly, both men as well as women viewed internet and smartphone use as an individual responsibility to a similar extent. Moreover, even though the article identifies several significant gender differences, the quantitative description reveals these differences to be relatively small. In sum, the findings soften the polarized portrayal of women and men in digital disconnection studies.

The article effectively lays the groundwork for the project by establishing an overview of gendered experiences of digital disconnection. The findings highlight gender differences in self-reported behaviors and opinions regarding digital media non-use in everyday life in Norway, underscoring the relevance of gender as a variable in digital disconnection research. In this regard, the quantitative analysis offers a nuanced perspective on the magnitude of these differences.

With the aim of integrating a gender perspective into digital disconnection studies, Article I examined women and men across the life stages of emerging, established, middle, and late adulthood. The two subsequent articles narrow this focus by concentrating specifically on women in emerging adulthood, thereby aligning more

closely with the project's original research interest in young women. Conversely, whereas Article I focuses exclusively on Norway, the two subsequent articles broaden the national scope by incorporating Germany as an additional national context. As outlined in sections 3.3 and 4.3.1, this expansion was motivated by the aim of extending the empirical material beyond a single national setting. The decision was also informed by the findings of Article I, which appeared to resonate strongly with the Norwegian context. In particular, the results indicated a distinct appreciation of the outdoors and a desire to enjoy it undisturbed by technology, aligning with Norway's cultural appreciation for spending time in nature (Syvertsen, 2022b). This suggested that experiences of digital disconnection may be closely embedded within national contexts and reinforced the value of including a second national perspective within the project.

5.2 Article II

The second article, titled *Reimagining Life with a Smartphone: A Creative Inquiry Into Women in Emerging Adulthood in Germany and Norway*, focuses on the 20 women in emerging adulthood from Germany and Norway who participated in the qualitative study. The article draws on conceptions of compulsory connectivity (Díaz Andrade & Techatassanasoontorn, 2021; Kuntsman & Miyake, 2022), previous contributions on women and digital disconnection (Beattie, 2020; Bozan & Tréré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023), the conceptual life stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004, 2010; Arnett et al., 2014), and scholarship at the intersection of mobile media studies and media resistance (Vanden Abeele & Syvertsen, 2025). Furthermore, the article draws on the creative prompt exercise and subsequent qualitative interviews, employing utopian thought as a framework that uses conceptions of ideality as a contrastive lens through which to examine existing circumstances (Levitas, 2013; Wells, 1906). As part of this process, participants were invited to imagine the role of their smartphones in an ideal world. The study was guided by the following two research questions:

How do women in emerging adulthood in Germany and Norway imagine an ideal relationship with their smartphones?

Who do women in emerging adulthood perceive as being responsible for making their imaginings a reality?

Through thematic analysis, three key themes elucidating the women's ideal relationship with their smartphones were developed: (1) ideal self, encapsulating the desire to reduce individual smartphone use through greater self-discipline; (2) ideal technology, involving reconsiderations of mobile media design to help users limit their use while preserving practical functions; and (3) ideal society, in which participants envisioned collective change toward reduced device use. Together, these three themes challenge contemporary conditions of hyperconnectivity by highlighting the women's desire to achieve and maintain balanced smartphone use in their everyday lives, in line with the Vanden Abeele's (2021) concept of digital well-being. Although issues identified in previous research on digital disconnection and women, such as demanding connectivity expectations imposed by others, did surface, participants generally referred to their gender only implicitly.

Within these three themes, the women also revealed whom they consider responsible for turning their ideal imaginings into reality. Many identified themselves and their own self-discipline as the starting point, resonating with the findings of Article I, which highlight how women evaluated their own smartphone consumption as "too much." This aligns with an understanding of digital disconnection as a manifestation of responsabilization, in which individuals are expected to manage issues related to overconnection that fundamentally persist at a broader, systemic level (Syvertsen, 2020). Still, through the exercise and the follow-up questions, the women gradually came to recognize that the perceived problem does not lie solely in their own behavior and that the countermeasures available to them are limited. In this context, they criticized the technology industry for profiting from extensive use, noting how mobile media design is often modified to keep users engaged. However, they could not imagine companies acting against their own interests and rejected the idea of state bodies intervening. In doing so, the women identified a dilemma: individuals are unable to combat overconnection on their own, while also perceiving state bodies and industries as ill-suited to resolve the issue. Drawing on utopian thinking, the women proposed a potential solution to this dilemma by envisioning leaderless, collective change, with cultures and societies instinctively embracing a more moderate approach to smartphone and technology use overall.

In the context of the project, this study demonstrates how young women experience digital disconnection in terms of ideality and responsibility. With regard to the former, the results highlight what the women themselves deem significant. Consequently, although the women's accounts remain situated within the context of their gender and age, sociodemographic characteristics were neither imposed on their imaginings nor overstated in the analysis. Through this approach, the article was able to show that the women themselves did not prioritize their gender identity in their ideal imaginings, making this not a flaw but one of the study's findings. Likewise, while the study was conducted within the distinct national contexts of Germany and Norway, only minor differences were identified. The most pronounced difference concerned Norway's infrastructure being described as more digitalized than Germany's, aligning with the contextual information presented in section 3.3. In this sense, Norwegian participants appeared to start from a position of greater everyday connectivity than the German participants. Still, all three themes were developed across both the German and Norwegian accounts alike.

5.3 Article III

The third article, titled "Handling What Hurts: Digital Disconnection in the Context of Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women," is based on interview material collected from the qualitative sample of 20 women in emerging adulthood from Germany and Norway. It set out with the broad research question:

How do women in emerging adulthood experience digital disconnection in the context of their gender?

Beginning with a thematic analysis, accounts of gendered experiences related to digital disconnection appeared rather fragmented. Two participants suggested that the anticipation of future caregiving responsibilities might facilitate digital disconnection, a finding that contrasts with previous research, which has primarily framed such responsibilities as an additional burden (Beattie, 2020; Bozan & Treré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023). Most participants, however, did not express a clear position on the relationship between gender and digital disconnection, while two German participants denied that gender has any influence.

Despite these accounts, the majority of the sample described hostile online encounters that led them to employ disconnective measures as being of misogynistic character and shared by their female peers. This prompted the integration of an abductive approach, anchoring the further analysis in UN Women's (2023) definition of TF VAW and informing the addition of a refined research question:

How do women in emerging adulthood experience digital disconnection in the context of technology-facilitated violence against women?

Addressing this question resulted in the identification of four recurring ways in which digital disconnection was sought out as a protective measure against TF VAW: (1) Avoiding hostile online spaces, (2) Blocking harassers, (3) Dealing with dick pics, and (4) hiding face and body online.

At the same time, the women highlighted how connectivity can function as protection in potentially threatening offline contexts, specifically by reaching out to their friends. This practice of looking out for one another demonstrates how availability norms and connectivity can be embedded in practices of care closely tied to solidarity rather than being solely associated with caregiving, resonating with Fisher and Tronto's (1990) feminist theory of caring.

The results highlight forms of digital disconnection in which women preemptively avoid online visibility in order to prevent encounters with TF VAW. Some of these disconnective measures extend previous conceptions of unfriending practices. In addition to reversing digital friendship ties already conceptualized under this term (Zhu, 2023), social connections are rejected from the outset, hostile users are reported, and traces of abusive relationships are deleted. This also reinforces the relational aspect inherent in such forms of digital disconnection, in which it is not devices, platforms, or content that are avoided, but rather other users. Moreover, while scholarly analyses frame women's withdrawal in response to TF VAW as a structural issue (Blandini, 2021; Posetti et al., 2025; UN Women, 2023), the women themselves describe their practices as self-directed acts of self-protection. As such, the findings demonstrate how the very same practice can plausibly be interpreted as both voluntary and involuntary.

Whereas Article II focused more broadly on the women's imaginings, Article III was deliberately designed to analyze their responses to interview questions that explicitly

addressed their identities as women, as well as other potentially gender-related aspects. Echoing the overall tendency identified in Article II, the women again tended to decenter gender in their accounts. Yet they repeatedly, and often unintentionally, referred to their experiences as women when describing encounters with TF VAW, a severe form of gendered experience. It was through this more explicit focus on gender that TF VAW emerged as a key context for digital disconnection

6 Discussion

Synthesizing the project's research activities, this chapter discusses the project's empirical contributions and their conceptual implications, as well as the methodological contribution. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the study's limitations and directions for future research.

6.1 Empirical Contributions

Overall, the project underscores the importance of attending to a range of perspectives, in this instance those of young women. Through the collection of quantitative and multimodal qualitative data, the project provides detailed, empirically grounded insights into the diverse ways they experience digital disconnection in Germany and Norway. In turn, the project extends existing research on digital disconnection among specific sociodemographic groups while also contributing to the concept's ongoing development, thereby advancing the relatively young field of digital disconnection studies. By engaging with the field's interdisciplinary character, these contributions may also be relevant to feminist STS and feminist media studies.

This section addresses the project's three key empirical contributions as well as its broader conceptual developments and perspectives across three subsections. The first subsection illuminates the diverse ways in which young women experience digital disconnection through the framework of everyday life, showing how these experiences are shaped by both individual circumstances and wider societal contexts. The second subsection outlines how the project contributes a nuanced approach to gender within digital disconnection studies, adding to previous, often polarized understandings within the field. The third subsection highlights how the project broadens digital disconnection studies' perspective on care, emphasizing its continued relevance to young women in forms that are not limited to formalized caregiving roles. Together, these subsections address the project's main research question:

How do young women experience digital disconnection in their everyday lives?

6.1.1 Illuminating Young Women's Experiences

Drawing on the framework of everyday life, the project illuminates young women's experiences at both individual and societal levels. In doing so, it contributes empirical insights to digital disconnection studies and advances the conceptual development of digital disconnection itself. Specifically, the project broadens the scope of disconnective practices, interrogates assumptions about wider societal shifts, and attends to practices that can be interpreted as simultaneously voluntary and involuntary.

Considering the individual level, the women reported a range of disconnective practices already integrated into their everyday lives, from restricting smartphone and internet use in various situations in Article I to attempts at digital disconnection in Article II. By highlighting strategies aimed at preventing encounters with TF VAW, Article III not only contributes additional empirical insights into digital disconnection but also extends the concept's scope. Through practices such as limiting online visibility and avoiding certain online spaces, the article identifies forms of digital disconnection that have previously gone unrecognized and demonstrates their preemptive character. It further expands existing conceptions of unfriending (Zhu, 2023) by highlighting functions such as declining contact requests, reporting perpetrators, and deleting traces of online interaction. These practices also illustrate that digital disconnection is not only a means of creating distance from technology but can also serve to create distance from other users, thereby underscoring its (anti-)social dimension.

While these findings position digital disconnection as an everyday practice and, at times, even a necessity, women also experienced it as a more elusive ideal. Across both samples, participants described their smartphone use as "too much," with women in Article II explicitly expressing a desire for greater self-discipline to implement disconnective practices more consistently. This suggests that digital disconnection occupied a twofold role in their everyday lives: both an established practice and an aspiration.

Regarding the societal level, as approached through perceptions of responsibility, the Norwegian women in Article I explicitly agreed that smartphone and internet use are individual matters. Comparable beliefs also featured prominently in the interview material in Article II, spanning both Germany and Norway. Here, the women overtly rejected the idea that either the technology industry *would*, or that public authorities

should, initiate action toward a more balanced role of technology in society. Nevertheless, the women also recognized the limitations of individual action, gradually moving beyond dynamics of responsabilization (Syvertsen, 2020). To address the large-scale challenges posed by hyperconnectivity, they expressed a desire for collective, leaderless change toward a more balanced presence of technology in society.

This desire is especially noteworthy in light of conceptualizations of a wider zeitgeist shift, such as Cramer's (2014) post-digital condition, Fast's (2021) disconnection turn, and Albris et al.'s (2024) digital backlash. These perspectives suggest that collective shifts are already underway, visible in the rise of digital disconnection practices, growing scholarly attention, self-help discourse, and societal debate. In this respect, the women's accounts resonate with broader critiques of hyperconnectivity. At the same time, they complicate these notions of conditions, turns, and backlash by revealing a longing for such sentiments to translate into meaningful action, suggesting that such shifts have yet to materialize.

The accounts of TF VAW in Article III also shed light on the societal contexts in which the women's experiences were embedded. The women not only recounted their own efforts to avoid such violence but also reflected on how it affected their peers, underscoring its structural nature (UN Women, 2023). Even so, the only apparent countermeasure took the form of individual acts of digital disconnection, again pointing to dynamics of responsabilization (Syvertsen, 2020). Notably, while the women framed these practices as self-directed choices, NGOs have understood such retreats from online spaces as constitutive of the violence itself (Blandini, 2021; Posetti et al., 2025; UN Women, 2023).

Previous research has challenged conceptions of digital disconnection as exclusively voluntary and has examined the simultaneous existence of voluntary and involuntary forms in contexts shaped by limited connectivity (Bozan & Treré, 2023; Hartmann et al., 2025). This project extends such scholarship by showing how the same act of digital disconnection can be plausibly interpreted as both voluntary and involuntary, depending on the perspective. Rather than privileging one interpretation over the other, the project highlights the importance of nuance, which remains central to the discussion that follows.

6.1.2 A Nuanced Approach to Gender and Digital Disconnection

By focusing on young women's experiences, the project inherently foregrounds the dimension of gender. While paying close attention to gender throughout its activities, the project also sought not to overstate the importance of this sociodemographic trait and remained open to additional aspects shaping women's experiences. In this way, the project contributes a productive approach to gender in digital disconnection studies that is focused without being reductive and capable of accommodating nuance in its findings.

Previous scholarship has tended to portray men's and women's digital disconnection experiences as rather polarized (Beattie, 2020; Fast, 2021) or has focused on singular examples drawn from empirical studies with a broader focus (Bozan & Tréré, 2023; Portwood-Stacer, 2012). The findings presented in Article I's quantitative analysis confirm the existence of significant gender differences in digital disconnection experiences. However, they also challenge overly polarized accounts by showing that these differences are relatively small. This underscores the importance of recognizing nuance in analyses of digital disconnection and gender.

Reflecting this commitment to nuance, the analysis of the qualitative data approached gender from two angles: in Article II through an open focus, and in Article III through an explicit consideration of gendered experiences. Regarding the open focus, the three key themes identified in Article II resonated with wider discussions surrounding digital disconnection in everyday life and did not primarily center on the women's gender identities. This reflects the project's approach to the women as multidimensional individuals for whom gender constitutes only one aspect of identity. Regarding the explicit consideration of gendered experiences, the analysis for Article III deliberately examined the material for explicit and implicit reflections on gender. Through this analysis, it became apparent that most women did not perceive their gender as relevant, with some even outright rejecting such an association. While respecting their views, it should be noted that these reflections are articulated at a time when anti-feminist rhetoric is intensifying, particularly in Germany (Fangen & Lichtenberg, 2021; Hajek & Dombrowski, 2022). Moreover, most of the participating women described some form of TF VAW experience that led them to digitally disconnect, revealing severe forms of gendered digital disconnection. It is here that the project demonstrates that gender may not always

play a central or consciously acknowledged role in women's experiences of digital disconnection, but when it does, its impact can be profound.

6.1.3 Broadening Perspectives on Care in Digital Disconnection Studies

Drawing on the conceptual life stage of emerging adulthood, the project deliberately focuses on young women as a demographic with relatively few caregiving responsibilities (Arnett, 2004). Yet this did not render care irrelevant. Rather, both Norwegian and German participants highlighted how multiple forms of care shaped their experiences of digital disconnection. Through these accounts, the project broadens perspectives on care in digital disconnection studies.

Previous scholarship has argued that expectations of online availability can complicate digital disconnection for women in formalized caregiving roles, as associated obligations increasingly extend into the digital realm (Beattie, 2020; Bozan & Treré, 2023; Portwood-Stacer, 2012). However, Article II showed that emerging adult women also lamented pressures to remain digitally available for others. These pressures sometimes stem from family members and boyfriends, but also from female friends and girlfriends. While the degree of such pressures may vary between women in and outside formalized caregiving roles, the findings nonetheless suggest that they shape women's ability to disconnect beyond heteronormative relationship structures.

Article III also featured women arguing that newfound obligations and limited time associated with motherhood could even aid digital disconnection efforts. Hence, whereas previous scholarship has interpreted such obligations mainly as an additional challenge alongside navigating existing relationships (Beattie, 2020; Bozan & Treré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023), participants also described maternal responsibilities as structuring everyday life in ways that permitted withdrawal. Although these accounts could be interpreted as overly optimistic hypotheticals, they offer a different perspective on what has thus far been a predominantly deficit-oriented discussion.

A further perspective on care is reflected in how women seek connection with one another online to regain a sense of safety in potentially dangerous offline situations, as detailed in Article III. Beyond a transactional understanding of care as something to be given and received, this practice can be viewed as a solidaristic form of care among

women. It thus aligns with Fisher and Tronto's (1990) feminist theory of caring, in which they demonstrate friendships and feminist sisterhoods as sites of mutual care. Importantly, these findings do not stand at odds with women in formalized caregiving roles, as no woman exists solely within a single role. Instead, they suggest that care in relation to connectivity and digital disconnection can take multiple forms. This also means that formalized caregiving roles remain a relevant object of study, but not necessarily a privileged one.

6.2 Methodological Contribution

The project employed an original mixed-methods research design. Article I adopts a quantitative descriptive approach that, despite being a relatively underutilized method (Freelon et al., 2023; Munger et al., 2021), proved particularly valuable for getting an overview of the project's topic. The abductive approach underlying Article III, meanwhile, demonstrates the importance of remaining receptive to unexpected patterns in the data.

The project's primary methodological contribution, however, lies in the design and implementation of the creative prompt exercise. Developed specifically for this project in accordance with utopian thought and employed in combination with semi-structured interviews, the exercise formed the basis of Article II. While creative methods have a long-established history and qualitative interviews represent a conventional research approach (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Cole & Knowles, 2008; McNiff, 2011), their integration in the context of digital disconnection constitutes a distinct methodological contribution to the field. More specifically, this study design adds to a small but growing body of research within digital disconnection studies that approaches inquiry as a contemplative process. Examples include Timár's (2023) use of creative writing and Kopecka-Piech's (2025) application of speculative design in an online format. Further extending these approaches through multimodality (Kress, 2010), the study treats multiple modes of expression as meaningful forms of data, especially in its incorporation of drawings. This methodological design thus further advances the role of creativity and contemplation within digital disconnection studies.

Moreover, this specific study design may offer insights for speculative research more broadly. Even though such research has an established methodological repertoire, it does not always achieve meaningful reflection (e.g., Kopecka-Piech, 2025; Markham,

2021), as imaginative processes are often limited by perceptions of the status quo as inevitable (Benjamin, 2024; Levitas, 2013). By providing participants with the time, space, materials, and a tested and intentional prompt phrasing, the exercise was successful in eliciting elaborate imaginings. The subsequent semi-structured interviews further strengthened the design by enabling participants to revisit, interpret, and expand upon their prompt responses. Together, the exercise and interviews thus constitute an example of a practical methodological design that cultivates imagination in combination with context.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

As with all research, this project comes with limitations and points to directions for future research. One limitation concerns the differing scopes of the research activities. Whereas the qualitative study focused exclusively on women in emerging adulthood, the quantitative study included a broader sample of women and men from multiple age groups. In addition, because the survey was conducted before the start of this project, it did not include questions specifically designed for this demographic. For this reason, although the quantitative study provides valuable insight into gender differences in digital disconnection in Norway and helps contextualize the project's further findings, it does not provide direct insight into young women's lives. Future research could therefore examine aspects of young women's experiences of digital disconnection through large-scale surveys designed specifically for this demographic.

A further limitation concerns the self-reported nature of the data. Given its focus on lived experience, the project prioritized young women's own understandings and reflections on digital disconnection. Future research could complement these findings by focusing more explicitly on everyday practices within this demographic. Even though such work could potentially grapple with digital disconnection not being easily captured through its character as a non-action (Kaun, 2021; Ross et al., 2024), ethnographic approaches (e.g., Jansson et al., 2026; Van Bruyssel et al., 2026) and diary methods (e.g., Lemahieu et al., 2025) have already been shown to provide some valuable insight, potentially offering a useful starting point.

Throughout this thesis, it has been emphasized that young women's lives are inherently diverse. Consequently, no single research project can fully capture the

complexity of their experiences. This leaves considerable scope for future research to explore women's experiences of digital disconnection, particularly in relation to intersecting sociodemographics. While this project considered characteristics such as age, nationality, and sexual orientation, future research could engage more directly with additional axes of identity. Specifically, as the project focused on Germany and Norway, its studies were conducted within two Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) contexts (Henrich et al., 2010), thereby centering women who were privileged in many respects. Research adopting a stronger intersectional perspective could thus expand its focus outside such WEIRD contexts, in line with Treré's (2021) and Bozan and Treré's (2023) calls to broaden the geographical scope of digital disconnection studies.

In extending such intersectional considerations, future research could also engage more directly with action-oriented approaches. Situated within research on sociodemographics in digital disconnection studies, this project belongs to an area of inquiry that closely engages with questions of digital inequality and voices societal critique (Bozan & Treré, 2023; Hartmann et al., 2025). Yet despite documenting gender differences, highlighting women's critiques of the tech industry and wider societal dynamics, and examining the prevalence and forms of TF VAW, the project's primary contribution remains analytical rather than explicitly transformative. Future work could therefore examine the implications of these dynamics and how they might be addressed through interventions, policy development, or other practical responses. This could be particularly relevant in relation to TF VAW, given that the definition from UN Women (2023), which is repeatedly referenced and analytically integrated in this project, was itself developed with the explicit aim of combating such forms of violence.

Importantly, further research on young women represents only one of several possible avenues for studying digital disconnection and gender. Future studies could revisit whether men's experiences of digital disconnection are indeed as different from women's as suggested by previous scholarship (Beattie, 2020; Bozan & Treré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023), particularly in light of the more nuanced picture emerging from this project. Research could also address the thus-far-overlooked experiences of genderqueer, non-binary, and trans* individuals within digital disconnection studies. This may be particularly relevant given the significance of TF VAW

for digital disconnection in this project, as similar dynamics may also affect individuals who do not identify within the gender binary. A conceptual starting point for such research could be the broader concept of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF GBV), which encompasses harms affecting a wider range of gender identities than women alone (UN Women, 2023). Such research could likewise benefit from more action-oriented approaches.

7 Conclusion

This thesis provides empirically grounded insight into how young women experience digital disconnection in their everyday lives. Drawing on a mixed-methods research design spanning one quantitative and one qualitative study presented across three articles, the findings show that digital disconnection was experienced as an established everyday practice. At the same time, participants still viewed a more balanced use of technology as aspirational, expressing a desire not only for greater self-discipline but also for broader collective change.

By deliberately shifting the focus to young women, the thesis foregrounds lived experiences of digital disconnection within a sociodemographic group that has received limited attention in previous scholarship. Through this focus, the project makes several contributions, including to the conceptual development of digital disconnection itself. The project's nuanced approach to gender and digital disconnection further demonstrates that although gender may not always play a central role in women's experiences of digital disconnection, its impact can be considerable when it does. Likewise, the project broadens perspectives on care within digital disconnection studies, challenging a predominant focus on heteronormative caregiving roles.

Upon the introduction of this thesis, the Artemis II mission symbolized the status of hyperconnectivity on Earth, ongoing technological ambition, as well as accompanying critiques and ambivalent sentiments, all recurring aspects within this thesis. In addition, Artemis II also highlighted gradual progress toward gender equality, with one woman among its crew members. Yet as this thesis reaches completion, the newly announced Artemis III crew includes no women (NASA, 2026). This serves as a reminder that progress is neither linear nor complete, with the conditions shaping life with and without technology remaining ever-changing. Consequently, the question of how young women experience digital disconnection in their everyday lives retains its relevance beyond the final sentence of this thesis.

8 References

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Appendix A: Article I

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Gender and Digital Disconnection: Experiences in Norway

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This survey-based study examines digital disconnection experiences among 1,142 respondents in Norway, focusing on self-reported behaviors and opinions regarding digital media non-use in everyday life. Specifically, it highlights gender differences, along with other sociodemographic variations, found in the responses of 552 women and 590 men. The results show that both genders reported spending ‘too much’ time on their smartphones, with women reporting this more frequently. Yet notably, there is no significant difference in self-reported screen time estimates between the two genders. Moreover, women reported imposing more frequent smartphone restrictions in various scenarios, whereas men expressed greater opposition to authorities interfering with Internet and smartphone use. Still, while these differences are significant, the quantitative description reveals them to be rather minor. This study seeks to advance the field of digital disconnection studies by integrating a gender perspective, thereby contributing to its interdisciplinary scope. Furthermore, it aims to establish a foundation for future research, potentially expanding beyond comparative analyses and the gender binary, and fostering more critical perspectives.

Keywords: Digital disconnection, digital media, gender, quantitative description, Norway

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Introduction

Recent scholarship in media and communication research is increasingly devoted to not only examine the intricacies of digital connection but also its inversion, *digital disconnection*. While resistance to media predates the Internet (Syvertsen, 2017), the proliferation of digital media has brought renewed attention to voluntary practices of non-use (Nassen et al., 2023; Ross et al., 2024). This surge of interest has catalyzed the emergence of a robust body of research, with *disconnection studies* now garnering recognition as an independent field of study (Altmaier et al., 2024; Nassen et al., 2023). Central to understanding digital connection and disconnection is the insight that, while they may initially appear as opposites, they are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they exist along a spectrum that media users navigate. Within this spectrum, digital disconnection can take on various shapes and forms, ranging from restricted use during holidays (Floros et al., 2021; Syvertsen, 2022) to only minor adjustments in daily routines (Mols & Pridmore, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022). Consequently, what Altmaier et al. (2024) describe as the object of digital disconnection can also vary; it may manifest as disengagement from digital devices such as smartphones, platforms like Instagram, the Internet more broadly, or entirely different categories of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Moreover, digital disconnection can be observed on different scales, ranging from individuals (e.g., Nguyen et al., 2022; Schwarzenegger & Menke, 2020) to larger organizations (e.g., Guyard & Kaun, 2018) and authorities (e.g., Hesselberth, 2018). In this context, Ross et al. (2024) argue that digital disconnection research operates along a continuum, spanning from being individually functional, focused on the personal behaviors and opinions of media users, to being socially meaningful, which emphasizes broader societal implications.

This brief overview of research interests already indicates that digital disconnection is far from being a uniform phenomenon. In this regard, Treré (2021) argues that “universalistic and taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the meanings and motivations of dis/connection” (p. 1674) are unsettled. He advocates expanding the research scope by scrutinizing the social and economic factors influencing digital disconnection. This study emphasizes sociodemographics in disconnection studies by centering on gender, a perspective gaining increasing attention in this field. For

instance, researchers contend that both women's use and non-use of digital media are substantially shaped by societal expectations regarding caregiving (Bozan & Tréré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Mannell et al., 2024; Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023). In contrast, men are often understood as more independent in their relationship with digital media (Beattie, 2020; Portwood-Stacer, 2013). However, these arguments frequently remain conceptual, and initial empirical data is predominantly confined to singular cases.

Since a comprehensive investigation into the role of gender in digital disconnection has not yet been conducted, this study aims to address this gap by examining gender differences between men and women in survey data from 1,142 individuals in Norway. This dataset comprises self-reported evaluations and estimates of time spent across various screens, reports on smartphone restrictions in different situations, and opinions toward responsibilities associated with Internet and smartphone use. Consequently, regarding the object of disconnection, this study focuses predominantly on the smartphone, but also integrates other devices such as computers, tablets, and the Internet in general. The survey questions explored digital disconnection not only as the absence of digital media use but also by examining digital media use from a complementary perspective. Hence, while digital disconnection is largely characterized as non-action and is therefore not easily quantifiable (Ross et al., 2024), incorporating measurements of use—specifically, evaluations and estimates of time spent online—provides a robust entry point. It is also important to note that the focus on digital disconnection in this study does not pertain to temporary periods of abstention, such as digital detoxes (e.g., Syvertsen, 2020; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020), or complete abstention, such as media refusal (e.g., Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Syvertsen, 2017). Instead, it centers on an everyday perspective of regular digital media users in Norway. Accordingly, this study adopts the concept of digital disconnection as individually functional, prioritizing individual perceptions of media users. At the same time, by addressing responsibilities associated with Internet and smartphone use, this study responds to Ross et al.'s (2024) call to bridge the gap between individual practices of digital disconnection and its broader social significance. Following the authentic process of data analysis, the study employs a descriptive methodology to present its

findings. It is guided by the research question: *How do men and women experience digital disconnection differently within the context of Norway?*

The reports reveal gender differences in the evaluation of time spent online, the frequency of smartphone restrictions in social situations, holidays, and in nature, as well as opinions toward the role of authorities. Through these results, this study highlights the nuanced dynamics involved, encouraging further exploration through future research. Moreover, this study integrates digital disconnection studies with gender studies, thereby seeking to actively contribute to the interdisciplinary scope of both fields.

Gender in digital disconnection studies

Previous publications in digital disconnection studies increasingly address potential gender links, particularly examining different prerequisites for men and women. For instance, in a qualitative interview study, Portwood-Stacer (2013) discusses a report from a man who bonded with other men over not needing Facebook, specifically in opposition to their wives. She contends that this instance illustrates “that masculine norms of rugged independence and seriousness — in contrast to the implicit femininity of playfulness and dependence — were bound up in the men’s vocal disidentification with social networking activities” (p. 1050). In a similar vein, Beattie (2020) considers how gender norms affect the ability to engage in digital disconnection. He describes the “ideal disconnected subject as one who is male and unencumbered and can cut their social ties at whim, something that is often not available to women and professionals who are socially burdened with relational obligations, such as parenting or managing social connections” (p. 12). Moreover, Fast (2021) introduces the rhetorical figure of the ‘post-digital housewife’, commonly depicting ‘her’ as a woman successfully managing care responsibilities in both the digital and offline realms. This not only includes achieving the right balance between these domains for herself, but also assisting those she typically cares for. An example of this can be found in a study conducted by Mannell et al. (2024) on low-income families in Australia. Their interview data includes a report of a mother who enrolled her children in a program designed to foster digital connection among students, yet she takes the Internet router with her in her handbag while shopping to prevent them from overconsuming online

content. Similarly, in Bozans and Trerés' (2023) interview study on Turkish villagers, mothers believed that reducing their Internet use would grant them more quality time with their children. However, they also feel pressured to remain online to be accessible to their children's teachers.

While the contributions outlined provide compelling arguments regarding gender and digital disconnection, they predominantly focus on women in caretaker roles, such as wives, housewives, and mothers. As a result, women's personal preferences appear to be overlooked. Moreover, many of the previous works tend to be conceptual in nature or often rely on isolated cases. Overall, there remains a significant gap in empirical data on the relationship between digital disconnection and gender. In their systematic mapping review of empirical studies on digital disconnection, Altmaier et al. (2024) identified gender primarily as a control variable, with little deeper consideration given to its particularities. Other publications discerning trends in digital disconnection research, such as Ross et al. (2024) and Nassen et al. (2023), did not highlight gender as a prominent aspect either. Hence, there are only a few studies in digital disconnection research paying closer attention to this dimension. One of these exceptions is a qualitative investigation made by Franks et al. (2018), which focused on the reconnection behavior of individuals following Facebook sabbaticals. The study discovered that men tended to revert to their previous usage patterns more readily, whereas women demonstrated a more deliberate and intentional process of reconnection. Rather contrarily, Turel and Vaghefi (2019) found in their experimental study that women were twice as likely as men to fail to abstain from social networking sites for a whole week. Another study by Van Bruyssel et al. (2023) examined gendered aspects in the marketing of disconnection workshops and retreats. They found that products directed toward women often advertise digital disconnection as a way to reallocate time to social reproductive tasks. In contrast, campaigns aimed at men emphasize disconnected time for improving professional skills. Examining the impact of different sociodemographics, Nguyen and Hargittai's (2023) quantitative study, found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, men in the USA tended to engage in digital disconnection more frequently than women. Overall, the women were less likely to have rules about limiting their digital media use. A different quantitative survey from Sweden, revealed that women experienced stronger moral dissonance regarding

smartphone use than men. They encountered both the rewards and problems associated with the smartphone to a greater extent (Fast et al., 2023). Accordingly, the previous state of research on gender and digital disconnection can be summarized as highly fragmented, with few studies giving deliberate attention to the matter.

Integrating gender studies into digital disconnection studies

In examining the societal dimension of gender regarding digital disconnection, this study is located at the intersection of gender studies with media and communication studies. Previous research at this juncture has its origins in dissecting the portrayal of gender in media and gendered dynamics in media production (Gadzepko & Smith, 2020; Mendes & Carter, 2008). Moreover, with the diffusion of digital media, research began to closely examine the role of gender in accessing media across communities and populations (Kemp, 2024; OECD, 2018; Robinson et al., 2015). This study, as further illustrated below, builds on such data and aims to broaden the scope of inquiry beyond media consumption to include the digital disconnection at a national scale.

When reviewing the existing literature on gender and media use, a complex and often contradictory picture emerges. A recurring argument about women's media use, also found in some of the studies cited above, suggests that they are tethered to digital devices as they engage in relational labor online (Beattie, 2020; Bozan & Tréré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Jarrett, 2016; Mannell et al., 2024; Portwood-Stacer, 2013). However, this argument can also be flipped, as media can provide women with space to detach from offline caregiving responsibilities and experience moments of solitude, aligning with the concept of escapism (Herzog, 1941; Thorhauge & Gregersen, 2019). For men, the dynamics are equally complex. While some authors suggest that digital disconnection is more accessible to them (Beattie, 2020; Portwood-Stacer, 2013), men are also significantly affected by online dependencies, such as problematic gaming (Nogueira-López et al., 2023; Winds et al., 2024). Thus, integrating gender studies into digital disconnection studies may offer greater clarity in understanding these intricacies.

Study Context: Norway

Norway represents a digital society, resembled by Internet access being available in 99 percent of households (OECD, 2024), with the average Norwegian spending 4 hours and 9 minutes per day online (Statistics Norway, 2024a). As a welfare state, Norway's media system is designed to ensure equal access to information for all citizens through public broadcasting services and ongoing efforts to expand digital infrastructure (Syvertsen et al., 2014). Correspondingly, news media, public administration, and other civic organizations increasingly adopt digital services (Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2021). Still, Norwegian society also takes on critical stances toward digital media. Like many other European countries (e.g., Adu, 2024; Hunt, 2024), Norway engages in debates regarding the role of smartphones in learning environments. As part of this discourse, in February 2024, the Norwegian government officially recommended keeping smartphones out of classrooms (Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 2024). Moreover, Norwegians highly value outdoor activities, despite the landscape's topography often disrupting digital connectivity. While some experience this as frustrating, there's a steadfast appreciation for Norwegian nature as a domain untouched by ubiquitous mobile coverage (Syvertsen, 2022).

Gender equality is deeply valued in Norway, with a history of government-supported liberal feminism, also referred to as 'state feminism' (Hernes, 1987). In terms of media use, both men and women access the Internet to similar extents (Statistics Norway, 2024b), indicating no gender-based disparities in digital infrastructure access. Still, men and women in Norway demonstrate different preferences in their digital media use. For instance, women show slightly higher activity on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest, whereas men tend to be more prominent users of platforms like X and LinkedIn (Kemp, 2024). Such gendered trends in media use are especially pronounced in gaming among children. Specifically, 73 percent of boys aged 9 to 15 play digital games daily, compared to a smaller proportion of 55 percent among girls in the same age group (Statistics Norway, 2024c). This suggests that although Norwegian society is characterized by gender equality, there are still gender differences worth considering. Moreover, it is important to note that despite Norway's progressive

characteristics, the country continues to grapple with gender issues. An example from the Norwegian media landscape is the underrepresentation of women in news media (Figenschou et al., 2021). Similarly, the pension gap, while gradually closing, still reflects a 23 percent disparity, with differences rooted in the historical division of labor according to gender (Halvorsen & Hetland, 2023). Furthermore, women are disproportionately affected by severe forms of domestic violence (Dale et al., 2023).

Methods

Quantitative surveys serve as a widely adopted method in disconnection studies, spanning from accompanying surveys in targeted interventions among smaller groups to investigations among large sample sizes (Altmaier et al., 2024; Nassen et al., 2023). This study adopts the latter approach as it was created as a collaborative effort within the research project 'Intrusive media, ambivalent users, digital detox' (Digitox) to capture given patterns across the diverse research interests within the project. These include various practices, motivations, and situations regarding digital disconnection, as well as opinions and other related facets. The questionnaire primarily consisted of close-ended questions, alongside Likert-style inquiries concerning self-reported behavior and opinions toward digital disconnection. Notably, in designing the study, gender was not a primary focus and was only considered a control variable. As a result, questions directly addressing potential gender differences were not included. However, upon reviewing the data, discernible gender differences emerged. Consequently, identifying these differences through quantitative description is both the method and the very inspiration of this article.

The survey, conducted by Kantar TNS from February 13 to 21, 2023, took place during a quiet post-COVID period in Norway in the winter, with no national holidays or other notable occasions. The questionnaire prioritized social gender over biological sex, offering respondents the choices 'kvinne' (en. woman) and 'mann' (en. man). Although the survey extended participation to individuals identifying beyond the gender classifications of men and women, the sampling failed to include such respondents. Accordingly, this presents a limitation of this study, as the scope of social gender extends beyond the categories of men and women.

Using a descriptive approach, this study refrains from testing hypotheses that, at this point in time, lack the descriptive knowledge necessary to inform them. Additionally, the importance of descriptive approaches, particularly in domains such as race and gender, is underscored by Freelon et al. (2023). They argue that, despite offering numerous advantages, statistical complexities can occasionally obscure existing patterns. Instead, the often-dismissed ‘mere description’ can sometimes provide clearer insights. Therefore, the descriptive analysis approach employed in this study facilitates a thorough presentation and subsequent discussion of the identified gender differences. The analysis involved determining mean scores and frequencies, along with conducting logistic binary regression and multiple regression analyses. For the regression analysis, the first model incorporates demographic variables such as age, education, household size, and income. The second model builds on this by also including gender as a variable. This approach shows whether the explanatory power of the models improves with the addition of gender, while also providing insights into gender within the context of other variables, and shedding light on those variables themselves. Leveraging the latter, the other sociodemographics are briefly discussed in the results and discussion section, while maintaining the primary focus on gender.

In total, 1,142 individuals residing in Norway participated in the survey. Table 1 details the age, gender, and living situations of the respondents, whose ages ranged from 19 to 88 years ($M = 55$, $SD = 16.6$).

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

	Percent	M	SD	n	N
Age		55	16.6		1,142
Emerging adulthood (18–29 years)	9.1			104	
Established adulthood (30–44)	21.1			241	
Middle adulthood (45–64)	35.8			409	
Late adulthood (≥65 years)	34.0			388	
Gender					1,142
Women	48.3			552	
Men	51.7			590	
Education					1,142
Primary school	4.2			48	
Secondary general education	11.2			128	
Secondary vocational education	12.3			140	
Vocational school	8.7			99	
University education (<4 years)	34.8			398	
University education (>4 years)	28.8			329	
People in home					1,142
1 person	23.1			264	
2 persons	44.9			513	
3 persons	13.1			150	
4 persons	13.5			154	
5 persons or more	5.3			61	
Income					1,142
Under 200.000 NOK	6.2			71	
200.000 to 299.999 NOK	6.8			78	
300.000 to 399.999 NOK	10.9			125	
400.000 to 499.999 NOK	15.4			176	
500.000 to 599.999 NOK	16.9			193	
600.000 to 699.999 NOK	12.7			145	
700.000 to 799.999 NOK	8.2			94	
800.000 to 999.999 NOK	5.8			66	
1.000.000 NOK or more	5.0			57	
I'd rather not say	12.0			137	

Note. The age groups are defined according to Arnett et al. (2014) and Mehta et al. (2020).

Results

Gender differences in evaluations of time spent online and screen time estimates

Limiting time spent online to make room for other activities is considered a key driver in adopting various practices of digital disconnection (Guyard & Kaun, 2018; Schwarzenegger & Menke, 2020). Therefore, the survey inquired respondents on whether they spent too much time on various screen devices. To prevent potential leading interpretations, one of the response options deliberately allowed respondents to indicate that they do not feel they spend too much time online. The results (see Table 2) suggest that age and gender were significant factors in self-evaluations of time spent across screens. The second model reveals significant differences between men and women, showing that women were more critical of their smartphone use, with $\beta = 0.51$ ($p < 0.001$), whereas men were more critical of their PC/Mac use, with $\beta = -0.87$ ($p < 0.001$). However, men were also more likely to report that they do not spend too much time online in general, with $\beta = -0.30$, though this was only borderline significant ($p < 0.05$). Regarding age, older respondents were generally less likely to believe they overuse their smartphones (M1 and M2: $\beta = -0.06$, $p < 0.001$) or PCs/Macs (M1 and M2: $\beta = -0.01$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, tablet overuse was slightly more prominent in older individuals ($\beta = 0.02$, $p < 0.01$ in both models), though the effect was minor.

Zooming in on gender, the frequencies depicted in Figure 1 further highlight distinct differences. 64.5 percent of women believed they spent too much time on smartphones, contrasting with a lower 49.5 percent of men. Inverting the perspective, 36.5 percent of men indicated they were not spending too much time on any screen, compared to 25.6 percent of women. Although no clear gender difference was evident in tablet use, the data revealed a different scenario for PC and Mac use. In detail, 17.7 percent of men compared to 9.5 percent of women found themselves spending too much time on these devices. Despite these percentages being visibly lower than those related to smartphones, they suggest a small, albeit persistent divergence in device preferences among genders.

Table 2. Binary logistic regression summary of screen time evaluation.					
Independent variables		Smartphone	PC/Mac	Tablets	I do not spend too much time online
Model 1	Intercept	3.07***	-1.15*	-3.33***	-3.20***
	Age	-.06***	-.01*	.02**	.05***
	Education	.05	.09	-.05	-.10
	N People in Home	.04	-.08	.04	-.02
	Income	-.04	-.06	.02	.06
	Cox & Snell R2	.18	.01	.01	.13
	Nagelkerke R2	.25	.02	.02	.19
Model 2	Intercept	2.35***	.01*	-3.62***	-2.74***
	Age	-.06***	-.01*	.02**	.05***
	Education	.02	.14	-.06	-.08
	N People in Home	.03	-.05	.04	-.01
	Income	-.01	-.11*	.03	.04
	Gender (1=men, 2=women)	.51***	-.87***	.18	-.30*
	Cox & Snell R2	.19	.03	.01	.14
	Nagelkerke R2	.26	.05	.02	.19

Standardized Beta values presented. Significance levels are reported at the *** = p < .001, ** = p < .01, * = p < .05 respectively.

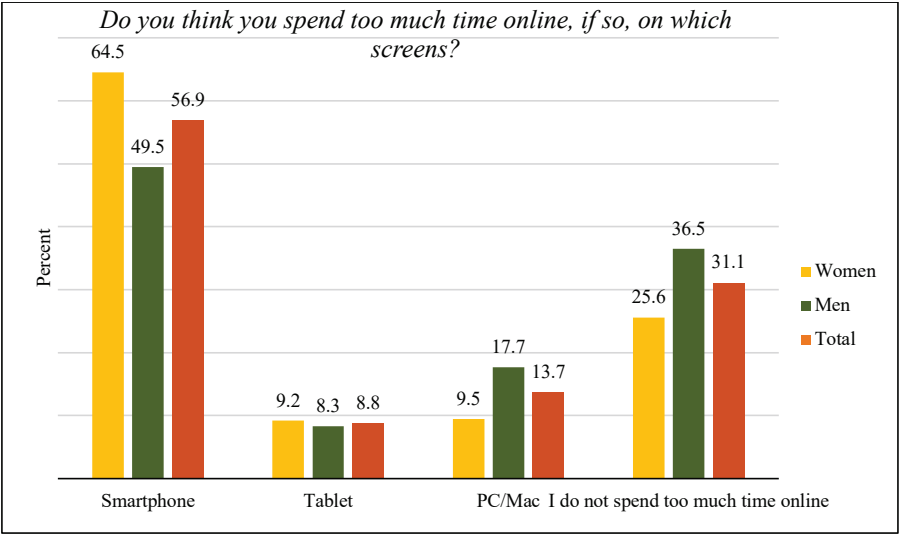


Figure 1. Self-evaluation of time spent online according to gender.
N=1,142.

Moreover, the survey prompted respondents to self-estimate their daily time spent online. As shown in Table 3, the multiple regression analysis reveals age and education as significant factors. $\beta = -0.02$ ($p < 0.001$) in both models indicates that older respondents were more likely to report lower screen time estimates. As for education, $\beta = 0.06$ ($p < 0.01$) suggests that individuals with higher levels of education reported spending more time online. When gender is included in the second model, the value of $\beta = 0.09$ is the largest in the model but remains statistically insignificant.

Table 3. Multiple regression summary of screen time estimates.

Independent variables		Screen time estimates
Model 1	Intercept	5.38***
	Age	-.02***
	Education	.06**
	N People in Home	.04
	Income	.01
	R (R2)	.42 (.18)
Model 2	Intercept	5.24***
	Age	-.02***
	Education	.06**
	N People in Home	.03
	Income	.01
	Gender (1=men, 2=women)	.09
	R (R2)	.42 (.18)

Standardized Beta values presented. Significance levels are reported at the *** = $p < .001$, ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$ respectively.

Situational gender differences

The reports revealed further gender differences regarding smartphone restrictions in various situations. To ascertain the implementation of restrictions within these settings, the survey included the question: ‘How often do you impose restrictions/mobile-free zones on yourself in the following situations?’ The scenarios encompassed time spent with family, socializing with friends, during holidays, and being in nature. Respondents rated each setting on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always), with an optional ‘I do not know’ response.

Table 4 provides an overview of the multiple regression analysis across the situations. Regarding smartphone restrictions within family settings, the multiple regression analysis shows gender as the only significant variable, with $\beta = 0.34$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating that women reported engaging in restrictions more often than men. Looking at the mean scores, the overall mean is 3.34 ($SD = 1.06$), with women slightly

above at 3.52 (SD = 1.02) and men slightly below at 3.17 (SD = 1.07). This suggests that while the gender differences are notable, they remain relatively small. The analysis of survey responses regarding time spent with friends shows that, with $\beta = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$ in both models, older respondents were slightly more likely to report establishing smartphone restrictions when around friends. Moreover, gender yielded significant differences, with $\beta = 0.36$ ($p < 0.01$) indicating that women reported more frequent restrictions. This is also evident in the mean scores, with women scoring 3.72 (SD = 1.03) and men scoring 3.30 (SD = 1.13). The overall mean is slightly higher compared to family settings, at 3.51 (SD = 1.10).

In addition to these social scenarios, gender differences also emerged amid nature and during holidays. These contexts commonly serve as settings for disconnecting from digital media as they often provide distinct spatial and temporal confines away from the daily grind (Conti & Farsari, 2022; Schwarzenegger & Lohmeier, 2021; Syvertsen, 2022). In both models, multiple regression analysis indicates that individuals in larger households were more likely to report smartphone restrictions during holidays, with $\beta = 0.12$ ($p < .001$) in Model 1 and $\beta = 0.11$ ($p < .001$) in Model 2. When gender was included in Model 2, the effect increased to $\beta = 0.24$ ($p < .001$), suggesting that women were more likely to report enforcing restrictions during holidays. This trend is reflected in the mean scores, with women averaging 2.75 (SD = 1.06) and men 2.46 (SD = 1.12). Among all the settings examined, the holiday setting had the lowest reported restrictions, as shown by the overall mean score of 2.61 (SD = 1.10). In the context of nature, the regression analysis also shows that women were more likely than men to report more frequent restrictions, with $\beta = 0.45$ ($p < .001$). This is also reflected in the mean scores, with an overall average of 3.23 (SD = 1.26); men scored lower at 2.98 (SD = 1.30), while women scored higher at 3.50 (SD = 1.16).

Table 4. Multiple regression summary of smartphone and Internet restrictions across different situations.

Independent variables		With family	With friends	On holidays	In nature
Model 1	Intercept	3.05***	2.76***	2.22***	2.79***
	Age	.01	.01***	.01	.01
	Education	.03	.07	.04	.08**
	N People in Home	.04	.03	.12***	.05
	Income	-.02	-.04	-.02	-.01
	R (R2)	.07 (.01)	.18 (.03)	.14 (.02)	.10 (.01)
Model 2	Intercept	2.54***	2.23***	1.87***	2.13***
	Age	.01	.01***	.00	.01
	Education	.01	.05	.02	.05
	N People in Home	.03	.02	.11***	.03
	Income	.01	-.02	-.01	.02
	Gender (1=men, 2=women)	.34***	.36***	.24***	.45***
	R (R2)	.17 (.03)	.24 (.58)	.17 (.03)	.20 (.04)

Standardized Beta values presented. Significance levels are reported at the *** = $p < .001$, ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$ respectively.

Gender differences in opinions

Further gender differences surfaced in opinions regarding who bears the responsibility for managing digital media use. The issue is perceived as subject to ‘responsibilization’, in which matters are viewed as individual problems instead of collective responsibilities (Syvertsen, 2020). As a result, despite the strong influence of societal structures on media use, negative impacts are often attributed to individual behavior. Nevertheless, collective strategies such as legislation and corporate policies receive increasing attention (Guyard & Kaun, 2018; Hesselberth, 2018). To ascertain how the respondents position themselves regarding the responsibility of media use, they assessed different statements. The first one: ‘The use of the Internet and smartphone is primarily an individual responsibility’. And the second one: ‘The authorities should not interfere with people’s use of the Internet and smartphones’. The respondents then rated

these statements on a scale of 1-5, from completely disagree to completely agree, with the additional option to respond 'I do not know'.

The trend across the sample indicated that Internet and smartphone use were commonly seen as an individual responsibility, as reflected by a mean score of 4.24 ($SD = 0.92$). Gender differences were negligible, with men scoring 4.29 ($SD = 0.91$) and women scoring 4.18 ($SD = 0.92$). Multiple regression analysis further revealed that gender was not a significant factor. Instead, education and income emerged as influential variables. Specifically, respondents with higher education (M1 and M2: $\beta = -0.09$, $p < .001$) were less likely to perceive internet and smartphone use as an individual responsibility. In contrast, respondents with higher income (M1 and M2: $\beta = 0.05$, $p < .001$) were more likely to regard media use as a personal matter.

In line with the perspective that Internet and smartphone use are personal matters, the sample showed a general tendency to reject authority interference, albeit slightly less pronounced, as indicated by the mean score of 3.56 ($SD = 1.23$). Gender differences were evident, with men scoring higher at 3.74 ($SD = 1.24$) compared to women at 3.37 ($SD = 1.20$). Men's greater tendency to reject authority intervention was also confirmed by the multiple regression analysis, which yielded $\beta = -0.27$ ($p < .001$) for gender. Notably, men and women differed not only in their opinions toward authority intervention but also in their levels of uncertainty about the issue. As shown in Table 6, 4.8% of women responded with 'I don't know', compared to only 1.6% of men. Additionally, 24.6% of women, versus 18.7% of men, neither agreed nor disagreed. Patterns related to education and income also emerged, consistent with findings on individual responsibility. Respondents with higher education were more open to authority intervention (M1: $\beta = -0.17$, $p < .001$; M2: $\beta = -0.15$, $p < .001$). In contrast, individuals with higher incomes were more likely to oppose such intervention (M1: $\beta = 0.08$, $p < .001$; M2: $\beta = 0.06$, $p < .001$).

Table 5. Multiple regression analysis of opinions toward individual responsibility and authority interference.

Independent variables		Individual Responsibility	Authority Interference
Model 1	Intercept	4.50***	4.03***
	Age	-.01	.00
	Education	-.09***	-.17***
	N People in Home	-.02	-.04
	Income	.05***	.08***
	R (R2)	.15 (.02)	.20 (.04)
Model 2	Intercept	4.57***	4.41***
	Age	-.01	.00
	Education	-.09***	-.15***
	N People in Home	-.02	-.03
	Income	.05**	.06**
	Gender (1=men, 2=women)	-.05	-.27***
R (R2)		.16 (.02)	.23 (.05)

Standardized Beta values presented. Significance levels are reported at the *** = p < .001, ** = p < .01, * = p < .05 respectively.

Table 6. Opinions toward authority interference in media use.

		Women		Men		Total	
The authorities should not interfere with people’s use of the Internet and smartphones	Completely disagree	5.7%	(32)	5.8%	(33)	5.7%	(65)
	Partly disagree	19.5%	(110)	12.9%	(74)	16.2%	(184)
	Neither	24.6%	(139)	18.7%	(107)	21.6%	(246)
	Partially agree	25.1%	(142)	25.3%	(145)	25.2%	(287)
	Completely agree	20.4%	(115)	35.8%	(205)	28.1%	(320)
	I don’t know	4.8%	(27)	1.6%	(9)	3.2%	(36)
Total		565		573		1,138	

Note. Cases do not sum to N = 1,142 due to 4 missing values.

Discussion and Conclusion

This survey-based study described how both men and women in Norway experience digital disconnection differently, examining 1,142 responses. Both of these genders reported spending ‘too much’ time on their smartphones; however, women reported doing so to a greater extent. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that there was no significant difference between men and women in their screen time estimates. Hence, these results suggest that women do not necessarily spend significantly more time on their smartphones but may evaluate their time spent more critically than men. This interpretation aligns with findings from the aforementioned study by Fast et al. (2023), which showed that women experience smartphone-related problems to a greater extent, and from Franks et al. (2018), who found that women are more intentional and deliberate in their use. This dynamic could also explain why men, seemingly more at ease with their smartphone use, reported fewer restrictions in social situations, in nature, and during holidays. Another possible and potentially intersecting explanation for the differences regarding the scenarios could lie in their normative connotations. In terms of social situations, previous literature indicates that women often face expectations to attend to their offline caregiving responsibilities without online distraction, as well as to assist others in managing their disconnective behavior (Fast et al., 2023; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023). Such expectations may contribute to women reporting a higher frequency of disconnection when around others. Conversely, the results also highlight gender norms directed at men. Here, it might be valuable to consider masculinity norms which, according to Beattie (2020) and Portwood-Stacer (2013), grant men greater independence in their personal media use. Although there was no significant difference in men’s and women’s perceptions of digital media use as an individual’s responsibility, men were slightly more inclined to reject authority intervention. This finding suggests a need for further examination of whether this inclination can indeed be attributed to men’s association with independence in their relationship with digital media or if additional aspects are at play. Here, deepening the link between digital disconnection studies and gender studies—particularly through concepts like gender performativity (Butler, 1990) and doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987)—could elucidate how the structural construction of gender norms and everyday practices shaped by one’s assigned sex also influence digital disconnection. This could also lead to the adoption

of more critical approaches that allow for further problematization of gendered experiences. Still, this call for deeper research into gendered norms should not be misunderstood as a call to view men's and women's experiences as completely distinct. Rather, further work should also be attentive to nuance. As demonstrated in this study, while gender differences exist, they are not always the most pronounced. For instance, although the men in this study reported to a lesser extent than women to spent too much time on their smartphones, nearly half of them still believed they did. This shows that men too, grapple with feelings of overconnection. Considering women, it might also be reasonable to take a different perspective and examine their personal preferences beyond their perceived obligations to others. Consequently, this study primarily emphasizes the importance of understanding gendered experiences holistically, encompassing both stark differences and subtle nuances, as well as shared experiences.

While this study focused primarily on gender, the results also revealed notable patterns across other sociodemographic factors. For instance, older respondents were less likely to perceive their time spent on screens as too much. They also reported lower screen time estimates and a greater tendency to impose smartphone restrictions when with friends, compared to younger respondents. This finding aligns with previous research, which found that older media users engage in more frequent and distinct disconnection patterns (Fernández-Ardèvol et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021). Further notable sociodemographic factors included education and income. Respondents with higher levels of education tended to report higher screen time estimates and viewed Internet and smartphone use as less of an individual responsibility, being more open to authority intervention compared to those with lower levels of education. As for income, the trend was reversed: Internet and smartphone use were more likely to be seen as an individual responsibility, with authority intervention being rejected. Notably, both education and income emerged in responses related to opinions, rather than behaviors. However, despite the general association of higher levels of both with greater social status, the patterns diverge in these contexts. As such, further investigation into the influence of social class could provide valuable insights.

The presence of minor but significant gender differences resonates within Norway's predominantly egalitarian society, which continues to grapple with persistent

gender disparities. Additionally, the data reveals peculiarities that further reflect the Norwegian cultural fabric. For instance, a majority of the sample consistently implemented smartphone restrictions when in nature. These reports may not only provide insight into the sample's media use but might also reflect the strong affinity Norwegians have for outdoor activities in general (Syvertsen, 2022). Furthermore, when considering the sample's perspective on digital media use as a personal responsibility and resistance to authorities' interference, it might be of relevancy that Norway ranks among the countries with the highest commitment to freedom of expression (V-Dem, 2024). The government itself proclaims that "[i]n the light of the rapid pace of development of digital technologies, Norway puts emphasis on safeguarding freedom of expression and information online" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Accordingly, the Norwegian government assumes the role of providing digital infrastructure rather than intervening. In this regard, it is worth noting that the recent recommendation to ban smartphones in classrooms specifically targets students within their learning environments (Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 2024), leaving the broader population unaffected. Acknowledging that these results appear to be deeply embedded in the Norwegian context, conducting similar studies in different national contexts could provide further insights.

This study contributes to the development of digital disconnection studies in two ways: firstly, by enhancing the general knowledge base of what digital disconnection entails through a gender-focused approach, and secondly, by broadening the interdisciplinary scope of digital disconnection studies by integrating gender studies. Still, this study represents only the beginning of integrating digital disconnection and gender, offering numerous opportunities for further exploration. In this regard, the descriptive analysis presented here could prove particularly beneficial, as descriptive data is well-suited to lay the foundations for future research (Munger et al., 2021). For instance, studies could focus exclusively on one gender and its specific intricacies, rather than employing a comparative approach. Qualitative methods might also be valuable for gaining more nuanced insights into contexts and their details. For example, this study primarily focused on different devices, predominantly smartphones, and time spent online or on the Internet. However, the specific activities of the respondents remain unknown. Inquiring about actual activities and allowing

respondents to provide more context could yield valuable insights. In conclusion, by highlighting tendencies regarding gender differences across various contexts, this study may serve as a foundation for further exploration.

Limitations

As with any research, this study is not without limitations. One such limitation is that the survey was not originally designed with a focus on gender. Since previous discussions around this topic are often centered on notions of care, the use of ‘people in the home’ as a stand-in for exploring care relationships was somewhat limited. Incorporating sociodemographic factors, such as parental and relationship status, into the survey design could have provided deeper insights. Another limitation lies in the study’s reliance on self-reported online time assessments. Critics of such measures argue that respondents tend to overstate their exposure to media content (Guess et al., 2019; Prior, 2009). Accordingly, the self-reported screen time estimates in this study can only be regarded as subjective perceptions, not factual data representing the respondents’ actual screen time.

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Appendix B: Article II

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Reimagining Life With a Smartphone: A Creative Inquiry Into Women in Emerging Adulthood in Germany and Norway

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Abstract

In contrast to states and industries promoting continuous innovation, discourse around digital disconnection suggests that individuals increasingly seek a reduced presence of technology. Recognizing that ordinary people have limited opportunities to create and articulate their own visions of life with digital media, this study employs a creative inquiry with 20 women in emerging adulthood (ages 18 to 29) from Germany ($n = 10$) and Norway ($n = 10$). Specifically, participants reflected on the role a smartphone would play in an ideal world, expressing themselves through drawings, text, and bullet points. Employing utopian thought as the guiding framework, the data reveal both formative desires and perceptions of responsibility across three themes: (1) ideal self, reflecting a wish for greater self-discipline in personal use; (2) ideal technology, involving critiques of technological design and industry interests; and (3) ideal society, envisioning collective change toward reduced device use.

Keywords

Digital disconnection, smartphones, utopia, creative methods, women, emerging adulthood, Germany, Norway

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Narratives promoted by states and industries tend to frame a livable life, an ideal society, and even a better world as dependent on ever more advanced technologies. Policy and public institutions, for instance, promote such visions through “roadmaps, rules, and regulations” (Mager and Katzenbach, 2021, p. 224), advocating expanded technological infrastructure. Industries likewise position themselves, through corporate charters, mission statements, and announcements, as “leading the fabric of socio-technical development” (Natale et al., 2019, p. 324). Still, such visions involve notable trade-offs, as illustrated by the smartphone in Vorderer (2016). He notes that the device receives praise for providing access to information anytime and anywhere, yet it is precisely this quality that draws users into intrusive patterns of constant connectivity. He further argues that the mediated world we live in “in many ways brings us closer to some version of ‘the good life,’ while at the same time leading us away from it” (p. 4). Scaling such issues to a societal level, scholars argue that users face increasing difficulty in opting out, a condition described using various terms, including “digital enforcement” (Díaz Andrade and Techatassanasoontorn, 2021), the “digital by-default society” (Kuntsman and Miyake, 2022, p. 10), and a “culture of connectivity” (Van Dijck, 2013). Accordingly, critical engagement with the negative impacts of technology across public and scholarly debates has intensified (Albris et al., 2024; Fast, 2021).

However, despite this growing attention, the voices of ordinary people affected by these digital developments remain largely excluded from shaping visions of life with technology. In Benjamin’s (2024) view, such perspectives remain absent, as a very small and male-dominated sliver of humanity monopolizes the imaginative space that she claims everyone has a right to. In redirecting the focus to ordinary people, this study specifically examines the utopian imaginings of an ideal relationship with smartphones among 20 women in the conceptual life stage of emerging adulthood (ages 18 to 29, as defined by Arnett, 2000) in Germany and Norway. It thereby builds on utopian thought as a framework (Levitas, 2013; Polizzi, 2023; Tower Sargent, 2010; Wells, 1906), conceptions of compulsory connectivity (Díaz Andrade and Techatassanasoontorn, 2021; Kuntsman and Miyake, 2022; Van Dijck, 2013), previous contributions on women and digital disconnection (Beattie, 2020; Bozan and Tréré, 2023; Fast, 2021), the conceptual life stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2010; Arnett et al., 2014), and the intersection of mobile media studies and media resistance (Vanden Abeele and Syvertsen, 2025). Through this, the present study seeks to understand both the formative desires of women in emerging adulthood regarding smartphones and the underlying perceptions of responsibility, within two highly digitalized national contexts.

RQ1. How do women in emerging adulthood in Germany and Norway imagine an ideal relationship with their smartphones?

RQ2. Who do women in emerging adulthood perceive as being responsible for making their imaginings a reality?

Using a qualitative research design grounded in creative inquiry, participants imagined the role of their smartphones in an ideal world through a prompt exercise involving drawings, text, and bullet points. Subsequent interviews further examined these prompt

outcomes. Through a thematic analysis of the multimodal data, three key themes were developed: (1) ideal self, where participants expressed a desire for greater self-discipline; (2) ideal technology, involving critiques of mobile media design and the technology industry's interests; and (3) ideal society, where participants envisioned a collective change toward reduced device use. By showing that conceptions of ideality do not inherently entail a greater technological presence, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the nuances of digital connection and disconnection.

Utopian Thought as Framework

To gain insight into women's imaginings of an ideal relationship with their smartphones and their accompanying perceptions of responsibility, this study applies utopian thought as a framework. Originating from the 16th-century novel titled *Utopia*, Greek for "no place," including a poem titled *Eutopia*, Greek for "good place," the term utopia is commonly understood as a blend of both meanings: a nonexistent good place (Tower Sargent, 2010). While utopia and its counterpart dystopia, a dysfunctional society, are well-established genres in literature and film, utopian thought has also received significance in academic scholarship (Levitas, 2013; Tower Sargent, 2010). As early as 1906, H. G. Wells argued that "the creation of Utopias – and their exhaustive criticism – is the proper and distinctive method of sociology" (p. 367). Levitas (2013) elaborates on this, explaining that utopias "embed a contrast with the present to which they stand as critique, articulating also the reasons for the ills of contemporary society" (p. xiv). Whether such visions are located "elsewhere or in the future," she further argues, "they are always substantially about the present" (p. xiv). Building on this characteristic of utopian thought, Polizzi (2023) draws links between utopian studies, political theory, and matters of media and communication studies, proposing that users' utopian and dystopian imaginaries of society are especially well-suited to examining the internet's potentials and limitations for civic life. Aligning with this proposal, the present study draws on the analytical qualities of utopian thought in the context of mobile media. Specifically, the study seeks to reveal both the formative desires at the individual level, here focused on an imagined ideal relationship with one's smartphone, and perceptions of societal structures, here considered in terms of responsibility.

Sociotechnical Imaginaries and Techno-Utopianism: Longing for More Technology

Dominant visions of an ideal society often arise less from individual reflection than from collective shaping by states and corporations (Levitas, 2013; Mager and Katzenbach, 2021). This is particularly evident in the realm of technology, as Jasanoff and Kim (2009) illustrate with their concept of "sociotechnical imaginaries," initially defined as "collectively imagined forms of social life and social order reflected in the design and fulfillment of nation-specific scientific and/or technological projects" (p. 120). An example of this is Norway's National Digitalization Strategy, which aspires to make the country

the most digitalized in the world by 2030 (Norwegian Ministry of Digitalisation and Public Governance, 2024). Remarkably, Norway is already a digital frontrunner: 99% of its citizens have home internet access (OECD, 2025), it ranks among the global leaders in e-government development (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024), and in January 2024, it established a Ministry of Digitalisation and Public Governance (Norwegian Ministry of Digitalisation and Public Governance, 2024). Although policy-makers acknowledge privacy concerns (Norwegian Ministry of Digitalisation and Public Governance, 2024) and advise limiting smartphone use in schools (Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 2024), the overarching narrative remains firmly pro-digitalization. Germany, a much more populous country, exhibits similar patterns. With over 92% internet penetration (OECD, 2025) and a robust e-government infrastructure (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024), one of the newly formed government's first actions was to establish a Federal Ministry for Digital and State Modernisation (BMDS, 2026), reinforcing its commitment to digitalization.

At a later point, Jasanoff (2015) clarified that sociotechnical imaginaries “are not limited to nation-states, as implied in our original formulation, but can be articulated and propagated by other organized groups, such as corporations, social movements, and professional societies” (p. 4). This is especially discernible in the ways technology industry leaders construct visions, missions, and strategies, commonly referred to as “techno-utopianism” (Barbrook and Cameron, 1996; Turner, 2006). Analyzing media artifacts from the 2021 announcement of the Metaverse, Lucia et al. (2025) found that Meta Platforms’ CEO Zuckerberg framed a perceived global deficit in connectivity as a problem and presented the Metaverse as its solution, reinforcing both his personal and corporate interests. A comparable narrative emerges in Apple’s public communications, citing CEO Tim Cook (Apple Inc., n.d.): “We believe that business, at its best, serves the public good, empowers people around the world, and binds us together as never before.” Samsung (n.d.) similarly articulates in its “Mission and Approach” statement that it follows “a simple business philosophy: to devote its talent and technology to creating superior products and services that contribute to a better global society.” Hence, even though Apple and Samsung also address public concerns about smartphones, for example, by introducing screen time monitoring tools (Apple Inc., 2025; Samsung, 2025), they continue to construct connectivity as a moral objective with a global claim.

Dystopian Technology and Digital Disconnection: Longing for Less Technology

Despite technology often playing a key role in utopian visions, it is also recognized for its dystopian qualities (Syvertsen, 2017; Wajcman, 2004). Karppi and Nieborg (2021), for instance, point out that a number of former tech executives have acknowledged contributing to forms of “techno-dystopianism,” including by exploiting “neuro-chemical vulnerabilities in human psychology” (p. 2641) to keep users on their platforms as part of their business model. More broadly, such addictive qualities have been problematized

across disciplines, including the social sciences, information and computer sciences, and law (Alter, 2017; Domalewska, 2025; Sorokowski and Sobczak, 2025). In response to such identified dangers, Karppi and Nieborg (2021) argue that a new kind of utopian vision centered on the refusal of technology is emerging, namely digital disconnection. The utopian character of nonuse is especially evident in temporary spaces created outside of daily routines. Examples include offline tourism sites (Schwarzenegger and Lohmeier, 2021; Syvertsen, 2022), pilgrimages (Jorge, 2023), or the Sexsibility Festival, embedded in a Swedish community for alternative lifestyles (Ljungberg, 2020), which incorporate disconnection as part of a broader experience. Others are entirely built around it, such as technology-free summer camps for adults, commonly known as digital detox camps (Fish, 2017; Karlsen, 2023). However, when considering digital disconnection in conjunction with utopia, three points are worth keeping in mind. First, digital disconnection is generally not understood as complete abstention from technology, but rather as “people’s mundane, reflexive responses to the role that smartphones and computers should play in everyday life” (Albris et al., 2024, p. 12). In line with this, Karlsen (2023) recommends that digital connection and disconnection should not be “seen as a binary pair but a spectrum of practices fluctuating between embracing and refraining from use of specific media technology” (p. 361). Second, as was implicit in the previous point, digital disconnection is not a distant eventuality but is already being enacted in everyday contexts. Historically, technological innovation has consistently been met with resistance (Syvertsen, 2017), indicating that digital disconnection is not a novel phenomenon but rather its most recent manifestation. This development has been accompanied by a surge in interdisciplinary research, with digital disconnection studies receiving recognition as a field in its own right (Altmaier et al., 2024). Capturing this conjuncture of growing scholarly as well as public attention to practices of nonuse alongside broader critiques of digital media, Fast (2021) coined the term “disconnection turn,” and Albris et al. (2024) similarly frame this development as a “digital backlash.” Third, digital disconnection is not an ultimate remedy. Despite its growing momentum, associated practices largely remain individual tools, whereas digital enforcement and digital-by-default societies operate at a structural level, rendering nonuse not always feasible (Díaz Andrade and Techatassanasoontorn, 2021; Kuntsman and Miyake, 2022; Van Dijck, 2013). Hence, it is within this complex landscape of visions of continual innovation marked by potentially dystopian qualities and the general possibility yet persistent uncertainty of nonuse that the longing for less gains a utopian character.

Study Focus: Smartphones and Women in Emerging Adulthood

The promotion of tech-driven utopias by states and industries appears seemingly at odds with a growing societal aspiration for digital disconnection. This raises the question: If ordinary people had the opportunity to define their own utopias for life with technology, what might they say? Following this research interest, the present study invited participants to imagine the role technology might play in an ideal world. Given the potential ambiguity of the terms “technology” and “digital media,” it uses

smartphones as a tangible entry point to contemporary discourse on the implications of ubiquitous connectivity. It thereby follows the recent invitation by Vanden Abeele and Syvertsen (2025) for research on mobile media and digital disconnection to recognize and leverage their shared stakes in questions surrounding mobile media affordances and media resistance.

Moreover, the study specifically examines women in the conceptual life stage of emerging adulthood, defined as ages 18 to 29 by Arnett (2000), within the previously introduced national contexts of Germany and Norway. This focus on gender and age is grounded in digital disconnection research that increasingly examines gendered dynamics. Just as technofeminism has highlighted how male-dominated technology industries and broader gender norms shape experiences and expectations of connectivity (Wajcman, 2004), such a perspective is now being extended to digital disconnection. Nonetheless, much of this research has focused on caregivers, typically wives and mothers, conceptualizing them as more constrained in their ability to disengage as their obligations increasingly extend into the digital realm (Beattie, 2020; Bozan and Tréré, 2023; Fast, 2021). As a result, women outside these roles have received comparatively less attention. This gap is particularly relevant for women characterized by heightened self-focus and fewer daily obligations, which are key features of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Arnett et al., 2014). While women in this age range may still assume care responsibilities, their relative independence creates additional opportunities to examine women's experiences of digital disconnection.

The study also draws on further characteristics of emerging adulthood, including identity exploration, possibilities, and optimism (Arnett, 2010; Arnett et al., 2014). Having reached the age of majority, emerging adults are no longer subject to parental regulation. This newfound freedom is theorized to extend to media consumption and contribute to "a time of unparalleled fun" (Arnett, 2010, p. 271). However, taking on responsibility for both content choices and the amount of time spent can also introduce challenges (Coyne et al., 2016). Moreover, as cultures, technologies, and broader social circumstances evolve over time, so too does what it means to be an emerging adult (Arnett et al., 2014). Scholars therefore encourage ongoing cross-national research on media use during this life stage to remain attuned to both the opportunities and challenges it entails (Benvenuti et al., 2023).

Today's women in emerging adulthood find themselves at an interesting juncture: a life stage marked by newfound independence and minimal obligations, shaped by omnipresent technology such as smartphones and a cultural quest for moderation, whereas states and industries continue to endorse further innovation. Recognizing this context, this study draws on the creative potential for reflection and speculation that women in emerging adulthood may bring to this moment.

Method

The study employed a two-part qualitative data collection process followed by a thematic analysis. First, the participants received a sheet of paper with the prompt:

Imagine living in an ideal world.
What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?
Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!

The prompt phrasing is the result of five pretest versions. After establishing the context of utopian imagination and the smartphone as the entry point, no further requests were added, allowing participants to reveal which aspects they prioritized. Participants had 15 minutes to respond in a silent setting, using a variety of colorful pens, pencils, markers, and other materials (e.g., eraser, pencil sharpener). The exercise builds on prior research into users' expression, imagination, and speculation. Notable examples include Timár (2023), who invited participants to write a love or break-up letter to technology, resulting in in-depth descriptions of ambivalent emotional experiences. Markham (2021) conducted a performance ethnography involving various speculative interventions in museums, encouraging visitors to critically reflect on technology and finding that many struggled to envision viable alternatives. Kopecka-Piech's (2025) study on speculative design examined how emerging adults conceptualized apps related to digital disconnection, with varying levels of creativity and feasibility. Her findings highlighted the need for future research to engage this age group in imagining measures beyond the digital realm, aligning with the present study's approach. To this end, the study incorporates artistic modes of expression, such as visual arts and creative writing (Cole and Knowles, 2008; McNiff, 2011). This methodology is consistent with the study's utopian framework, as creative inquiry processes are "defined by an openness to the expansive possibilities of the human imagination" (Cole and Knowles, 2008).

Second, to further contextualize their prompt responses, participants took part in interviews in which they elaborated on their outcomes, answered follow-up questions, and discussed broader topics related to their experiences with smartphones and digital disconnection. The interviews lasted between 44 and 67 minutes and were subsequently transcribed and anonymized. To promote accurate representation of participants' identities, they were encouraged to self-select a pseudonym (Pretorius and Patel, 2025). The data collection took place between August 5 and December 18, 2024.

To avoid projection and misinterpretation, the analysis approached the prompt outcomes not as artworks with latent meaning but through their multimodality (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). Accordingly, the three forms generated by the prompt exercise – drawings, text (i.e., full sentences), and bullet points – were treated as distinct semiotic modes of data, intended by the participants to convey specific messages, just as the interview transcripts were. All modes were subjected to thematic analysis, a recognized analytical approach in qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2022), with the process leading to the development of the three key themes presented in the results section.

The study included 20 participants who met three inclusion criteria: self-identified as women, in emerging adulthood, and from either Germany ($n = 10$) or Norway ($n = 10$). Due to language limitations, the prompt exercise was conducted in English with Norwegian participants and in German with German participants. Recruitment followed a snowball sampling method, with outreach extending to a nursing school, a running club, and university students. Table 1 presents an overview of the participants, including their

Table 1. Sample Characteristics.

Pseudonym	Age	Country	Occupation ^b	Prompt Outcome ^b
Anneliese	27	Germany	Paramedic	Drawing
Ares	26	Norway	Nursery aid, BA student	Drawing and bullet points
Elin	25	Norway	BA student, healthcare assistant	Drawing
Emily ^a	28	Norway	PhD student	Text
Emma	29	Norway	MA student	Text
Freyja	27	Norway	Museum receptionist	Text and drawing
Friederike ^a	22	Germany	BA student	Bullet points
Hind	26	Norway	Marketing manager, BA student	Bullet points and drawing
Kine	23	Norway	Content creator	Drawing
Laura ^a	29	Germany	Educational coordinator	Text
Lilly	19	Germany	Nursing trainee	Drawing and text
Liv	22	Norway	BA student, waitress	Drawing and text
Luka	27	Germany	Research assistant, PhD student	Text and drawing
Mia	24	Germany	Massage therapist	Text and drawing
Michelle	20	Germany	Nursing trainee	Bullet points and drawing
Nora	29	Germany	Consultant, PhD student	Text
Romy	27	Germany	Research assistant, PhD student	Drawing and bullet points
Sara	29	Norway	Advisor	Drawing
Sydney	20	Germany	Nursing trainee	Drawing and text
Vilde	29	Norway	Advisor, MA student	Text

^aThese participants did not select their own pseudonyms but instead agreed to suggestions.

^bThe main occupation/prompt outcome mode is listed first.

pseudonyms, age, country of residence, occupation, and the main modes of their prompt outcome. None of the participants have children, which was not an inclusion criterion but rather reflects a common characteristic of women in this age group from these countries, where the average age at first childbirth is 30.4 years in both Germany (Destatis, 2024) and Norway (Statistics Norway, 2025b). The project has received approval from the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (No. 378655), confirming adherence to ethical standards in data handling.

Results

Three key themes are presented below: (1) ideal self, (2) ideal technology, and (3) ideal society.

Ideal Self

Participants consistently took themselves as the point of departure, noting that, in an ideal world, their smartphone use would differ from their current habits. At present, they echoed contemporary concerns about the intrusiveness of digital media and the desire to disengage (Albris et al., 2024; Alter, 2017; Fast, 2021; Vorderer, 2016), referring to



Figure 1. Luka's prompt outcome (excerpt).

themselves as highly dependent on their devices, regularly distracted, and, in some cases, even as addicts. Ideally, however, they would manage to use their smartphones just the right amount. Luka, for instance, drew herself listening to music while ignoring an incoming call on her vibrating smartphone (Figure 1). She further explained that she often gives in to a perceived pressure to be immediately available, especially to her largely female friend group and to her girlfriend. In her ideal scenario, Luka alone would determine when she is available, independent of external influences. Her account illustrates that efforts to disengage amid navigating conflicting social expectations of availability, which Fast (2021) terms “disconnective work,” are not limited to heteronormative relationships or to women in caregiving roles. Rather, they also occur within relationships between women.

Other participants also described a desire to be more intentional about their smartphone use, one of them being Michelle. She suggested the need “to create boundaries and building blocks” to limit the extent to which the device plays a role. Freyja provided a concrete example of such building blocks in her interview, saying she would like to ask herself more often, “Is this really necessary?” or “Is there anything else I need to do first?” when using her smartphone. Instead of scrolling, she wants to spend more time on hobbies, trying new things, and being with people. Similarly, Laura wrote in her prompt response that an ideal world makes her think of “nature, of garden, of time spent with family, time in the here and now, in which the smartphone does not play a role. At least it would not play an active role.” Elin illustrated how more such time could be allowed for by imagining her phone would, by default, remain “behind bars” in her purse (Figure 2).

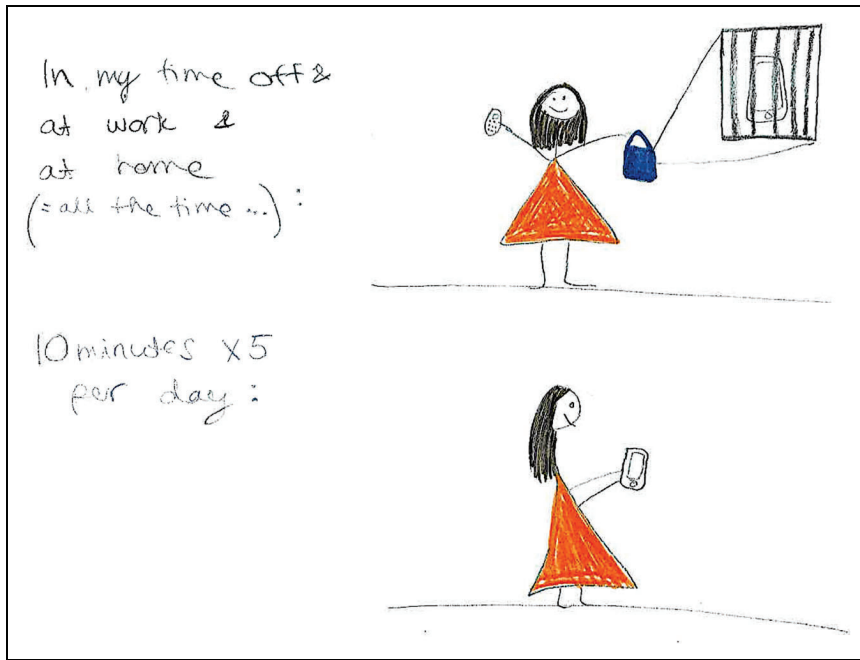


Figure 2. Elin's prompt outcome (excerpt).

Her idea resembles the existing post-digital consumer object of mobile phone boxes, in which smartphones are temporarily stored to minimize distraction. Some of these, in fact, take the form of tiny jails, symbolizing the growing disenchantment with digital life that characterizes the post-digital condition (Cramer, 2014; Fast and Syvertsen, 2024). In Elin's ideal world, she would allow herself to take the phone out of its jail only for ten minutes, five times per day, far below the Norwegian average daily screen time of 4 hours and 35 minutes (Statistics Norway, 2025a).

Some participants mentioned having tried digital detox apps to manage their screen time. These apps aim to "beat technology with technology" (You, 2024, p. 175) by limiting specific apps after a preset time. However, these limits can often be dismissed. Hence, as Hind put it, an obvious solution would be to "maybe not ignore the time limit!? [LAUGHS]." Across the sample, the women saw the ability to exercise self-discipline as integral to their ideal worlds. Such views seemingly mirror dominant self-help narratives, which frame individuals as responsible for their smartphone use and recommend that taking specific, small-scale actions can help them regain control (Karlsen and Syvertsen, 2016; Syvertsen, 2020). This pattern is also visible in Sara's self-portrait, depicting herself at home, with her phone placed in a drawer and an on/off switch connected by an arrow (Figure 3). In her interview, she explained that the drawing reflects her desire to put her phone away more often. Notably, the act of placing a device into a drawer, as well as the other practices described in this section, are already accessible.



Figure 3. Sara's prompt outcome (complete).

A study by Mannell (2019), for instance, identified several of the suggested ideas among the participants in the present study, such as putting the phone at a physical distance or delaying responses, as “disconnective affordances” currently employed within its own sample. So, when asked whether Sara could see herself following through with her proposed strategy, she responded candidly that she had been thinking about it but also described herself as lazy. This, in turn, consolidates the theme of an “ideal self,” in which participants do not desire disconnection practices themselves, but rather an inner drive to enact them.



Figure 4. Lilly's prompt outcome (excerpt).

Ideal Technology

Some participants initially responded to the prompt by imagining life entirely without smartphones. Lilly, for instance, wrote in her prompt response: "In an ideal world, I wouldn't need a smartphone anymore," accompanied by a depiction of a crossed-out device (Figure 4). Freyja wrote: "Ideally, I wouldn't have a smartphone in the first place. I would love to simply have a small brick phone like in the early 2000s and only use it for calling and texts." Her prompt response was likewise accompanied by a crossed-out device (Figure 5). However, throughout the interviews, Lilly and Freyja's stances became more nuanced, as both also acknowledged the smartphone's benefits. This process of deconstructing their initial rejection and developing a more ambivalent view is especially discernible in Emily's prompt outcome. She wrote: "My first thought was none! but then I started thinking ... Through my smartphone I connect with friends and family that lives[-sic] far away." Accordingly, Lilly, Freyja, and Emily revised their initial responses to accentuate that, while smartphones might not disappear, in an ideal world, they would at least play a lesser role.

Other participants also voiced their interest in reducing the impact of the smartphone by redefining its role from a distracting force to something more positive. Freyja, Vilde, Emma, and Nora described the ideal role as a "tool," Romy as a "helper," Hind as a "colleague," Friederike as an "everyday companion," and Michelle as an "accompanying item," whereas Laura simply stated that its role should be "functional." To achieve this, Elin drew a model of a technological solution. She explained that she is intrigued by the idea of a phone without internet access, were it not for the essential services she relies on in everyday life, such as online banking and digital identification. Hence, whereas a "smart" phone has too many functionalities, a "stupid" one has too few. Her



Figure 5. Freyja's prompt outcome (excerpt).

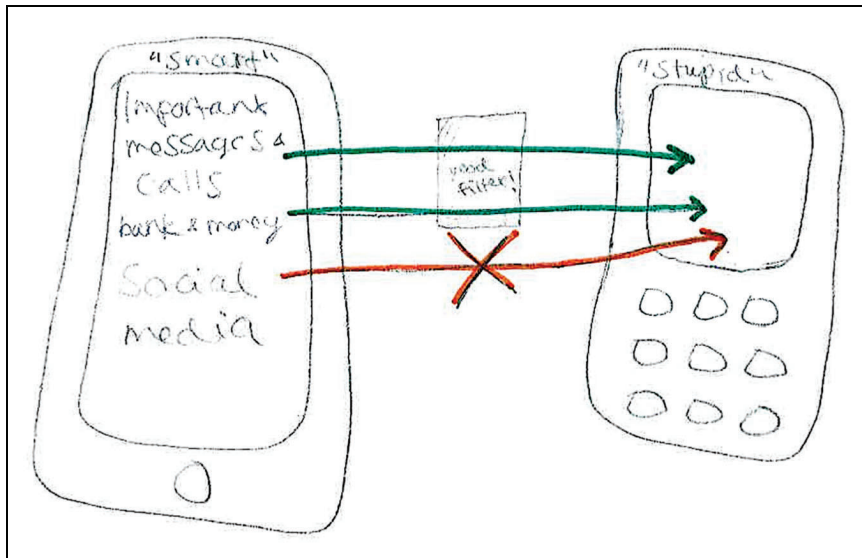


Figure 6. Elin's prompt outcome (excerpt).

solution would be a “good filter” that allows the user to access essential internet-based services while blocking distractions such as social media (see Figure 6).

Strikingly, imaginings of ideal technology not only included limiting current technology but, in a few cases, also advancing it. One such case was Friederike:

I would like to see some replacement of smartphones with other technologies. For example – I don't know – some kind of chips in our hands that we can use to pay or identify ourselves.

Her imagining aligns with a broader desire among participants to reduce the presence of devices and to deploy technological solutions to mitigate the very effects of technology (You, 2024). At the same time, its embrace of implantable chips brings Friederike's vision close to ideas that are publicly debated for their dystopian potential (Vogiatzoglou, 2017). This, in turn, underscores the deeply subjective nature of both utopian and dystopian imagination.

Aligning with interdisciplinary scholarship (Alter, 2017; Domalewska, 2025; Sorokowski and Sobczak, 2025), participants problematized the addictive qualities of technology design experienced firsthand, attributing them to the profit-oriented structure of the technology industry. As Freyja explained:

I mean they make money off of people being on social media. And I don't feel like they hide that very well. I think that it is very obvious that they want people to stay on their phones.

When asked what the technology industry could do, Mia suggested that apps be designed in a way that draws users in less. Providing a concrete example, Emily referred to notifications featuring gentle reminders to disconnect, such as "Oh, now you've been here for 8 h!," "Maybe you should sleep!," or "You've seen enough for today!" Still, when probing deeper, participants disregarded existing initiatives, such as the aforementioned digital detox apps. Instead, they viewed the idea of companies genuinely caring about users' interests as unrealistic, assigning a dystopian character to the technology industry. Romy expressed:

I'd say the tech industry is focused on making money, and I don't think they care that we'll soon run out of rare resources, and that it's always just about getting bigger. And I have no hope that anything could change because they couldn't care less.

In her ideal world, Nora would like to see technology and platforms offered by grassroots movements or public service companies, which might be more attentive to users' needs. But she too concluded her vision by saying that these movements and companies would probably never do it. When asked why, she said: "You'd have to figure out how to make money with it, beyond 'We sell data.' And I don't think that is easy." Consequently, although the women often identified the technology industry as a key reason their current relationship with smartphones was not ideal, they struggled to envision change, even when prompted to engage in utopian thinking.

Ideal Society

In reflecting on their relationship with smartphones, participants also acknowledged external influences. For instance, as emerging adults, most of the women were students or had just started their first jobs, often experiencing heightened stress. Consistent with the concept of escapism (Herzog, 1941), the women reported frequently turning to their

devices to unwind during their downtime. Romy explained that her previous job had been very stressful and that her phone offered a quick and easy form of distraction, expressing hope that her upcoming new job would be the solution. Expanding on the role of work, Emma articulated a critique of capitalist work culture and expressed a desire for shorter workdays:

Well, it's just that I imagine that if people had more spare time, they would have more energy. And then I think we wouldn't kind of just revert like automatically to like looking at our phone all the time.

Participants also highlighted the influence of infrastructure, with distinctions between countries emerging. Norwegian participants reported that, without a smartphone, they would struggle to go about their day. An example of this is Elin, who works as a student in a healthcare facility and relies on electronic identification through her smartphone. This is a process with which participants working in the German healthcare sector, including Anneliese, Lilly, Michelle, and Sydney, were unfamiliar. Most Norwegian participants also mentioned that when using public transport, they typically bought tickets via an app, with the only alternative being to purchase tickets from convenience stores. In contrast, although digital tickets are also available in Germany, ticket machines on public transport and at stations remain the standard.

In terms of smartphone dependence in social contexts, both Norwegians and Germans demonstrated similar experiences. Sydney detailed that her current plan to delete TikTok will not only affect her, but that her friends expect her to send and receive short videos on the platform, requiring her to justify her decision before doing so. In general, participants described their smartphone use as deeply interwoven with their friends, families, partners, and society at large, echoing the arguments that digital participation is not merely a matter of individual choice (Díaz Andrade and Techatassanasoontorn, 2021; Kuntsman and Miyake, 2022; Van Dijck, 2013). Liv exemplifies this in her reflections on social media, noting that while she could potentially reduce her use, doing so might exclude her from her social life. Meaningful change, therefore, would require collective involvement:

I think it's important for people to know that my age group, like young adults, we don't want to be addicted to social media. It's not a choice, it's a force. You know. Because you have to have it to fit in. So, I feel like if I made a deal with everyone else to quit, I would go for it.

The desire for collective change is especially evident in Anneliese's drawn prompt response (Figure 7). In her view, smartphones are the product of a historical development that increasingly divides people. She illustrated how the negative impact of technology has grown over time, represented by dots above each year mark that increase in size, with 2024 (the year the interview took place) marked by a large circle. To put smartphone use further into perspective, she drew planet Earth, a Saturn-like planet, and a black square at the center of Earth to represent how small devices seemingly hold the entire universe in their grip. In an undated ideal scenario, by contrast, people would find a balance between "real life" and "social media," "connecting" with and "supporting" each other.

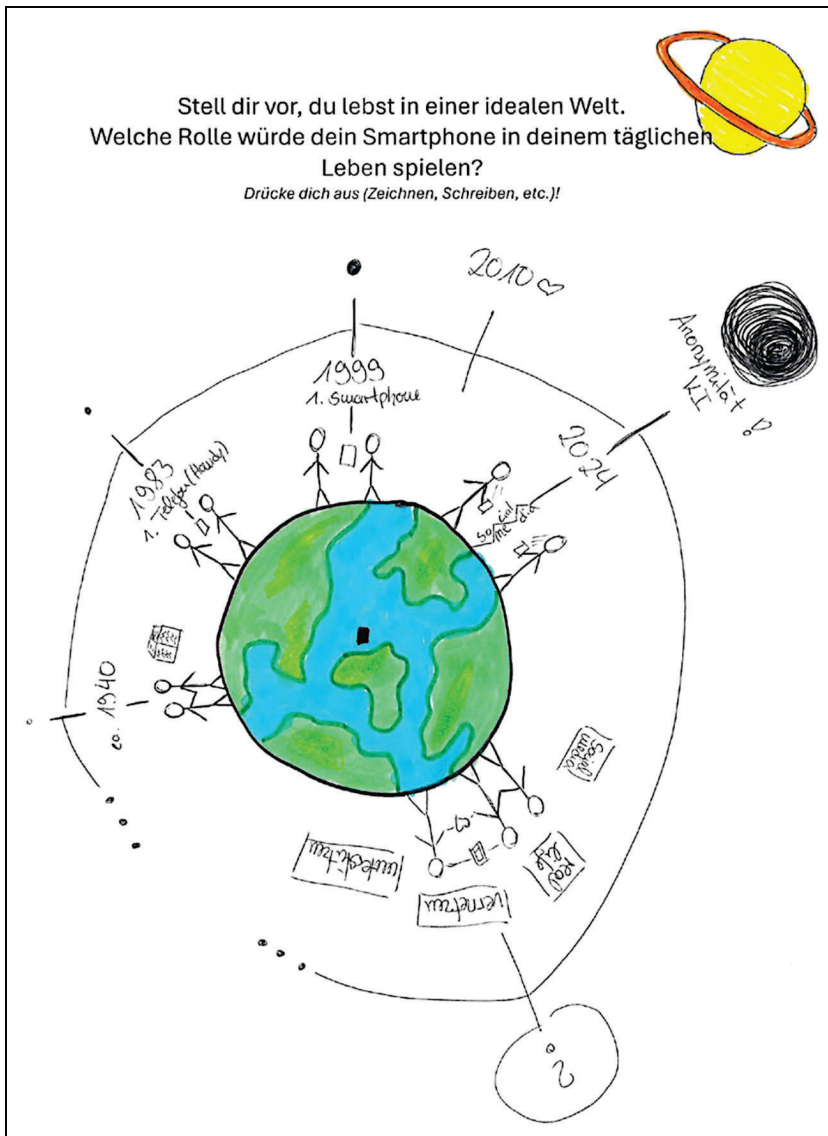


Figure 7. Anneliese's prompt outcome (complete).

Although several participants envisioned society undergoing collective change to achieve their ideal worlds, the makeup of this collective remains elusive. Having already ruled out the technology industry, participants could only imagine two types of interventions from state bodies. First, by making the internet safer, potentially through regulating

platforms, and second, by restricting and educating children and teenagers about smartphone use. The latter was especially prominent among Norwegian participants, as the Norwegian government had recommended keeping smartphones out of classrooms shortly before data collection (Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 2024). However, when discussing concrete ways in which state bodies could support not only students but media users more generally, participants stressed caution. Many saw government intervention as an unjustified intrusion into personal behavior, as expressed in Luka's comment: "I don't think politics should be allowed to dictate media use *per se*." Concerns regarding legal interventions also appear in academic work. Van Dijck (2013), for example, questions the effectiveness of such laws, noting that social norms often outweigh formal regulation. Hesselberth (2018) adds to this critique by arguing that the "right to disconnect," which refers to labor laws limiting employer contact outside working hours, paradoxically reinforces the idea that connectivity precedes disconnectivity.

With individuals, the technology industry, and state bodies removed, the pool of potential leaders of collective change becomes noticeably smaller. Sydney suggested that influencers could take on this role, echoing Emily's reference to "role models, people you look up to." Many participants expressed particular concern about how smartphone overuse affects children, with Emma, Lilly, Sydney, Michelle, Laura, Romy, Luka, and Emily emphasizing that parents hold the responsibility to ensure balance for future generations. Yet again, when the focus shifted to current generations of adults, responses became vaguer. Elin said that "we" need to reshape the norms of "our culture," Emily referred to "all of us," and Ares mentioned both "guerrilla fighters" and "people from every single side," whereas Kine and Sydney spoke more broadly about "humans." Their imaginings are rooted in the belief that the current world needs to undergo large-scale change, though they do not offer insight into how this process should unfold. Importantly, this absence of "blueprints" is not a deficiency but rather a defining characteristic of utopian thinking, as it reflects the capacity to disregard the constraints of existing measures and freely envision something entirely ideal (Kateb, 1965; Levitas, 2013).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined how women in emerging adulthood from Germany and Norway imagine an ideal relationship with their smartphones, employing creative inquiry. A thematic analysis of the multimodal data led to the development of three themes: (1) ideal self, (2) ideal technology, and (3) ideal society. Across all themes, the imagined worlds revolved around a core idea: finding a balance between smartphone use and nonuse. As such, the study's results resemble desires for digital well-being, a twin concept of digital disconnection (Vanden Abeele and Syvertsen, 2025). Specifically, Vanden Abeele (2020) defines digital well-being as "the subjective individual experience of optimal balance between the benefits and drawbacks obtained from mobile connectivity" (p. 938). Consequently, the findings reveal that even though these women are exposed to technology-driven utopias promoted by states and industries, their own imaginings nonetheless challenge both compulsory connection and the imperative of continuous

innovation. Importantly, this does not mean that the women are entirely against technology, nor that devices would disappear from their imagined worlds. Rather, it highlights that conceptions of ideality are contestable, don't have to be polarized, and may instead take more nuanced forms.

By applying utopian thought as a framework, the analysis revealed perceptions of responsibility. In many cases, the women initially saw their own shortcomings in managing mobile media consumption as the main barrier to an ideal relationship with their smartphones. This aligns with dominant narratives in self-help content and with the broader concept of responsabilization, which holds that individuals bear responsibility for their media use and its consequences, with little to no accountability placed on authorities (Karlsen and Syvertsen, 2016; Syvertsen, 2020). Notably, even though participants had the opportunity to challenge these liberal underpinnings, they did not envision scenarios in which this responsibility was lifted from them. A possible reason is that they may have internalized these dynamics too deeply, as imagination remains shaped by existing circumstances (Levitas, 2013; Markham, 2021). Accordingly, they expressed a desire for greater self-discipline, aspiring to successfully implement practices and strategies commonly found in self-help content.

When asked why they did not simply follow the suggested steps, participants explained that beyond habit and convenience, doing so might exclude them from their social circles and the broader societal infrastructure. Although they regarded smartphone use as an individual matter at the outset, they gradually came to see overconnectivity as a systemic issue, aligning with scholarly conceptions of digital enforcement, digital-by-default societies, and a culture of connectivity (Díaz Andrade and Techatassanasoontorn, 2021; Kuntsman and Miyake, 2022; Van Dijck, 2013). In considering how this issue might be addressed, they dismissed both the technology industry and state bodies, viewing their interference as either misaligned with their respective interests or too intrusive. Instead, they envisioned a somewhat leaderless change in which society at large calibrates connectivity and disconnection. Such a conception of collective change partially resonates with labels such as digital backlash, disconnection turn, and post-digital condition, all of which are argued to already be underway (Albris et al., 2024; Cramer, 2014; Fast, 2021). This invites reflection on whether these shifts primarily signal changing sentiments or have developed into observable actions that indeed challenge broader digital compulsion. It also underscores the importance of context. This study focuses on Germany and Norway, and its findings resonate strongly within these settings, as discussed further below. Future research could build on this work by examining societal structures across a wider range of social environments, including different communities and national contexts beyond Europe.

Given the sample's distinct inclusion criteria, a number of insights regarding gender, age, and national context became visible. Despite the sample consisting solely of women, the matter of gender receded into the background, likely because the prompt did not explicitly invite reflections on demographics. While several drawn responses included self-portraits in which the women depicted themselves with feminine signifiers such as dresses and long hair, they did not further emphasize their gender identity when providing context for their visions in the follow-up interviews. Still, the participants offered some

insight into their identities as women by tying their imaginings to roles as friends, daughters, sisters, and romantic partners to men and women, showing that smartphones could play both supportive and straining roles in managing these relationships. This indicates that disconnective work has a considerable impact beyond heteronormative or mother–child dynamics. In this way, the study extends previous contributions on women and digital disconnection (e.g., Beattie, 2020; Bozan and Treré, 2023; Fast, 2021) by adding a childfree perspective, underscoring the importance of considering women at different stages of life and in diverse roles.

Regarding age, unrestricted access to media has been framed as a characteristic of emerging adults' independence, which can be both challenging and an expression of their newfound freedom (Coyne et al., 2016). Here, the findings of this study clearly reinforce the interpretation that such unrestricted access can be overwhelming. Building on work that highlights the changing circumstances of emerging adulthood (Arnett et al., 2014) and identifies media use as a key direction (Benvenuti et al., 2023), this study underscores the need to attend to how ubiquitous connectivity not only fosters opportunities but also creates pressures within this life stage.

As for national differences, Norwegian participants reported a greater reliance on smartphones, which they attributed to the country's highly digitalized infrastructure. They also frequently referenced the government's recommendation to keep smartphones out of classrooms (Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 2024). This suggests a more active and nuanced public debate on digitalization in Norway than in Germany, which, at the time of the interviews, had not yet established a Ministry for State Modernization and Digitalization. Despite these differences, the thematic analysis presents the same three key themes across both countries, which may reflect their shared positioning within a highly digitalized European context.

Naturally, this study also comes with limitations. Whereas state bodies and tech leaders command extensive resources to develop their visions, the participants in this study were constrained by a 15-minute time frame, reliance on basic writing and drawing materials, and limited prior experience with visualization and strategizing. Even so, through this creative inquiry, the study sought to foster access to imaginative spaces, aligning with Benjamin's (2024) argument that everyone should have the right to such spaces. Beginning with 20 women in emerging adulthood from Germany and Norway, the approach can likewise be applied to many demographics not included here, such as other genders, socioeconomic classes, ethnicities, and national contexts.

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Ethical Approval

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Appendix C: Article III

Kratel, V. A. E. (under review). Handling What Hurts: Digital Disconnection in the Context of Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women.

Unpublished Manuscript.

Handling What Hurts: Digital Disconnection in the Context of Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women

With users navigating conflicting feelings about the benefits and drawbacks of digital media, its use is increasingly understood as an ambivalent experience. Among the disadvantages commonly associated with this ambivalence are disruptions to daily routines (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020), heightened expectations of constant availability, and the pervasive presence of screens in everyday life (Syvertsen, 2022). Achieving digital wellbeing, as argued by Vanden Abeele (2020), thus requires users to find an optimal balance, underscoring the relationship between connection and disconnection as a “multifaceted and contradictory phenomenon” (Treré, 2021, p. 1666).

Within this context, research has increasingly focused on practices of reduced digital media use, i.e., digital disconnection, that extend beyond complete refusal. These include adjustments to everyday routines and temporary forms of abstention (Altmaier et al., 2024; Ross et al., 2024; Syvertsen, 2020). Moreover, scholars emphasize that disconnection is not a universal experience, highlighting meaningful differences across demographic groups (Altmaier et al., 2024; Beattie, 2020; Treré, 2021). Such perspectives raise questions about whether digital disconnection is always voluntary and draw attention to potential intersections with frameworks of the digital divide and digital inequalities (Bozan & Treré, 2023; Hartmann et al., 2025; Treré, 2021). At the same time, digital disconnection has been conceptualized as a potential privilege that may not be equally accessible to all (Beattie, 2020; Nguyen & Hargittai, 2023; Portwood-Stacer, 2012). Building on this line of inquiry, the present study examines experiences of digital disconnection among women in emerging adulthood ages 18 to 29 (Arnett, 2000; Arnett et al., 2014).

This focus is informed by prior research on digital disconnection and gender. Existing studies have examined gendered dynamics particularly in relation to women in caregiving roles, noting that digital media can help manage responsibilities while also creating new expectations of constant availability that limit opportunities to go offline (Bozan & Treré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023). Men, in contrast, are often understood to be less bound by care obligations and therefore to be less restricted in their digital media use (Beattie, 2020; Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023). Although these discussions raise timely points about the gender imbalance of care work and its impact on the ability to pursue digital disconnection, gendered experiences and broader conceptions of care outside formal caregiving roles within heteronormative nuclear families have received far less

attention. To address this gap, the study employed semi-structured interviews with 20 women in the conceptual life stage of emerging adulthood, ages 18 to 29. This stage is characterized by heightened self-focus and typically involves the fewest formal care obligations across the life span, thereby making it a particularly well-suited context for examining gendered dynamics other than those associated with motherhood or household labor (Arnett, 2000; Arnett et al., 2014).

The study set out with the broad research question: *How do women in emerging adulthood experience digital disconnection in the context of their gender?* While participants often decentered gender when reflecting on smartphone and internet use more generally, they consistently foregrounded their experiences as women when describing disconnective measures used to avoid hostile online encounters. In response, the study anchored its further analysis in the UN Women's (2023) definition of technology-facilitated violence against women (TF VAW), adopting an abductive approach (Vila-Henninger et al., 2024). This shift prompted the integration of an additional, refined research question: *How do women in emerging adulthood experience digital disconnection in the context of technology-facilitated violence against women?*

Addressing this question, the study identified four recurring ways in which digital disconnection was reported as a form of protection against TF VAW: (1) avoiding hostile online spaces, (2) blocking harassers, (3) handling dick pics, and (4) hiding face and body online. Still, participants also highlighted how continued connectivity can serve protective functions in offline contexts. Through these findings, specifically by identifying TF VAW as a key context of digital disconnection, the study makes several empirical and conceptual contributions. It demonstrates how women frame disconnective practices as agentic choices within a nonetheless deeply structural issue, thereby contributing to ongoing debates about the voluntariness of such actions (Bozan & Treré, 2023; Hartmann et al., 2025; Nassen et al., 2023; Ross et al., 2024; Treré, 2021). In addition, the study identifies several lesser-known forms of digital disconnection, some of which take on a distinctly preemptive character, thereby broadening the prevailing scope of such practices. These insights also emphasize that it is not always devices or platforms themselves that are avoided, but rather the antisocial to outright violent behavior of other users.

(In)Voluntary Digital Disconnection and Gender

With research on digital disconnection not only gaining momentum but also receiving recognition as its own field, scholars seeking to delineate *digital disconnection studies* have

largely framed the focus as voluntary practices (e.g., Nassen et al., 2023; Ross et al., 2024). In this framing, digital disconnection resonates with Wyatt's (2002) early taxonomy of technology non-use, particularly her category of "Want Nots." These include "resisters," who have access to technology but choose not to use it, as well as "rejecters," who deliberately withdraw following prior use. "Have Nots," by contrast, encompass the "excluded," who never had access, and the "expelled," who have lost it. Digital disconnection studies have so far softened the totality implied by non-use to encompass practices alongside continued digital media use, yet the overall focus on withdrawal as a voluntary choice rather than the outcome of an involuntary circumstance remains relevant (Nassen et al., 2023; Ross et al., 2024). Viewed in this way, an emphasis on voluntary disconnection could be understood as a productive complement to research frameworks such as the digital divide and digital inequalities, which have traditionally examined non-use in contexts of limited access and literacy (Hargittai, 2021; Van Dijk, 2020).

However, recent scholarship challenges this distinction, arguing that under conditions of continued technology diffusion, constraints on access may coexist with desires for digital disconnection. Treré (2021), for instance, critiques the predominantly Western framing of digital disconnection and draws attention to diverse practices across the UK, India, China, Argentina, Mexico, and Colombia. One notable insight is that in underprivileged neighborhoods, disconnection often stems from exhaustion rather than deliberate choice. Bozan and Treré (2023) further illustrate how challenges related to both unreliable coverage and the burdens of technology shape experiences among villagers in rural Turkey. Hartmann et al. (2025) document similar dynamics among roofless individuals in Germany, who felt overwhelmed by maintaining social contacts after receiving devices through smartphone distribution projects. To capture the overlap between barriers to access and the challenges of sustained connectivity, they introduce the concept of the "disconnection divide."

Research has also started to emphasize situations in which technology use itself may not constitute an active choice but instead reflects an involuntary condition. Nguyen and Hargittai (2023) argue that such unequal capacities to disconnect in an always-connected world should be understood as a distinct dimension within digital inequality theories. Resonating with this perspective, a growing strand of research within digital disconnection studies focuses on the sociodemographic traits that potentially hinder people's capacity to step back. Age-related examples include Jorge et al. (2024), who found that Norwegian and Portuguese teenagers feel pressured to remain online to not miss out on socially significant experiences, whereas Nguyen et al. (2021) observed that adults aged 59+ rarely reported such

difficulties. Research on ability status includes Klausen's (2024) study of how people with chronic illnesses negotiate partial disconnection while relying on technologies for treatment, as well as Beattie's (2025) work on individuals with ADHD, which argues that common accounts of digital disconnection overlook neurodivergence.

Attention has also been devoted to gender, with a particular focus on women's experiences in relation to caregiving roles. In this context, Fast (2021) introduces the rhetorical figure of the "post-digital housewife," who must manage her own digital consumption habits as well as simultaneously support those she cares for in developing a balanced relationship with technology. This dynamic often gives rise to double binds, as illustrated by the aforementioned study by Bozan and Tréré (2023), in which mothers reported making an effort to be available to their children's teachers via their phones while feeling the need to reduce their use in order to spend more time with their children. This reinforces a sentiment identified in Van Bruyssel et al.'s (2023) study, which analyzed gendered messages in the marketing of disconnection workshops and retreats. The researchers found that products targeted toward affluent women often promote digital disconnection as a form of self-care, framing attention to women's own needs as a means of sustaining their capacity for caregiving. Taken together, this scholarship paints a picture in which both women's digital disconnection and connection are shaped by gendered caregiving expectations. In contrast, men's digital disconnection is often framed as autonomous and associated with performance, leadership, and productivity (Beattie, 2020; Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023).

The focus directed toward gender in digital disconnection studies seems to be closely positioned at the blurred boundary between voluntary and involuntary (non-)use. Although these contributions provide important arguments and initial empirical support for the claim that digital disconnection is gendered, they rely on a narrow understanding of gender that equates women with caregiving roles and positions men outside of them. Seeking to extend this research through additional, potentially gender-related angles, the present study focuses specifically on women in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Arnett et al., 2014). This conceptual life stage provides a particularly relevant lens, as it is characterized by heightened self-focus and typically fewer social roles and obligations than other stages of the life course. According to the literature, emerging adults have generally moved beyond adolescence and are no longer expected to respond to the demands of parents or school authorities. At the same time, while some may have begun to take on adult commitments, they are typically unmarried, childless, and not yet established in long-term employment. As a result, they

occupy an in-between position marked by increasing self-responsibility and the pursuit of their first major independent life decisions (Arnett, 2000; Arnett et al., 2014).

Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women (TF VAW)

Through its deliberate focus on women in emerging adulthood and its abductive approach, the study anchors its analysis in the UN Women's definition of TF VAW:

Technology-facilitated violence against women (TF VAW) is any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms (UN Women, 2023, p. 4).*

This definition stems from the UN Women's longstanding work to combat violence against women through its role as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Within this work, UN Women has consistently acknowledged the ambivalent role of technology in women's lives. On the one hand, the organization recognizes the capacity of digital technologies to expand opportunities for political expression, education, employment, and leisure; on the other hand, it has also drawn attention to the emergence of new forms of violence that frequently limit women's access to these benefits on a global level. On this basis, the definition is the outcome of an expert group convened to establish a common conceptual foundation for addressing technology-facilitated violence against women (UN Women, 2023).

The report accompanying the definition acknowledges that technology-facilitated acts of violence can affect anyone who is online, yet places strong emphasis on women being disproportionately targeted and on such violence being often motivated by the victim's gender (UN Women, 2023). These assertions are supported by studies on the disproportionate global prevalence of such violence against women, indicating that women in the age span of emerging adulthood are especially targeted, alongside more entrenched risks associated with intersectional factors (Das NETTZ et al., 2024; Plan International, 2020; Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019).

Regarding specific manifestations of TF VAW, the definition itself is intentionally time-invariant, with the overall report providing more concrete examples such as online harassment, the nonconsensual sharing of intimate images, and cyberstalking (UN Women, 2023). In this regard, the UN Women definition resonates with highly publicized incidents

such as Gamergate, an organized harassment campaign targeting women in the gaming industry that escalated into widespread online misogyny (Mortensen, 2018), as well as the collective publication of more than 500 images of mostly celebrity women without their consent in 2014 (Massanari, 2017). Such incidents and their broader dynamics have also been examined within feminist media studies, which emphasize that women's access to and visibility in online spaces do not inherently translate into greater gender equality (Blandini, 2021; Harvey, 2019). This aligns with UN Women's claim that negative online experiences deny women the opportunity for full participation in and enjoyment of the online realm (UN Women, 2023). Consequently, women's retreat from online spaces can not only be understood as a response to, but as an expression of TF VAW, linking this phenomenon directly to questions surrounding digital disconnection and digital inequalities.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews with 20 participants who self-identified as women in emerging adulthood from Germany ($n = 10$) and Norway ($n = 10$). Table 1 presents participants' self-chosen pseudonyms, ages, countries of residence, occupations, and relationship statuses.

As argued above, the focus on women in emerging adulthood, defined as ages 18 to 29 (Arnett, 2000; Arnett et al., 2014), was deliberately chosen to shift attention toward women who are largely theorized as being outside formal caregiving roles, thus offering the potential to extend prior research. Participants in the present sample closely aligned with multiple characteristics associated with emerging adulthood. Most were pursuing education, consistent with the defining feature of not yet having a long-term employer (Arnett et al., 2014). The majority were in relationships with men, with only one participant married and another divorced. This is also consistent with the absence of formal caregiving roles in emerging adulthood as well as with broader demographic trends, given that the average age of first marriage for women is 32.9 in Germany (Destatis, 2025) and 35.2 in Norway (Statistics Norway, 2025b). Likewise, none of the participating women had children, reflecting a pattern common among women under 30 in both countries (Destatis, 2024; Statistics Norway, 2025a).

In addition to these sociodemographic considerations, the study is situated within the broader structural contexts of Germany and Norway. With Norway holding a comparative edge, both countries exhibit high levels of technology diffusion and strong commitments to digitalization, rendering questions of access and digital literacy comparatively less salient in

either context (e.g., Federal Ministry for Digital and State Modernisation, 2025; Norwegian Ministry of Digitalisation and Public Governance, 2024). Both countries also rank highly in terms of safety for women (GIWPS & PRIO, 2025) and on further measures of gender equality (e.g., World Economic Forum, 2025), with Norway shaped by a longstanding tradition of state feminism (Hernes, 1987). In this study, Norway therefore represents a highly digitalized and gender equal yet relatively small Nordic context, and Germany a larger and more centrally positioned European context.

Table 1
Sample characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Country	Occupation	Relationship status
Anneliese	27	Germany	Paramedic	Single
Ares	26	Norway	Nursery aid, BA student	Single
Elin	25	Norway	BA student, healthcare assistant	In a relationship (woman)
Emily*	28	Norway	PhD student	In a relationship (man)
Emma	29	Norway	MA student	In a relationship (man)
Freyja	27	Norway	Museum receptionist	Married (man)
Friederike*	22	Germany	BA student	In a relationship (man)
Hind	26	Norway	Marketing manager, BA student	Divorced, in a relationship (man)
Kine	23	Norway	Content creator	In a relationship (man)
Laura*	29	Germany	Educational coordinator	Single
Lilly	19	Germany	Nursing trainee	In a relationship (man)
Liv	22	Norway	BA student, waitress	Single
Luka	27	Germany	Research assistant, PhD student	In a relationship (woman)
Mia	24	Germany	Massage therapist	In a relationship (man)
Michelle	20	Germany	Nursing trainee	In a relationship (woman)
Nora	29	Germany	AI advocate, PhD student	Single
Romy	27	Germany	Research assistant, PhD student	In a relationship (man)
Sara	29	Norway	Advisor	Single
Sydney	20	Germany	Nursing trainee	Single
Vilde	29	Norway	Advisor, MA student	Single

* These participants did not select their own pseudonyms but instead agreed to suggestions.

The interviews explored participants' everyday experiences of digital disconnection, encompassing both positive and negative interactions with digital media. In addition, the interview guide included questions that did not explicitly foreground gender alongside others that directly addressed participants' identities as women. Given the broad scope of the term technology, central to UN Women's (2023) definition, and the emphasis on digital media in digital disconnection studies (e.g., Altmaier et al., 2024; Nassen et al., 2023), smartphones

and the internet served as initial points of reference, helping to establish a shared understanding among participants.

The interviews lasted between 44 and 67 minutes. Following completion, transcripts were anonymized using pseudonyms that participants selected or confirmed to reflect their identities (Pretorius & Patel, 2025). The project received ethical approval from the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (No. 378655), confirming compliance with relevant ethical standards. The interviews formed part of a larger data collection process, with this article specifically focusing on interview data related to gendered experiences that have not previously been analyzed. More specifically, the article presents findings from an analysis that began as a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and evolved into an abductive analytical process (Vila-Henninger et al., 2024). Initial familiarization with the data led to the identification of safety and violence as salient themes, which guided the integration of UN Women's definition of TF VAW as an analytical reference (UN Women, 2023). This definition then informed an iterative process of interpretation across the interview material.

Results

The results are organized into three sections. First, *Women's Perspectives on Gender and Digital Disconnection* are presented. The second, *Digital Disconnection as Protection*, forms the core of the analysis, examining four recurring instances of digital disconnection in relation to TF VAW. Third, the final section, *Connectivity as Protection*, adds nuance to the preceding analysis by highlighting how connectivity can also provide a sense of safety.

Women's Perspectives on Gender and Digital Disconnection

When explicitly asked whether being women shaped their smartphone use, most participants expressed uncertainty or loosely pointed to algorithms that tailor content to young women. Beyond this, they most commonly problematized their own consumption habits while largely decentering gender, instead framing these habits as personal shortcomings echoing self-help discourses of individual responsibility and optimization (Syvertsen, 2020). A notable exception, however, were Romy and Liv, who argued that expectations regarding when to be online or offline, particularly those directed at women in formal caregiving roles such as mothers or those working nine-to-five jobs, could in fact be beneficial. Contrary to interpretations that frame minimal responsibilities and the absence of parental regulation of screen time as a form of freedom (Coyne et al., 2016), both participants

expressed a longing for the structure they anticipated in motherhood. This led them to view formal expectations in an overly positive and relatively uncritical way, effectively forming an antithesis to the recurring argument in digital disconnection studies that women in formal caregiving roles are at a disadvantage (Beattie, 2020; Bozan & Treré, 2023; Fast, 2021; Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Van Bruyssel et al., 2023).

In contrast to these accounts, Anneliese and Sydney, both German, rejected the idea that there could be any link between gender and technology use. Anneliese stated that she did not believe gender differences exist, instead framing issues related to overconsumption as a matter of being “human.” Similarly, Sydney, who was otherwise very talkative during her interview, gave brief responses and denied that being a woman played any role, despite later detailing several severe experiences of TF VAW. Notwithstanding that the underlying reasons for their dismissive reactions cannot be definitively identified here, their responses seem to emphasize personal choice over shared struggles and to position technology as neutral, aligning with postfeminist sentiments (Gill, 2007). This interpretation can also be situated within the participants’ national contexts: Norway’s explicit commitment to state feminism contrasts with developments in Germany, where the growing visibility of right-wing politics has contributed to increased public ridicule of gender-related issues (Hernes, 1987; Luxton et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, participants’ accounts across both national contexts repeatedly touched on gender, particularly in broader discussions of negative experiences with smartphones and the internet. In these moments, often without explicitly recognizing it, they described certain experiences as being shared among their female friends or by women more generally. As these references accumulated most clearly when participants discussed instances that fall under the definition of TF VAW, the study incorporated this framework into further abductive analysis, establishing this focus as a key outcome of the research rather than its explicit starting point.

Digital Disconnection as Protection

Across the data, the women described four recurring ways in which they employed disconnective strategies to protect themselves from TF VAW:

(1) Avoiding Hostile Online Spaces

Many participants reported a broader pattern on online platforms in which users receive unwanted attention as soon as they are perceived as women. Ares, for instance,

signed up on a language learning platform, set a profile picture, and immediately received inappropriate messages, which led her to delete the app within the same hour of installing it. Other participants described similar dynamics across a range of platforms, noting that overtly negative treatment toward women often emerges once their gender identity becomes visible. Participants most commonly reported experiencing this in public comment sections on social media platforms. Here, Emily stated, “I think the comment section looks different when a woman has written something or said something than when a man has.” She further explained that anticipating such hostility leads her to carefully evaluate whether to engage at all, ultimately finding it “not always worth it.” Nora described abstaining from commenting for the same reasons. She reflected that, rather than avoiding comment sections entirely, an alternative strategy could involve adopting a male-signifying account name, a practice already prevalent within the gaming community. A study conducted in the United States, China, and Germany found that 59% of participating women reported masking their gender when playing games to avoid conflict (Reach3 Insights, 2021). In this sense, Nora suggested that such a pseudonym would allow her to engage in debates “in a completely different way,” indicating that she does not currently feel able to fully participate in online spaces when her actual gender identity is visible. Her account thus echoes broader observations that TF VAW poses a “threat to women’s participation in public life and democratic deliberation” (Posetti et al., 2025, p. 6).

Moreover, technology-facilitated violence is argued to be intensified by intersectional factors (Plan International, 2020), as illustrated by two lesbian participants. Luka explained that she not only refrains from commenting but also avoids reading comments on LGBTQ+ topics altogether, as the prevalence of homophobia deeply affects her. Michelle expressed similar feelings, noting that homophobia is a persistent feature of the internet and often prompts her to turn off her phone entirely.

(2) Blocking Harassers

Whereas participants largely described harassment in comment sections as reactionary, the women also shared several instances of targeted harassment. An example is found in Luka, who recalled casually chatting with a young man she had met at school. When she did not respond as quickly as he expected, he lashed out, sending messages filled with misogynistic slurs. She ultimately blocked him, an action that falls under the broader category of *unfriending*, which also includes the act of reversing the digital friendship ties it is named after (Zhu, 2023). In Luka’s case, blocking brought the harassment to an end.

Kine's experience, however, differed. As a full-time influencer producing dance and gaming content, she reported encountering targeted harassment almost daily. To manage this, she emphasized the importance of having content moderators in her chat who block users on her behalf. At the same time, she noted that these measures are only partially effective:

"I've had this one guy, he's been harassing me for months now. He comes in almost every single stream. [...]. So, we ban him every time. But he makes a new account, and he comes in and he writes that I am a disgrace to my family. That I have ruined my white race because I have an Asian boyfriend. And that my father hates me."

In both cases, the block function was highlighted as a means of defense, even though in Kine's case it could not fully neutralize the perpetrator and merely inconvenienced him. Both participants consequently framed blocking as a self-directed response to perceived wrongdoing. This framing resonates with John and Agbarya (2021), who identify blocking, particularly within structural power asymmetries, as a form of "punching up," comparable to flipping someone off. Hence, aside from functioning as a tool with varying degrees of effectiveness, blocking also serves as a means for victims to channel their anger.

(3) Dealing with Dick Pics

Based on participants' reports of various experiences with TF VAW, the women conveyed a shared understanding that certain online spaces and types of content are best avoided. When Lilly first began using online platforms, however, she was not yet aware of this premise:

"When you were younger and on Snapchat, you kind of accepted everyone—thank God I don't do that anymore—and then out of nowhere, a dick pic or something like that would show up. There were definitely perverts in action."

Her quote indicates that she initially approached online contacts with a degree of curiosity but quickly encountered unpleasant situations. She explained that these could largely be avoided by limiting interactions with strangers, particularly by denying new contacts from the outset. Still, while this strategy may indeed lead to the nonreceipt of undesired content, it seemingly shifts the responsibility for avoiding such instances from

perpetrator to victim, as signified by Lilly thanking herself for no longer accepting everyone on Snapchat.

Notably, experiences of receiving unsolicited dick pics were widely shared among participants. As Luka noted, all of her “female friends have experienced something like that at some point.” This statement aligns with findings from a study conducted in Germany, which reported that 42% of women aged 16 to 24 have received unsolicited intimate images (Das NETTZ et al., 2024). Beyond proactively adjusting privacy settings to prevent such encounters, participants also described deleting these images as a way of moving on. Nora, for example, recounted how she and her roommate dealt with receiving pornographic material from a handyman who was scheduled to work in their apartment. Aside from deciding not to hire him again, they took no further action, referring to the act of reporting him as a “hassle” and expressing a desire to forget about the incident altogether. Her statement points to an expectation that addressing the situation would prolong feelings of discomfort and shame. This sentiment was similarly reflected in Emily’s account, in which she deleted an unsolicited dick pic sent by someone in her study cohort. Rather than reporting the incident to her university, removing the image appeared to offer a quick way to erase any traces of the incident from her phone and to avoid an emotional aftermath. Friederike, however, was the only participant in the sample to actively push back against unsolicited dick pics. As sending such images can be prosecuted under the law in both Germany and Norway, she has reported several of such instances to the police through the online initiative *Dickstinction* (n.d.). She described the reporting procedure as straightforward but emphasized that she has never received any follow-up and has therefore seen no concrete consequences for the senders. Even so, she hopes that through contributing her experiences to official statistics, “one day people will realize that this is a problem.”

(4) Hiding Face and Body Online

The participants also described experiences of nonconsensual pornography victimization, defined as the distribution of sexually explicit images without the consent of the individual depicted (Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019). In these cases, the violence is directed not at the recipients of the images but at the person whose photos are shared. Feminist scholarship indicates that this form of victimization disproportionately affects women (Harvey, 2019; Massanari, 2017), with evidence from the United States documenting heightened vulnerability among those in emerging adulthood (Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019).

Sydney recounted her distressing experience of sending intimate photos to a male acquaintance:

There was a phase where I really needed compliments and—I don't know—the easiest way was to wear nothing. And yes, he immediately showed everything to his friends and so on.

Romy witnessed a similar incident in high school, in which an ex-boyfriend of a friend spread nude pictures in the aftermath of their relationship “with the obvious aim of humiliating her.” She further explained that although the perpetrator was sentenced, albeit very mildly, her friend continued to be judged by her social environment. The core argument voiced by her peers reflected victim blaming attitudes, suggesting that if someone wants to avoid such incidents, they should simply refrain from taking or sending such material in the first place. Adding to the portrayal of leaked nude images as a nightmare scenario to be avoided, Ares emphasized that the threat does not depend on the authenticity of the images. She described having encountered digital forgeries, i.e., deepfakes, in which the faces of celebrity women were edited onto nude bodies. In her view, the problem is intensifying with the rise of AI-generated imagery, aligning with ongoing public debate as well as current legislative efforts in the United States aimed at curbing these practices (DEFIANCE Act of 2024, 2023). As a result, and in light of her earlier negative experience on the language-learning app, Ares takes precautions by avoiding the upload of any photographs that show her face.

Aside from nude photographs, the participants were generally very reluctant to post pictures of themselves. Even though several participants reported that societal beauty standards have become less rigid with the growing popularity of the body positivity movement and that they gained greater confidence in their bodies after adolescence, they remained cautious about creating opportunities for unwanted scrutiny. Michelle, for instance, stated that she feels intimidated by not knowing what kinds of comments might follow from her social environment if she were to post a picture and therefore chooses not to post at all. This reinforces an overall trend within the data: to avoid TF VAW, the prevailing strategy is to limit one's visibility from the outset. Friederike, however, once again diverged from this pattern, as she was among the few participants who posted more frequently. She is studying to become a teacher, is involved in local politics, and works part-time as a travel influencer. Yet while posting images of her body set her apart from participants who avoided online

visibility, her experiences also confirmed the scrutiny they feared. She reported receiving comments that questioned her professionalism and legitimacy as an emerging teacher, such as, “your students shouldn’t be able to find you in a bikini on the internet with just two clicks!” Remarks like these can be particularly hurtful during a life phase marked by efforts to establish credibility and competence (Arnett et al., 2014).

Connectivity as Protection

Alongside experiences of TF VAW within the online realm, participants did not portray connectivity solely as a threat, but also as a source of protection. One such case was Emily, who shared that she feels reassured knowing that her family members share their GPS locations with one another via their smartphones at all times:

Going home late at night, It’s obviously scary sometimes. And I feel like most girls have been in situations that weren’t ideal. And having, like, my location on, so my family can see where I am all the time. [...] That’s nice, so they know where I am.

Although both Norway and Germany rank among the safest countries in the world for women, the *Women, Peace and Security Index* highlights that women in neither country fully feel safe walking home alone at night (GIWPS & PRIO, 2025). The participants in this study reflected these sentiments, reporting feeling unsafe when out alone at night and describing their smartphones as a means of enhancing their sense of safety. This practice further aligns with a study by Cumiskey and Brewster (2012), which found that women considered mobile phones to be effective means of self-defense in potentially unsafe situations, even more so than pepper spray. The core element in carrying a device lies in the ability to signal that one is not truly alone. Sara, for instance, described calling each other when going home at night as an established routine among her friends. Ares reported that her friends call her after they have arrived home safely, and Sydney detailed an agreement with a friend to reach out whenever she feels unsafe. In this respect, the practice is deeply reciprocal, with female friends both reaching out and being reached out to. This also highlights that, despite not occupying formal caregiving roles, the participating women were deeply embedded in practices of care. In particular, the reciprocal nature of giving and receiving care resonates with Fisher and Tronto’s (1990) *feminist theory of caring*, which positions friendships and feminist sisterhoods as key sites of mutual care.

Concurrently, Cumiskey and Brewster (2012) also raise concerns, noting how reliance on smartphones for safety evokes new connectivity standards. This resonates with research arguing that digital disconnection is not always feasible for women (Beattie, 2020; Fast, 2021; Portwood-Stacer, 2012), as well as with Klausen (2024), who also raises this concern in relation to chronically ill patients. Even though technology can be crucial in supporting chronically ill patients, she argues that it is nonetheless problematic in that it limits patients' opportunities for disengagement. Such a case was present in this study in the account of Liv, who has type 2 diabetes and uses an app that alerts her to changes in glucose levels before intervention is required. She, however, described her smartphone as supporting her health monitoring solely in positive terms, much like the women who reached out to friends in potentially unsafe situations.

Discussion and Conclusion

This interview study deliberately focused on women in emerging adulthood and their experiences of digital disconnection. By foregrounding women's perspectives beyond those associated with formal caregiving roles, the study found that while participants did not prominently frame their digital consumption habits in gendered terms, they described recurring instances in which digital disconnection served as protection against TF VAW.

Through this newfound focus, the study's findings make several empirical and conceptual contributions. These include contributions to scholarly debates on voluntariness and digital disconnection, moving past established concerns with involuntary connectivity and the dual conditions of overconnection and unequal access. In this regard, reports documenting large-scale patterns of TF VAW have conceptualized women's digital disconnection not merely as an outcome, but as an active pushout from digital spaces as part of TF VAW itself (Blandini, 2021; Posetti et al., 2025; UN Women, 2023). From this perspective, women's disconnective practices can be situated within frameworks of digital inequality and the digital divide. The participants, however, did not interpret their withdrawal as a problem, let alone a structural one. Instead, they framed their disconnective practices as self-directed actions that function as powerful tools of self-protection. Their interpretation resonates with dynamics described in broader digital disconnection scholarship, in which users manage both the benefits and harms of digital connectivity through selective withdrawal (Syvertsen, 2022; Vanden Abeele, 2020; Ytre-Arne et al., 2020). Just as the omnipresence of screens must be managed, so too must potential encounters with TF VAW, raising the question of whether these challenges and their associated practices are

fundamentally different. Returning to Wyatt's (2002) taxonomy, these disconnective practices appear to fit neither the category of being expelled against one's will, as the women describe their measures as agentic choices, nor that of conscious rejecters, since the drivers of their withdrawal remain outside their control.

It is perhaps unsurprising that scholarly analyses and personal accounts diverge; yet this does not mean that one holds greater legitimacy than the other. Rather, they illuminate the same issue at different scales, each holding merit in its own right. In analytical terms, the focus is on examining the structural impact of TF VAW by analyzing population-level patterns, often with the aim of raising political awareness and contributing to its eradication (e.g., Das NETTZ et al., 2024; Plan International, 2020; UN Women, 2023). In lived terms, women who experience TF VAW firsthand seem to have little incentive to step back and interpret these incidents at a more abstract level, a reluctance potentially amplified by the shame that accompanies them. Instead, they seek to avoid and manage such instances of TF VAW in the moment, with disconnective measures serving as a primary tool. Considering their perspective, it seems reasonable not to problematize the very strategies that function as immediate forms of protection.

In integrating these perspectives, this study argues for a pluralist scholarly approach that understands digital disconnection as neither solely a matter of the involuntary digital divide nor exclusively one of voluntary withdrawal, but as a phenomenon that spans both. Despite the appeal of clear analytical boundaries, especially in an emerging field, the findings caution against rigid categorizations. Accordingly, they call for analytical openness that allows issues and practices that might otherwise remain at the margins, such as TF VAW, to come more clearly into view.

Beyond tracing the prevalence and forms of TF VAW, this study helps to explain how targeted individuals actively reconfigure their patterns of use in response. In doing so, it has also identified several lesser known forms of digital disconnection, extending existing typologies such as Mannell's (2019) disconnective affordances and the strategies classified in literature reviews of prior research on digital disconnection by Altmaier et al. (2024) and Nassen et al. (2023). Research in this area is generally challenged by the fact that the practices it seeks to capture tend to involve omissions, that is, actions that characteristically do not take place (Kaun, 2021; Ross et al., 2024). Here, the interviews proved to be a particularly generative source of new insights, as the women described various activities they deliberately avoided or discontinued. These included a range of distinctly preemptive

measures, such as refraining from commenting due to fear of destructive responses, steering clear of certain comment sections because of expected hostility, or not setting a profile picture out of concern that it might be misused for intimate digital forgeries. This suggests that digital disconnection is shaped not only by actual instances, such as blocking a perpetrator *after* harassment, but also by the anticipation of potential instances of TF VAW. Another such example is the denial of new online contacts from the outset, which could also be interpreted as an additional form of unfriending. Alongside severing digital friendship ties, muting, and blocking, which are already conceptualized under this term (Zhu, 2023), the women also described related actions such as deleting traces of abusive interactions and reporting perpetrators. These practices resonate particularly with unfriending, as they highlight a relational dimension of digital disconnection in which the aim is less to distance oneself from devices or platforms than from other people online (John & Agbarya, 2021; Zhu, 2023). Thus, whereas research often focuses on social dynamics such as peer expectations to remain connected (Jorge et al., 2024) or demands for presence in offline interactions (Syvertsen, 2020), the present findings demonstrate that digital disconnection is also shaped by antisocial to outright violent behavior.

As with all research, this study has its limitations. While participants shared some intersectional experiences related to sexual orientation and health, they were privileged in many other respects. This points to the need for further research that attends more closely to additional intersectional dimensions. Considering the increasing repression of trans people, for instance, it may be valuable to examine the role of digital disconnection for this group using UN Women's (2023) adjusted definition of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF GBV), accounting for the experiences of gender non-conforming individuals. Such work could also contribute to broader efforts within digital disconnection studies to develop deeper insights into gender, an undertaking that has so far largely taken place within gender-binary frameworks. Ultimately, through its deliberate focus on women in emerging adulthood and its abductive approach to TF VAW, this study demonstrates how new insights can emerge from novel angles and aims to inspire future research.

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Appendix D: Participant Consent Form (Articles II & III)

Are you interested in taking part in the research project "Gendered Experiences in Digital Disconnection in Everyday Life"?

Purpose of the project

You are invited to take part in a research project aimed at understanding how women manage their offline and online lives.

This research project is focused on women aged 18 to 29 who live in Germany and Norway.

The research project is part of a doctoral thesis aimed at understanding how women perceive their conditions for digital disconnection.

Through a short online survey and interviews, the goal is to explore how they balance being offline and online in today's world. The study will also examine which aspects of their everyday lives influence their use of digital media, using smartphones as a key example.

Additionally, this research seeks to uncover women's ideal vision for their relationship with digital media, considering whether conditions need to change to facilitate an easier balance between offline and online life.

Which institution is responsible for the research project?

Kristiania University College in Oslo, Norway, is responsible for the project.

Victoria A. E. Kratel, a PhD fellow at Kristiania University College, conducts this research under the primary supervision of Faltin Karlsen and the secondary supervision of Lene Pettersen.

Why are you being asked to participate?

- You are a woman
The research project aims to explore how women use digital media in their daily lives, including individuals who self-identify as women.
- You are between the ages of 18 and 29
Another criterion is an age range of 18 to 29, representing the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The study aims to understand the unique circumstances experienced by this demographic.
- You live in either Norway or Germany
Participants must live in Norway or Germany, both known for high digital infrastructure and commitment to equality.

The sampling process involves social media, local clubs (such as sports clubs and choirs), and snowball sampling, where new participants are recruited through current participants.

What does participation involve for you?

If you decide to join this project, you'll be asked to complete a short online component and a longer offline component.

- Online component (ca. 10 minutes)
Completing a questionnaire.
- Offline component (ca. 90 minutes)
Answering a written prompt and conducting an in-person interview.

a) Before the interview begins, you will receive a paper-based survey with a question about your smartphone use. You can respond by writing, drawing, or both. There are no right or wrong answers. You will have about 10 minutes for this, but if you finish early or need extra time, that is perfectly fine (ca. 10 minutes).

b) We will begin the interview by discussing your response to the paper-based survey. I will then ask you questions about how you use your smartphone in your daily life, as well as other digital media (ca. 80 minutes).

Our conversation will be recorded using a secure application called Nettskjema, and I will also take notes. Only the project team will have access to the recording. Once it has been transcribed, meaning our conversation has been written down, the recording will be deleted completely.

The interviews will take place in either English or German.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

Your personal data will be used solely for the purposes specified here and will be processed in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation). It will be stored securely using an online assessment tool managed by Nettskjema.no, developed by the University of Oslo.

Identifiable information, such as names, will not be used in the research. Names and contact details necessary to facilitate the research will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data, accessible only to the project team.

When presenting the data, no identifying information will be used. This means that while details such as age, highest degree of education, and occupation will be included, names and location indicators will be replaced with fictitious ones to ensure anonymity.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The planned end date of the project is 06.08.2026. At that time, digital recordings and identifiable information will be deleted. Anonymised data will be retained to allow for further research until 31.12.2030. After this, all data from the project will be deleted.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with Høgskolen Kristiania and The Data Protection Services of Sikt – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project meets requirements in data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Kristiania University College
via VICTORIA A. E. KRATEL
Mail: victoria.kratel@kristiania.no
Phone: +47 938 69 283
- Data Protection
Kristiania University College
forskadm@kristiania.no
Guro Gidske
Mail: guro.gidske@kristiania.no
Phone: +47 926 48 147
- If you have questions about how data protection has been assessed in this project by Sikt, contact:
Mail: personverntjenester@sikt.no
Phone: +47 73 98 40 40.

Yours sincerely,

Victoria A. E. Kratel

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project "Gendered Experiences in Digital Disconnection in Everyday Life" and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

I give consent:

- ☐ to participate in the online questionnaire.
- ☐ to participate in the paper-based survey.
- ☐ to participate in the interview.
- ☐ that researchers Victoria A. E. Kratel, Faltin Karlsen, and Lene Pettersen have access to information about me from the methods mentioned above.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end of the project.

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix E: Creative Prompt Exercise and Interview Guide (Articles II & III)

Creative Prompt Exercise (original format, presented on a blank sheet):

Imagine living in an ideal world.
What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?
Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!

Topic 1: Discussion of the prompt result

Prompt: Imagine living in an ideal world. What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?

- Describe what you have drawn/written
 - What does this mean?
- How different is this from your current situation?
 - If different: What prevents you from achieving this?
 - If not different: What helps you to achieve this?

Topic 2: Positive experiences with smartphones

- Since when do you own a smartphone?
- What do you like about your smartphone?
- What do you like about the Internet or digital media in general?
Clarification: This includes digital devices (e.g. laptops, tablets, smartwatches), web services (e.g. online shopping) and apps (e.g. Instagram, TikTok)
- Which digital devices are the most important in your life?
- What do you think are the biggest benefits of using a smartphone?
E.g. convenience, community, trends, updates on social and political issues
- Has using your smartphone ever made you feel safer?
 - If yes, how so?
E.g. staying updated, when alone (at night, on public transport, in nature), sharing your location, being available in emergencies

Topic 3: Negative experiences with smartphones

- If you lost your smartphone, what would be the first problem you would face?
- What do you like least about your smartphone?
- What do you like least about the Internet or digital media in general?
- Do you think you use your smartphone too much?
 - If yes, what do you think is the reason for that?
- Are there certain apps you would like to delete?
 - If yes, which ones?
 - What keeps you from deleting these apps?
- Have you ever had negative experiences using your smartphone?
 - Have you ever had negative experiences using the Internet or other digital media in general?
 - Do you feel comfortable sharing these experiences?
E.g. peer pressure, bullying, harassment, body image
- Have you ever felt unsafe using your smartphone?
 - Do you feel comfortable sharing these experiences?
E.g. surveillance, cybercrime, bullying, or harassment, viruses

Topic 4: Digital Disconnection

- Do you have specific times when you try not to use your smartphone?
E.g. around family, around friends, during work, during holidays
- Do you have any locations where you try not to use your smartphone?
E.g. in the office, in nature, in the bedroom, at a meal table
- Do you have any tools that help you to manage your smartphone use?
E.g. a designated place to park a device, digital detox apps
 - How did you come across them?
- Have you ever gone offline for an extended period of time?
 - If yes, please tell me more about it.
- Is there anything that keeps you online when you want to go offline?
 - If yes, what?

Topic 5: Self-perception

- What do you think your smartphone use tells about you?
- Do you think your smartphone use affects how you view yourself?
→ If yes, how so?
- Is the person you present to be online different from who you are offline?
→ If yes, how so?
- Do you think your Smartphone use is related to you being a woman?
→ If yes, what do you think would be different if you were a man?
- Do you use digital services or apps that are tailored for women?
E.g. marketing apps, menstrual cycle trackers, contraception trackers

Topic 6: Relationships

- How would people close to you describe your relationship with your smartphone?
E.g. friends, family, partner
- If you lost your smartphone, who would be the first to notice besides yourself?
E.g. friends, family, partner, work, network, community
- If you lost your smartphone, who would be the last person close to you to notice?

Topic 7: Speculative questions

- How do you think your relationship with your smartphone might change within the next year?
→ Due to own intentions
→ Due to new technology (e.g. artificial intelligence)
- Do you believe the way we humans relate to smartphones needs to change?
→ If yes, in which ways?
→ Who is responsible such changes?
→ Technology industry
→ Politicians
→ Yourself
- What do you see as the most important societal benefit of smartphones?
→ How could this be made even better?

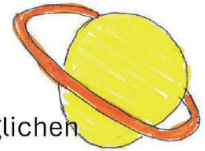
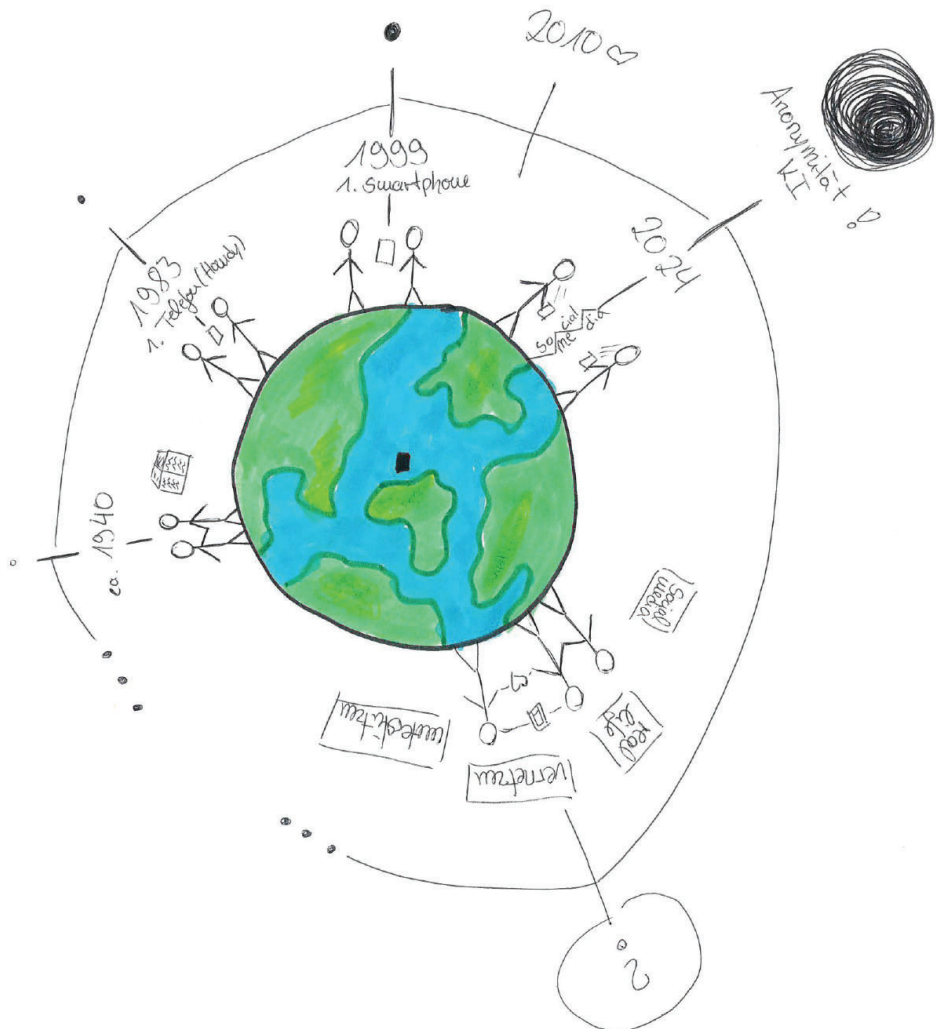
END:

- Is there anything else you'd like to add about the topics we've discussed?
- What is the most important point we've covered today?

Appendix F: Prompt Outcomes (Article II)

Stell dir vor, du lebst in einer idealen Welt.
Welche Rolle würde dein Smartphone in deinem täglichen
Leben spielen?

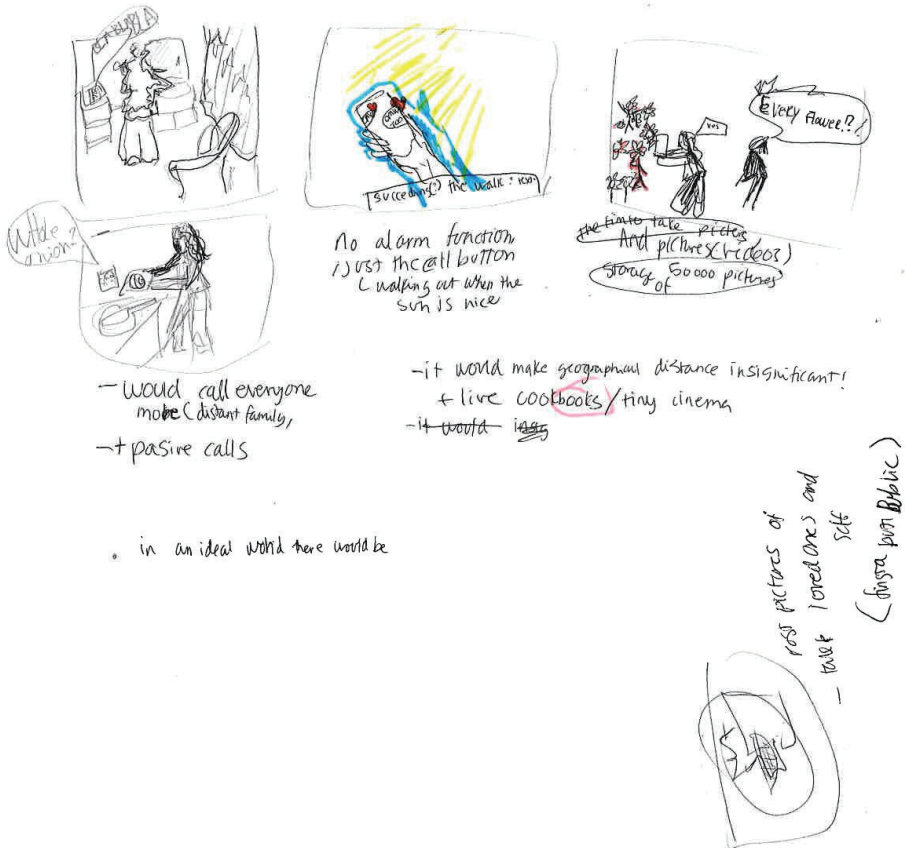
Drücke dich aus (Zeichnen, Schreiben, etc.)!



Anneliese (27, Germany)

Imagine living in an ideal world.
What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?

Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!



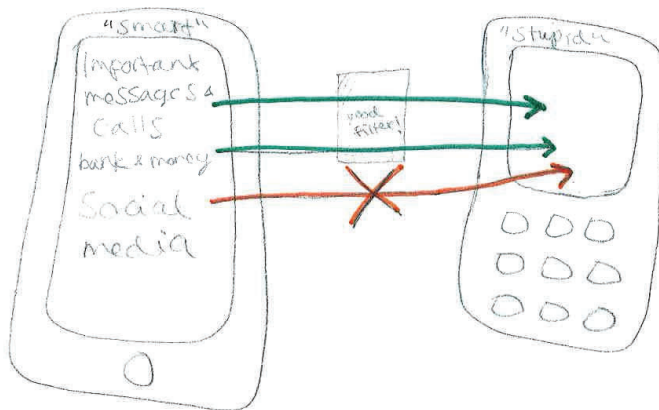
Imagine living in an ideal world.
What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?

Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!

In my time off &
at work &
at home
(= all the time ...):



10 minutes x 5
per day:



Elin (25, Norway)

Imagine living in an ideal world.
What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?

Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!

My first thought was none!

but then I started thinking...

Through my smartphone I connect with friends
and family that lives far away.

Facetime lets me see them; Changing, aging, living,
being creative & living their life.

They can help me (and I them) with practical
issues like which screwdriver to use because
they can see what I see through the
smartphone. We can try on dresses before going out.

This part I like. this part I like to keep.

HOWEVER
watching a movie, eating lunch, having a
meeting with someone that's not there
with me, but instead somewhere ^{else} on their
phone... this part I would not keep in
my ideal world.

(OR THAT I DON'T
SEE EVERYDAY)

I would keep the parts that connect me to people
far away, but remove the parts that
disconnects me from being present with
the people I'm here with now (in person)

Emily (28, Norway)

Imagine living in an ideal world.

What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?

Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!

→ for everyone, so everyone has ^{more time and} (maybe a bit more) energy
Ideal world: shorter working day, more time for hobbies,
creative projects, exercise, friends, family etc. = more energy to spare

The smartphone would still have useful
functions like maps, tickets, messaging etc., but
would be more of a tool than centre of
attention.

less need of ^{the phone} ~~at~~ work for checking emails,
notifications, messages etc.

At home: the phone would stay in a different
room than me (at least sometimes).

also less expectations of being available 24/7,
working hours respected

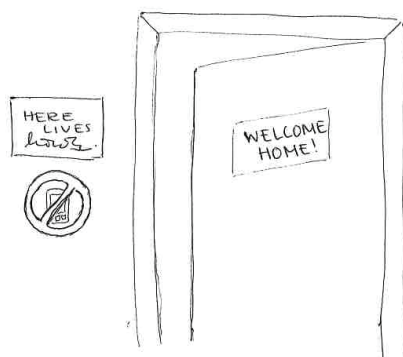
Imagine living in an ideal world.
What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?

Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!

Ideally, I wouldn't have a smartphone in the first place. I would love to simply have a small brick phone like in the early 2000's and only use it for calling and texts. The rest I would be fine – and pleased – without. I would not constantly be distracted by the content that a smart phone feeds me. It would just be a tool for reaching me and for reaching others. Maybe a map & a calendar, but that's it.

Hence, in an ideal world, my phone would play a much smaller role in my daily life. Consequently releasing me to spend more time and focus on the things I'd rather do, like hobbies, exploring new things, spending time (more time) with people. It would not be the extension of my being, as a smartphone is often described to be, just a clever tool that I could easily live without.

I feel like I would be more at peace that way, with a "dumb" phone with minimal presence.



Freyja (27, Norway)

Stell dir vor, du lebst in einer idealen Welt.
Welche Rolle würde dein Smartphone in deinem täglichen
Leben spielen?

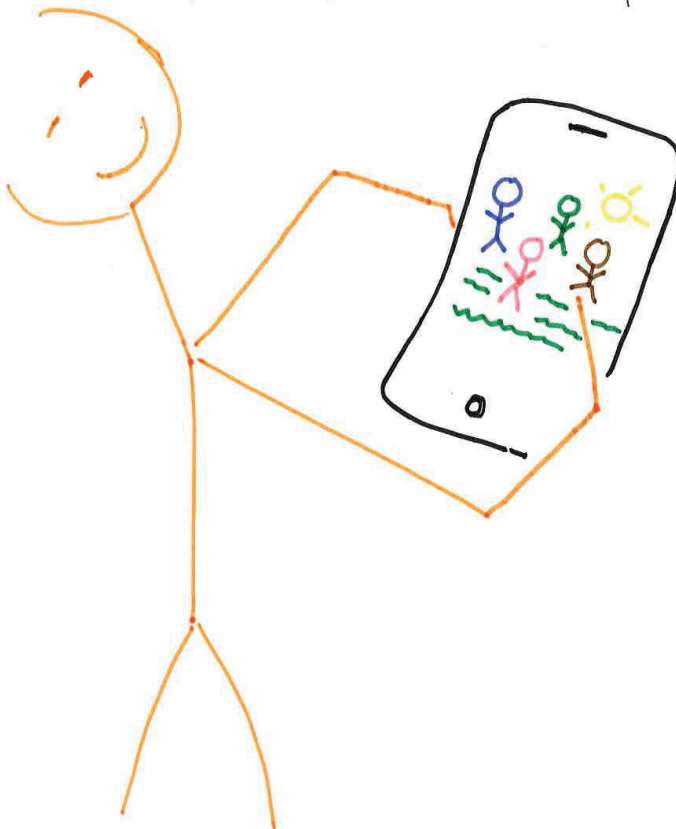
Drücke dich aus (Zeichnen, Schreiben, etc.)!

- In einer idealen Welt, ist das Smartphone ein Alltagsbegleiter
 - ↳ Fotos machen, Kommunikation, Bezahlen
 - ↳ smarte Gadgets und vorausschauend
 - ↳ verknüpft mit anderen Technologien wie Smart-Home
 - ↳ starke Personalisierung bei z.B. Werbung
- teilweise Ablösung durch andere Technologien wie Chips in der Hand
- es sollte die Möglichkeit geben, dass Handy auch ausstellen zu können oder stumm zu haben
- das Smartphone als : Ausweis, Bezahlmöglichkeit, Kontaktbuch, Fotoalbum etc.
- ~~auch die Möglichkeit haben auf analoge~~
analoge Möglichkeiten als Alternative haben
- das Smartphone ist immer dabei und unterstützt und vereinfacht den Alltag, indem es "mitdenkt"

Imagine living in an ideal world.
What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?

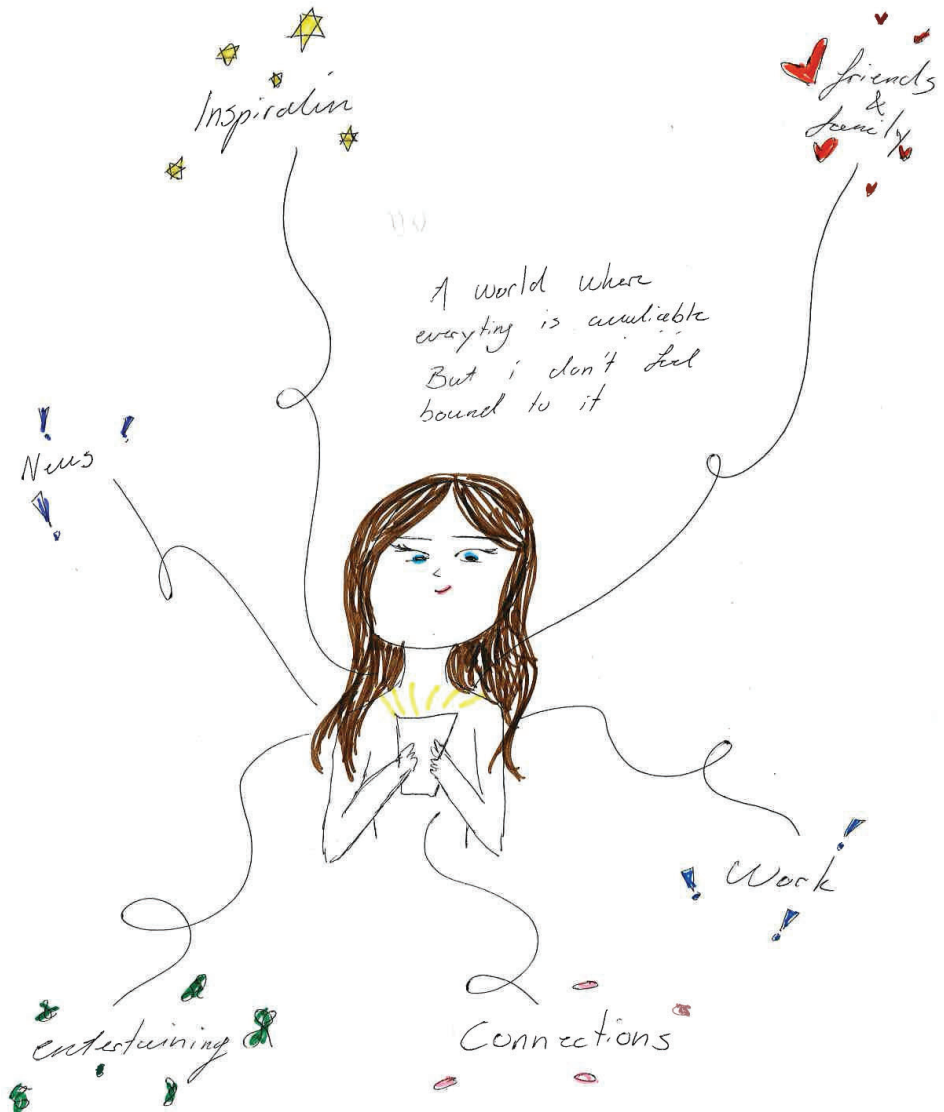
Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!

- Colleague
- Practical role
- Portal to information and people
- ~~Memories~~ Memories - Pictures - Teleport ~~to~~ ^{back} to memories



Imagine living in an ideal world.
What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?

Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!



Kine (23, Norway)

Stell dir vor, du lebst in einer idealen Welt.
Welche Rolle würde dein Smartphone in deinem täglichen
Leben spielen?

Drücke dich aus (Zeichnen, Schreiben, etc.)!

Einerseits denke ich bei einer idealen Welt an
Natur, an Gärten, an Reisen, an Zeit mit der
Familie, Zeit im hier und jetzt, in der
das Smartphone keine Rolle spielen würde.

Zumindest würde es keine aktive Rolle spielen,
in dem Sinne, dass es unterhalten, verbinden
und somit Unterständen kompensieren
muss (für mangelnde Aktivitäten & Gesellschaft).

Andererseits sehe ich viele Vorteile, die das
Smartphone bringen kann, gerade auch in der Natur,
beim Reisen und bei Familientreffen. Zum
Beispiel nutze ich das Smartphone, um Fotos
zu machen, um Wander- oder Fahrradrouten zu
planen, um mich durch Städte zu navigieren,
um Musik abzuspielen und auch mal etwas
im Internet nachzuschlagen. Ich denke diese
passive, funktionale Rolle sollte das Smartphone
in einer idealen Welt haben. Man sollte es gezielt
nutzen, ~~wenn man etwas~~ und möglichst wenig,
was ~~exakt~~ in Außen fehlt damit kompensieren.

Eine Welt ohne ^{Smartphone} ist für mich nicht mehr vorstellbar,
weil es so viele sinnvolle Funktionen hat, gleichzeitig
sehe ich auch die Abhängigkeit, in die man sich möglicher-
weise begibt, wenn man gar nicht mehr ohne klar kommt.
Das heißt, ohne Smartphone keine Möglichkeit sieht mit

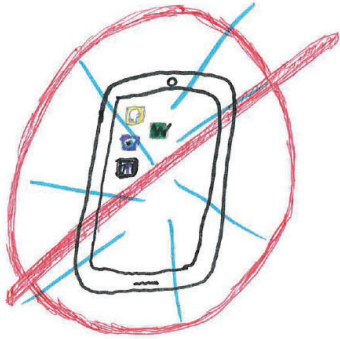
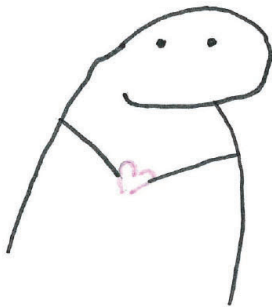
Laura (29, Germany), FRONT

Menschen in Kontakt zutreten, keine Möglichkeit
sieht Fotos zu machen ~~keine~~ oder Musik abzuspielen
und sich auch nicht orientieren kann etc.:

Deshalb ist das Feuerstein darüber wichtig,
dass es sich eben nur um einen Gegenstand,
ein Werkzeug handelt.

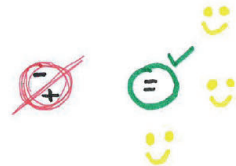
Stell dir vor, du lebst in einer idealen Welt.
Welche Rolle würde dein Smartphone in deinem täglichen
Leben spielen?

Drücke dich aus (Zeichnen, Schreiben, etc.)!



In meiner idealen Welt 
bräuchte ich kein Smartphone
mehr. Ich nutze es häufig um
Verbundenheit zu erfahren, doch
in meiner idealen Welt wäre
dies nicht mehr nötig, da alle
die jetzt so weit weg sind,
ganz nah bei mir wären.

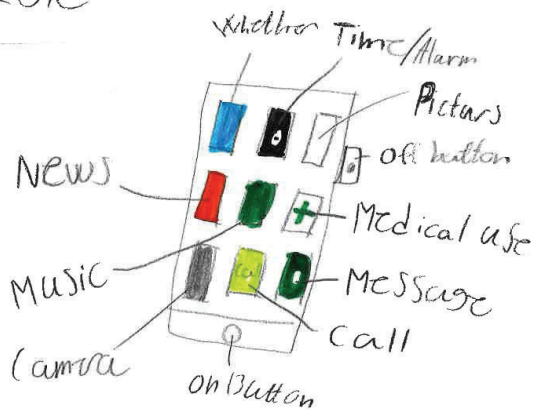
Ich empfinde mein Smartphone
oft eher als Bürde. Ein Gegenstand
der mich oft dazu bringt mich
mit anderen zu vergleichen. In
meiner idealen Welt sind alle
gleich und ein Smartphone kann
das nicht ändern. 



Imagine living in an ideal world.
What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?

Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!

NO ROLE



- I don't want to know where and what my friends are doing at all times, but I have to follow the rest of the world to not get left out.
- The smart phone world just be. it just be a simple one, not different brands or models but just one. So we all would have the same phone. No options. With the same apps that we could have use for. So social media did not exist.

- We don't need 10 different
platforms ~~to~~ and ways to bridge
or connect with each other.
We only need one.

**Stell dir vor, du lebst in einer idealen Welt.
Welche Rolle würde dein Smartphone in deinem täglichen
Leben spielen?**

Drücke dich aus (Zeichnen, Schreiben, etc.)!

Mein Smartphone, bzw. Handy überfordert mich momentan etwas - bzw. vor allem die Tatsache, dass ich (auch, auf Grund der Smartwatch + in Kombi mit meiner Fernbeziehung) ständig das Gefühl habe, soziale Kontakte pflegen zu müssen. Es fällt mir sehr, sehr schwer, das abzuschalten (literaley, haha). Andererseits nutze ich Social Media sehr gerne für Unterhaltung - wenn dann aber viele Benachrichtigungen etc. kommen von Freund:innen, dann stresst mich das eher wieder. Dennoch schätze ich auch die verschiedenen Kontaktmöglichkeiten sehr. In einer idealen Vorstellung wäre mein Smartphone deswegen gerne genau so smart, wie es aktuell ist, aber etwas anders genutzt. Ich würde es lieber mögen, wenn Leute anrufen

als ständig zu schreiben + das weniger Druck hinter
der Kommunikation steht. Ohne mein Smartphone
wäre aber z.B. meine Bestellung aufrechtzuerhalten,
oder Kontakt zu Freundinnen und Familie im
Ausland sehr schwer (und sehr teuer). Gessen möchte
ich mein Smartphone deswegen nicht.



Dußerdem, in einer idealen Welt könnte ich mein
Handy auch einfacher mal ignorieren :)

Stell dir vor, du lebst in einer idealen Welt.
Welche Rolle würde dein Smartphone in deinem täglichen
Leben spielen?

Drücke dich aus (Zeichnen, Schreiben, etc.)!



→ mein Leben einfacher machen

- Informationen sortieren, sodass sie leicht zu finden sind & jederzeit abrufbar sind
- bei alltäglichen Aufgaben helfen wie z.B. Briefe, Steuern, Papiere, etc. ... sodass man Zeit spart
- der Produktivität helfen, Ziele erreichen

→ No Distractions

- kein Content der kein Nährwert hat & mich einfach nur ablenkt
- keine Ablenkung im Alltag durch das Handy
- keine Ablenkung der Momente
- Inspiration
- neue Sachen entdecken, meine Sichtweise erweitern
- neue Sachen lernen



→ FUN

- zum abschalten & einfach Spaß haben aber im Maßen sodass mein Handy nicht mein ganzes Leben einnimmt

Stell dir vor, du lebst in einer idealen Welt.
Welche Rolle würde dein Smartphone in deinem täglichen
Leben spielen?

Drücke dich aus (Zeichnen, Schreiben, etc.)!

- begleitendes Mittel
- keine übermäßige Präsenz, auch mal aus der Hand legen
- Überlegen: Brauche ich es gerade wirklich oder dient es einfach nur zum Langeweilevertreib, auf Social Media z.B., obwohl ich auch anderes Offline machen könnte
- "Das Leben besteht nicht nur aus dem Handy"

2. Orga

1. Kommunikation



Insta

TikTok

WhatsApp

- schnell, um bspw. auf dem laufenden zu bleiben
- soll nicht die persönlichen, echten Gespräche ersetzen

2024

M	D	M	D	F	S	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

- Arbeit und Termine koordinieren
- To Do Liste
- Urlaub

3. Kreativität / Hobbys / Ideen

4. Information / Bildung



- informelle Infosammlung
- auf dem laufenden bleiben
- Wissen ziehen



Gym

Insta
TikTok

- neue Bücher
- Trainingsideen
- Sport verfolgen
- Erinnerungen

**Stell dir vor, du lebst in einer idealen Welt.
Welche Rolle würde dein Smartphone in deinem täglichen
Leben spielen?**

Drücke dich aus (Zeichnen, Schreiben, etc.)!

In meiner idealen Welt nutze ich mein Handy selbstbestimmt und als Werkzeug, um meinen Alltag besser zu gestalten. Ich entscheide mich jeweils sehr bewusst für die Nutzung, wenn ich das Gefühl habe, sie nutzt mir oder sie tut mir gut. Das kann z.B. sein, wenn ich beim Wandern die Komoot App aufrufe, um neue Wanderrouen zu finden und zu navigieren, wenn ich beim Inline fahren meine Lieblingsmusik über Spotify höre oder wenn ich mir abends zur Entspannung coole und kreative Videos auf Youtube ansehe. Wenn ich mich mit anderen ~~erüber~~ über Smartphone Apps connecte, sind das Dienste, die meine Daten nicht tracken (z.B. Signal) oder nicht zu den großen Big Tech Konzernen aus den USA gehören (schon ich diese nicht mehr als nötig supporte). Soziale Netzwerke gibts trotzdem, die sind dann aber eher so wie nebenan.de, oder wie die Communities von Podcaster*innen auf Patreon / Content Creators auf Youtube.

Ich würde täglich max. 2 Stunden auf meinem Bildschirm gucken. Und es gäbe Zeiten am Tag, in denen ich ganz ohne Stress mein Handy aus der Hand legen könnte. Toll wäre, wenn das alle anderen zu Ahnlichen

Zeiten tun und & man sich in sozialen Situationen aufeinander konzentrieren kann. Ich war vor Zweren auf einer Mehrtageswanderung und habe auf Hütten übernachtet, auf denen es kein Internet gab. Es war toll zu sehen, wie sich alle Gäste voll aufeinander konzentrieren konnten und es sind richtig tiefe Gespräche & und gemeinsame Aktivitäten entstanden (Musik machen, Spiele spielen). Das Handy wurde mal zum Fotos ~~an~~ zeigen herausgeholt, hat die Situation aber nicht so dominiert oder mich aus dem Moment "herausgerissen".

Stell dir vor, du lebst in einer idealen Welt.
Welche Rolle würde dein Smartphone in deinem täglichen
Leben spielen?

Drücke dich aus (Zeichnen, Schreiben, etc.)!

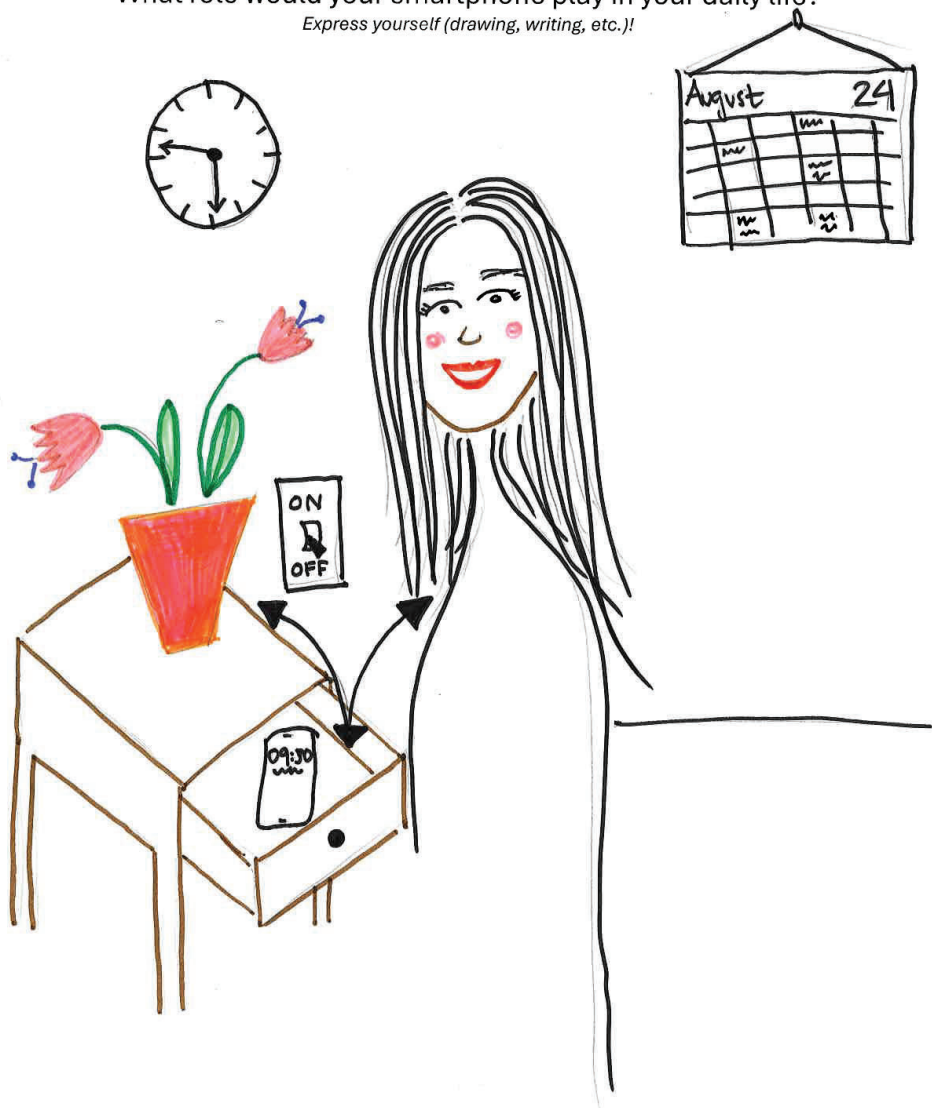


- bei mir, aber nicht immer in meiner Hand
- unterhält mich
- abrufbar, wenn ich es brauche (Wegweiser, Informationen, Telefonieren)
- Nachrichten von Freund:innen + Familie nicht immer da - nur in Zeiträumen
- weniger immer abrufbar
- wie ein Helfer, aber weniger präsent
- ständige Erreichbarkeit und auch „Flucht“ ins Handy strengt mich an
- Beschränkung für Apps, die ich nicht aufladen kann
- nur Inhalte, die mich positiv stimmen, negative Nachrichten nur wenn ich mich darüber informieren will
- keine Inhalte die mich aufwachen

Romy (27, Germany)

Imagine living in an ideal world.
What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?

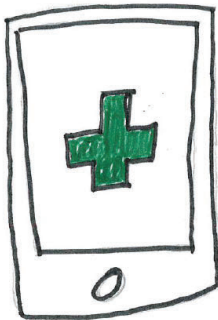
Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!



Sara (29, Norway)

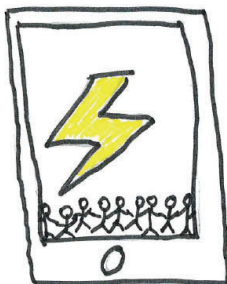
Stell dir vor, du lebst in einer idealen Welt.
Welche Rolle würde dein Smartphone in deinem täglichen
Leben spielen?

Drücke dich aus (Zeichnen, Schreiben, etc.)!



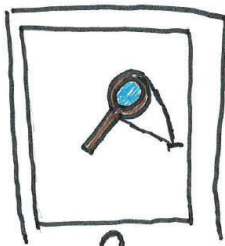
Das Handy würde in der idealen Welt ein Zugang zur Hilfe bedeuten. Nicht allein im medizinischen Sinne im Bezug auf online-Apotheke oder Notruf. Es gibt Foren, in welchen man alle Fragen stellen kann oder auch einfach mal mit jemandem reden kann, der kennt, wie man sich fühlt

ohne einschüchternde Fachkenntnis oder tausend verschiedene Hassbemerkungen.



Es sollte dazu da sein einander zu stärken und vermeiden ein schlechtes Miteinander zu erzeugen.

Es sollte den Menschen Hoffnung schenken und eventuell unterbinden können, falls es nicht so ist.



Es sollte kontrolliert sein. Alle Ebenen sollten gerecht und mit Gewissen überprüft sein. Inhalte sollten niemals zu privat oder ohne Einverständnis irgendwo landen können.

Imagine living in an ideal world.

What role would your smartphone play in your daily life?

Express yourself (drawing, writing, etc.)!

It would be a helpful tool, like it is today, but not so addictive. I use it for everything, shopping, meal prep, tickets, email and so on, but I get lost in "doom-scrolling" for hours a day. The some apps are too clever for me and I'm hooked on insta. I have not downloaded Tick-Tok because I'm already to hooked on insta and don't need another app to waste my time. I also find useful things on insta, food, tips and so on, but way too much is just a waste of time and I think it makes me less happy.

My smartphone would help me make life easier, not trap me. It would act "analog" like my keys now, when not in use, it would be on the table and not in my hand. I think it would make human relations easier and better if we were not all so attached to the phone.

I suppose it's not the phone, but the apps and the marketing, but still. My attention span is so so bad, and my memory worse. There is always a chance of a better option around the corner, and it's hard to be sure of my choices because of this.



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