CHAPTER 6

A decade of digital disconnection research in review

Where, what, how, and who?

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ABSTRACT

The backlash against digital media usage has manifested in everyday practices of digital disconnection, or deliberate non-use of media. This chapter provides an overview of the last decade of empirical disconnection research, tracing both its overarching tendencies and its boundaries. This is done through an analysis of 346 empirical studies on digital disconnection. For the purposes of this chapter, digital disconnection research is defined by a research ethos which does not consider the act of media non-use or restricted media use as something to be remedied. In review, the typical interest of the research has been in studying the disconnection of relatively young and individualised agents from social media, a disconnection which is often temporary or partial. Therefore, in the discussion portion of the chapter, I consider the opportunity for the openness of digital disconnection studies to extend even further, with particular emphasis on structures and contexts where disconnection may not only be problematised by the imperatives of "always on" communication, specifically in working life and other organised contexts.

KEYWORDS: digital disconnection, systematic literature review, social media, problematising review, disconnection turn

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Introduction

Over the past decade, media and communication studies have witnessed increased scholarly attention to the ambivalences and resistance encountered in everyday media and communication usage. This phenomenon has been coined the "disconnection turn" (Fast, 2021), leading to the emergence of a new field of research. Beyond academic debates, resistance against popular media has also found its way into broader cultural discussions and popular expressions (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021). While there is ongoing terminological debate, I contend that digital disconnection studies, the term encompassing most of the disconnection turn, are characterised by a prevailing research ethos. In this ethos, non-use or restricted use of digital media is regarded neutrally or even positively, rather than as a problem requiring a solution (Syvertsen, 2017). Consequently, this research embraces the possibility that abstaining from media use may be deemed both "meaningful and necessary" by those involved (Bucher, 2020: 612), while still maintaining the capacity to critique the limitations of such disconnection (Sutton, 2020). "Digital disconnection" is thus a research ethos for studying "on the ground" manifestations of the backlash against digital media.

The question then arises as to the extent of this normativity surrounding digital disconnection during its initial decade or so of existence. To what domains has this openness extended, and where is it yet to emerge? To answer these questions, I utilise this chapter to summarise and analyse the past decade or so of studies on digital disconnection. I accomplish this through an analysis of a systematically collected sample of 346 empirical studies focused on real experiences of disconnection. I approach this literature review with both a scoping and problematising perspective (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020; Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

The review is scoping in the sense that it delineates the existing boundaries and research interests within disconnection studies over the past decade. In this review, I explore *where* disconnection has been studied globally, *what* media and technologies people have been disconnecting from in existing research, *how* this disconnection is executed, and *who* is depicted as capable of disconnecting. This reveals the dominant narrative in disconnection studies, portraying a responsible individual in a highly digitalised country temporarily disconnecting from digital media.

Following this, the review is then problematising, as it questions why the normativity of disconnection has not been explored more extensively thus far. Here, I place particular emphasis on the potential for digital disconnection to extend beyond the individual media user and consider the organisations and institutions that shape daily life (Perrow, 1991). Recognising the pivotal role these contexts play in determining what one can or cannot disconnect from, I discuss this in the context of media-dependent and -entangled working life (Bagger, 2021b; Fast, 2021) as a prime example of such a structuring

context, though it is far from the only domain where digital disconnection research has room to grow. In summary, I argue that the openness of digital disconnection studies has the potential to expand even further.

Background: Digital disconnection studies and the disconnection turn

Whether one starts the story with worries about television addicts (Vanden Abeele & Mohr, 2021), concerns about landline telephones eroding privacy (Rymarczuk, 2016), or all the way back at Socrates' alleged dismissal of the writing (Peters, 1999), resistance, and criticism of media is hardly a new phenomenon. However, the last decade or so has witnessed a steep increase in the interest, from both researchers and the general public, in resisting or refusing the use of digital technologies. The beginning of this turn can be marked by a few well-cited key texts (e.g., Baumer et al., 2013; Portwood-Stacer, 2013). The last few years have seen an increased interest in the topic, which has manifested in several anthologies and journal special issues (Chia et al., 2021; Jansson & Adams, 2021; Karsay & Vandenbosch, 2021; Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021).

Digital disconnection exists alongside several other terms related to the digital backlash. The distinguishing feature of digital disconnection studies is that acts of resistance towards media usage are not a priori considered the result of technophobia or "media panics" among the population (Drotner, 1999), nor as a "digital divide" that must be bridged for the betterment of society (van Dijk, 2006). If the non-use or restriction of media is imposed from above, for instance, at the level of governments, this is also something which is usually studied as an element of "digital dictatorships" and outside the scope of digital disconnection studies (although, see Rohman & Ang, 2021). If terms like techlash cover the mass media and news discourse of disillusionment with digital media (Helles & Lomborg, Chapter 2 in this volume; Jespersen & Albris, Chapter 4 in this volume; Weiss-Blatt, 2021), then digital disconnection is the on-the-ground expression of such distrust or disappointment. In contrast, digital disconnection denotes a non-use of media which is voluntary or consensual on the part of the non-user and is not viewed as a problem by the researcher.

The underlying assumption of the emerging research agenda of digital disconnection is thus that the refusal, restricted use, and non-use of digital media and communication tools may be something valuable and worthwhile rather than a technical or social gap which must be bridged (Syvertsen, 2017). Although rarely explicitly stated, it seems this line of research tacitly accepts that treating the refusal to communicate digitally with suspicion is ultimately untenable (see Peters, 1999). Digital disconnection can thus be both "meaningful and necessary" (Bucher, 2020) – at least to the people involved.

Notably, this does not preclude researchers from critically examining both the usefulness and feasibility of disconnection. In the final discussion portion of this chapter, I return to how the potential further study of disconnection bumps up against the boundaries of these other key terms.

While the term digital disconnection may have its origin within media studies, the interest in non-use of digital media is present across a variety of research disciplines (e.g., Biedermann et al., 2021; Ozdemir & Goktas, 2021), and the urge to disconnect is evidently present within broader social trends (Moe & Madsen, 2021). This all corroborates that we are in the middle of a "disconnection turn" (Fast, 2021) which is seen across several scholarly disciplines. While we are turning, then, we should make sure we have a good lay of the land: What ground has the body of disconnection research covered thus far, and which areas of the map are still underexplored? I explore this not by discussing the *whys* of digital disconnection in terms of motivations and outcomes, which have been extensively discussed elsewhere; in contrast, my purpose in this chapter is to make clear *where* disconnection has been studied, *what* the subjects of study are disconnecting from, *how* they are disconnecting, and *who* is being studied as disconnecting agents.

Review method

Sampling process: Finding existing disconnection

The aim of the sampling for the present review was to locate empirical studies of *existing* disconnection. In other words, the studies included had to be based on an empirical inquiry into people disconnecting from digital media. Primarily theoretical interventions and critiques were thus excluded from the sample. Additionally, the disconnection practices under study had to be treated within the normative scope of "digital disconnection", as discussed above. This meant that the non-use of media could not be viewed as an a priori problem to be solved by the researchers.

The sampling proceeded by a process of hand-picking the broadest possible sample of relevant studies through citation chain analysis (Levy & Ellis, 2006). I deemed sampling via citations preferable to the otherwise commonly used methods of sampling via a keyword search for two major reasons. First, digital disconnection research has a large degree of terminological contestation (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021), with scholars using terms as broad as disentangling, non-use, unplugging, and detoxing, all of which have a myriad of other uses. Second, keyword searches did not provide a reliable way of distinguishing between empirical and non-empirical studies. An extensive hand-selection procedure would thus have to be called for in any case.

My chain of search started from two points, one being key empirical texts on digital disconnection and the other being existing subdiscipline-specific research reviews of digital disconnection (both listed in Table 6.1). First, the

citation lists of these texts were screened for relevant studies. Second, if any relevant studies citing these initial studies were found, studies citing these newly included studies were then in turn screened for inclusion. This strategy followed from an assumption that empirical studies tend to cite other relevant empirical studies.

In the first prong, the search started from eight existing systematic reviews on disconnection research or related phenomena. All these reviews tended to be domain-specific and generally emphasised quantitative studies. As such, there was virtually no overlap between the texts they each reviewed. The texts analysed in these review articles were then individually screened for inclusion in my study before proceeding further. In the second prong, nine key empirical studies (> 100 citations) on disconnection were identified and selected as starting points.

In each prong, articles, monographs, anthology chapters, and theses in these citation networks were individually screened – including their title, abstract, and keywords – to ascertain whether they built upon an empirical study of disconnection from one or more media and communication technologies. "Disconnection" was understood as any type of non-use, whether temporary or indefinite, provided this non-use happened with the consent of the disconnecting agent. The media which people disconnected from were likewise broadly defined as anything that enabled and expanded communication capabilities either interpersonally or intrapersonally (Jensen & Helles, 2011; Lomborg & Frandsen, 2016). Any technology was considered a medium if it enabled communication on a many-to-many (e.g., social media, collectively used information systems), one-to-many (mass communication devices such as television, radio), one-to-one (e.g., texting), or self-to-self (e.g., self-tracking apps, smart devices) basis.

TABLE 6.1 Key texts and reviews in digital disconnection studies

Text	Type	Discipline	Summary
Biederman et al., 2021	Review	Computer science	Review of digital self-control interventions
Eriksen, 2020	Review	Psychology	Review of social media restrictions and subjective well-being
Huang et al., 2021	Review	Science studies	Review of research on consumer "innovation resistance"
Kania-Lundholm, 2021	Review	Media studies	Review and call for a critical research agenda
Ozdemir & Goktas, 2021	Review	Business and trade studies	Review of the research on "digital detox holidays"
Radtke et al., 2021	Review	Media studies	Review of the effectiveness of digital detox on smartphone use
Soliman & Rinta-Kahila, 2020	Review	Information systems	Review of "discontinuance" in information technology studies
Soliman & Tuunainen, 2021	Review	Information systems	Review and study of "volitional" information systems rejection
Baumer et al., 2013	Key text	Computer science	Exploration of Facebook non-use
Brubaker et al., 2016	Key text	Media and communication	Users leaving the app Grindr
Dickinson et al., 2016	Key text	Business and trade studies	The desire for mobile disconnection among tourists
Epstein et al., 2016	Key text	Computer science	Discontinuance of self-tracking devices
Hakkarainen, 2012	Key text	Media and communication	Older computer non-users
Light, 2014	Key text	Media and communication	Disconnection from and with social networking sites
Pearce & Gretzel, 2012	Key text	Business and trade studies	"Technology dead zones" in tourism
Portwood-Stacer, 2013	Key text	Media and communication	Quitting Facebook and "media refusal"
Selwyn, 2006	Key text	Cultural studies	"Non- and low-users" of computers
Stieger et al., 2013	Key text	Psychology	Contrasting users and quitters of Facebook

Scope and limitations of final sample

The final sample consisted of 346 texts on digital disconnection. These included 220 research articles, 17 book chapters, 86 conference papers, 4 monographs, 7 doctoral dissertations, and 12 master's theses. The oldest studies were published in 2010, with most studies (86%) being from 2015 or later, thus lending credence to the idea of the "disconnection turn" as a genuine recent development covering the last decade or so (Fast, 2021). The present overview thus stands as a scoping of the first decade of concerted research into existing digital disconnection, as well as a problematisation of some of the limitations of this research.

As discussed above, texts which studied non-consensual disconnection, or which viewed disconnection as a problem, were excluded. For related reasons, studies on the adjacent phenomenon of "news avoidance" were also excluded from this review, as there is some controversy about whether they fit the normative framework of "digital disconnection", with some scholars describing such avoidance as "an increasing problem for the news industry and democracy at large" (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020: 459). For similar reasons, research on the non-use of communication technologies in telemedicine were also excluded from the search (for a review, see Reinhardt et al., 2021), as this is also a field where non-use of the relevant technologies is viewed as problematic first and foremost (although, see Klausen, Chapter 8 in this volume). For my present purposes, disconnecting from one's Internet provider and disconnecting from one's healthcare provider are thus not comparable.

A notable limitation of the present review is that it can only describe how digital disconnection has been *studied*. Therefore, it can offer few insights about where digital disconnection might *happen*. A second limitation of the sample is that it cannot account for studies which have no interaction, first-, second-, or third-hand, with the central texts or reviews mentioned above. In this way, the studies represent the only the dominant or overarching ways in which disconnection has been studied but cannot account for the whole picture. There may be disconnection texts unaccounted for which have yet to enter dialogue with the main body of research.

During the revision process of this chapter, additional reviews on disconnection were published (e.g., Figuerias et al., 2023; Nassen et al., 2023). Notably, these studies did not cite or review any eligible texts that were not already included in my sample. I thus considered the original sample to have been adequately saturated and did not proceed to subject any of the newer reviews to the systematic chain search described above.

Coding process

With the final sample in hand, I proceeded to ask the four basic questions of the body of disconnection research:

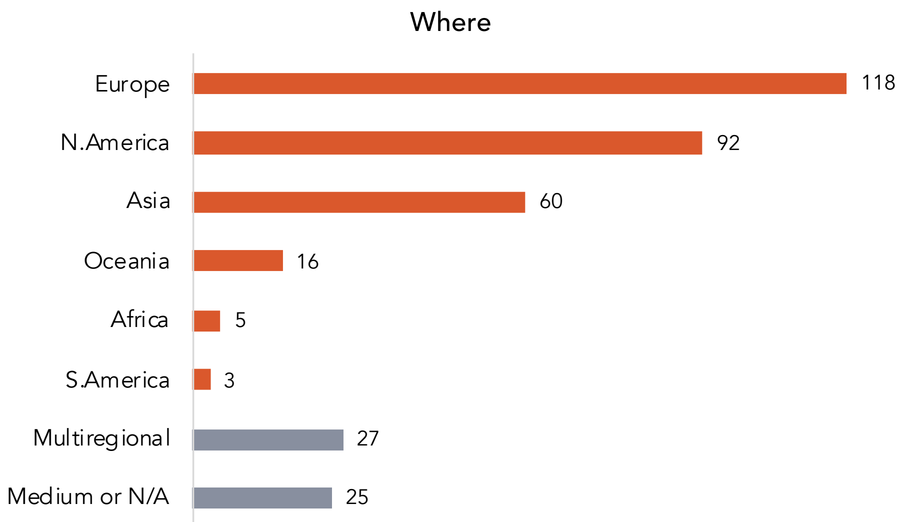
1. Where have these studies been located nationally?

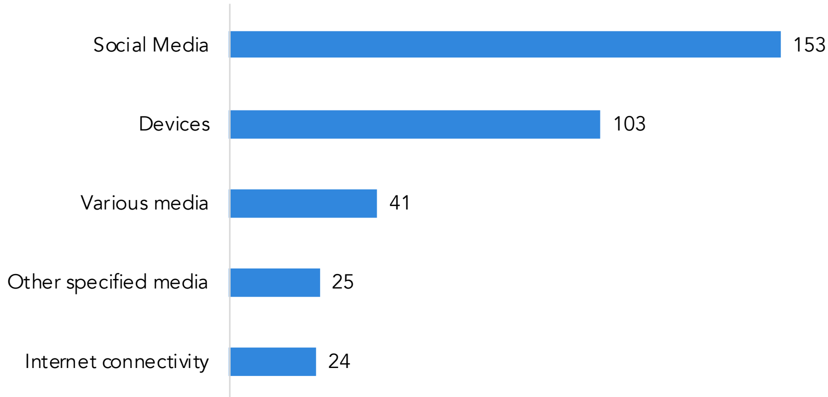
2. What people are being studied as disconnecting from (i.e., how are the targets of disconnection delineated within the given study)?
3. How is this process of disconnection taking place (is it caused by the researcher or not, is it temporary or indefinite)?
4. Who is being studied as doing this disconnection (i.e., who is constructed as having the agency to disconnect, and are they sampled according to any specific demographic characteristics)?

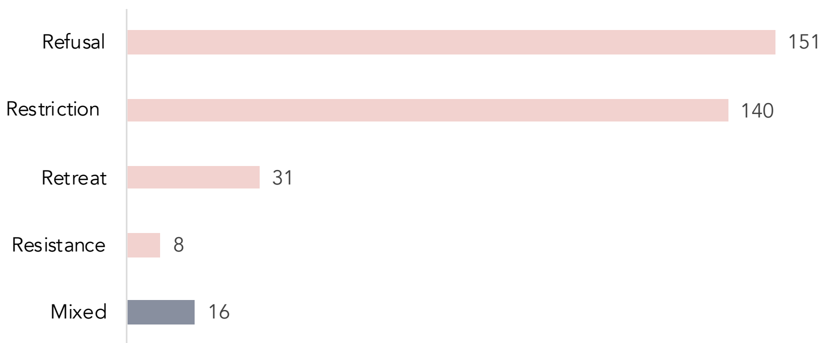
This process first entailed an open coding: a consolidating round of coding categories before a final selection of relevant codes and categories. In the ultimate consolidation, variables which were clearly identifiable across most studies were emphasised. Ultimately, this emphasis on consolidation and comparability means that several variables about the demographics of disconnectors (e.g., gender, racial, and class background) are left out of the final comparison, as these were far from consistently reported. Ultimately, this resulted in a coding which accounted for the broadest strokes of disconnection research.

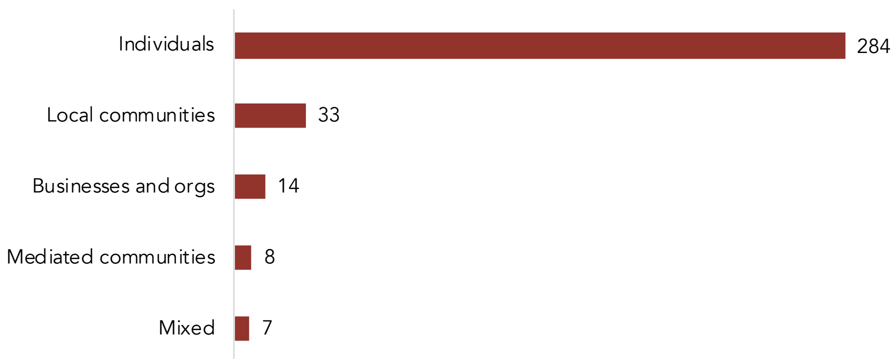
Findings

FIGURE 6.1 Overview of content of digital disconnection studies









Comments: n = 346. Overview according to the location of the study (where), the target of disconnection (what), the method of disconnection (how), and the disconnecting population being studied (who).

Where is disconnection being studied?

As might be expected, disconnection is largely a phenomenon under study among populations in nations which are highly digitalised and datafied. It must be noted that the sample reveals little about the overall disconnective intentions of *most* nations as a whole, with a handful of exceptions (e.g., Fast et al., 2021). Most empirical studies are set within nations designated as “frontrunners” in digitalisation (Huawei, 2020), mainly located within Europe (118 studies) and North America (92 studies). Asian nations are found at a distant third on the list (60), with mainland China (20) accounting for the bulk portion of studies outside the traditional “West”. Only a small handful of studies buck this trend, focusing on nations in Africa (5 studies) or South America (3 studies).

In one exceptional study looking at rural Kenya, Wildermuth (2021) deliberately attempted to discuss digital disconnection outside the usual normative scope of digital divides. Here, the author lambasted the “assigned normative superiority of polymedia repertoires as found amongst urban elites in Kenya and majorities of the Global North” which hinders “recognition of the diverse and pluralistic character of less privileged, media practices” (Wildermuth, 2021: 449). What this study illustrates is that while the normativity of digital disconnection still needs to justify itself in Western and highly digitalised or privileged contexts (Syvertsen, 2020; Portwood-Stacer, 2013), there seems to be even more work to do in justifying it outside these contexts.

A comprehensive discussion of the reasons why disconnection is more likely to be studied in a broadly Western context are beyond the scope of this review. However, it bears noting that digital disconnection in not exceptional within media studies for being focused on Western nations (Waisbord, 2022). For now, it is worth noting that this geographic specificity may have had some influence on how the phenomenon has been studied and constructed. First and foremost, it may have led to a focus on certain media over others, as I discuss further below.

What is being disconnected from?

What characterises the targets of studied disconnections *overall* is that they are media which are characterised by being accessible across spatial and temporal boundaries, “always on” and “always happening” (Helles, 2013). The most obvious example of this is social media, which are the largest single target of digital disconnection (133 studies), with Facebook being the most frequently named example (90 studies). Building on the point about geographic parochialism from the previous section, we can perhaps highlight that only four studies in the sample studied resistance to the Chinese platform WeChat, despite its billion-strong userbase. The paradigmatic study of disconnection is thus perhaps Portwood-Stacer’s (2013) foundational text on “media refusal”, in which we meet principled non-users taking a stand against Facebook.

Next to social media, digital devices themselves are the biggest category of resisted media (103 studies). These media are usually also categorised by their mobility and ubiquity (Helles, 2013), as only half a dozen studies have looked at resistance to the comparably more stationary laptop or desktop computers. Even the few digital games that were studied were characterised by their perpetuity and open-endedness (Debus et al., 2020). This is not to say that older media (most notably television) are completely absent from the sample, but rather that digital disconnection studies seem to have developed in tandem with these popular "always on" media. This is worth bearing in mind, since criticism of mobile media often emphasise self-governance strategies, as opposed to structural solutions (Vanden Abeele & Mohr, 2021).

Another vital aspect of Portwood-Stacer's (2013) foundational study is that of "conspicuous non-consumption". This suggests another crucial aspect of the media that are being disconnected from: They are largely understood as being popular enough that disconnection is the exception rather than the norm. Furthermore, the media being disconnected from largely have not gone anywhere at time of writing. This includes social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (now X), devices such as smartphones, the Internet, as such, and (although less widely adopted) wearable digital devices. In the problematising part of this chapter, I discuss how it is unclear whether this is an incidental or necessary part of digital disconnection studies. Perhaps in part due to this, digital devices and platforms are characterised by being extremely difficult for users to actually *quit* (Karppi, 2018). This difficulty in exiting also becomes apparent when we look at *how* people are able (or not able) to disconnect.

How is disconnection being done?

Most of the disconnection under study does *not* owe its existence to a researcher intervening. This corroborates the assertion that disconnection is a prominent cultural phenomenon (Moe & Madsen, 2021), in addition to being an emerging research topic (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021). Even so, the most prevalent form of disconnection is one which is distinctly temporary, which I have labelled *refusal* (151 studies) in Figure 6.1. This pattern is perhaps best described in a foundational study by Baumer and colleagues (2013) as a cycle of "leaving and relapsing", at least when it comes to social media. The category of non-use which rivals this one is that of *restriction* (140 studies), where users continue their usage of a given medium, but with certain self-inflicted restrictions in place. Often such self-restrictions may be supported by digital apps (see also You, Chapter 9 in this volume). The study of digital disconnection is thus mainly the study of partial or temporary disconnection.

A less widespread, but nonetheless prevalent form of disconnection from social media involves a *retreat* from the rhythms of everyday life, either on a holiday with media restrictions or in a camp setting for media non-users (31

studies). Disconnection may be more comprehensive in these contexts, but they are by their very nature temporary retreats from the rhythms of everyday life and are thus limited in their applicability to how digital disconnection can have a larger impact. I highlight this because it represents an explicit link between the retreat from media *and* the retreat from the routines and structures of daily life. Here, researchers have stressed both the commitment of such retreats while also pointing out that they come with problems of their own. For instance, an in-depth inquiry by Sutton (2020: 265) stressed that the preconception of such camps might be tied up with goals "highly specific to Western and American values" while at the same time repeating "long-held colonial, primitivist narratives" in what they offer as alternatives to a highly digitalised world.

A small handful of studies investigated religious communities where media usage is frowned upon, most notably Amish communities and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities (Shahar, 2017). These communities are not temporary in the same way that digital detox holidays or camp retreats are, and they thus demonstrate a more enduring resistance towards digital media. Notably, the search uncovered no examples of religious institutions and locations as such (e.g., churches, mosques, and temples) being exceptional sites or zones of digital disconnection.

A final category of disconnection is what I have termed *resistance* (8 studies). This denotes studies where participants refused to adopt the given medium at all. These studies usually target specific new technologies under the conceptual banner of "innovation resistance" (Huang et al., 2021). While these technologies are not the targets of "conspicuous non-consumption" discussed in terms of *how* disconnection is done (Portwood-Stacer, 2013), this does not mean that these innovations have been scrapped.

Who is doing the disconnection?

Finally, I touch upon the disconnection agent: *who*. Here, most studies were concerned with an individual and atomised agent disconnecting (284 studies). Studies were coded as individualising resistance if the disconnecting agent was not constructed as a group of people or an organisation, such as a community or a group. In contrast, 33 studies looked at local communities (including school classes, camps, and households) as agents of resistance, while 8 studies looked at mediated or online communities performing acts of disconnection. Only 14 studies looked at businesses or similar organisations disconnecting, a point which I return to in the discussion.

Judging by the research, disconnection is seemingly something one goes about alone. This is congruent with the linking of digital disconnection with broader cultural trends of responsibilisation, as noted by other scholars (Fast, 2021; Moe & Madsen, 2021). This individualising and responsibilising discourse is prevalent in the "how to" literature and other popular discourses on disconnection (Enli & Syvertsen, 2021; Vanden Abeele & Mohr, 2021).

Characteristically, the disconnecting agent is also relatively young, broadly defined as being in the 18–35 age range. Hence, the default picture painted by disconnection studies is of an overconnected youth in need of a digital break, with only a small sliver of studies looking at adults or older adults meaningfully disconnecting. Although rarely stated explicitly, the frequent focus on students may also be due to particularities of research approval practices across different nations, where American studies of social media in particular favour college students (for a discussion, see Jensen & Bechmann, 2021).

In some cases, the choice of young and individualised agents as the object of study is something that scholars do reflect upon. For instance, Kim and colleagues (2017: 18), in their study mainly focusing on college students and digital interruptions, reflected: "Unlike employees in a company, graduate students […] do not have strict working hours". Here, Kim and colleagues were indirectly alluding to some of the empirical limitations of digital disconnection studies as a whole: how duties and responsibilities from other contexts may impact the feasibility to disconnect. This is a point I return to in the discussion.

Thus, if one were to draw a caricature of the dominant focus of digital disconnection studies from the present sample, it would go something like this: Disconnection would take place within a highly digitalised nation (the *where*), be concerned with a young person in the 18–35 age bracket (the *who*), probably a college student, who attempts limit their use of a social medium (usually Facebook) or at the very least to use their smartphone less (the *what*). Sometimes, they would be doing this because they had signed up for some experiment in their college setting, but usually this disconnection would be of their own volition, independent of any research participation. This would either come in the form of taking brief periods of absence from these media, or restricting the time of their usage on these apps (the *how*).

Disconnecting further

To summarise the scoping portion of this review: Digital disconnection has mainly been focused on in highly digitalised nations in the West, has mainly been concerned with resisting social media, and has mostly found restricted usage or temporary abstentions to be the preferred strategy for doing this disconnection, leaving little hope for disconnection to be an impactful strategy for resisting social media (Lomborg, 2020). Finally, the disconnecting agent has largely been constructed as an isolated and atomised individual.

In this problematising discussion, I argue that each of these four tendencies within digital disconnection studies present their own problems: 1) The focus on highly digitalised countries might implicitly reproduce the notion that disconnection is only a viable option in the most digitalised contexts, 2) the focus on social media comes at the expense of other technologies with similar characteristics, 3) the focus on non-permanent means of resistance might inadvertently close off the debate to actual closures or disappearances

of digital media, and 4) the focus on individualised disconnectors might inadvertently reproduce the individualising tendencies of popular literature on media resistance (Enli & Syvertsen, 2021; Gregg, 2018).

First, if digital disconnection is to be understood as an ethos of openness towards the non-use of media, then there is no reason this openness should only be limited to the most digitalised contexts. Many of the related concepts (digital divides, digital dictatorships, or news avoidance) discussed in the opening of this chapter take as their point of assumption that people are not communicating enough, or at least are not able to. As a side effect of this, we might expect digital disconnection and these other concepts to not only be *theoretically* distinct, but also to concern themselves with entirely different *empirical* settings. However, as a few trailblazing studies have shown (Udende et al., 2020; Wildermuth, 2021), there is nothing that mandates that this must be the case.

Second, while social media have been both a preferred target of media and communications scholarship in general, and digital disconnection scholarship in particular, they need not be sole targets of disconnection. One argument against including one-to-many media under the purview of disconnection studies is that the field should be concerned with resisting particularly intrusive media (e.g., Vanden Abeele & Mohr, 2021). Here, the obvious counterargument is that social media are far from the only intrusive media technologies, nor are private corporations the only agents with the ability to exert communicative demands upon the public (Bagger et al., 2024).

Third, disconnection scholars have generally stressed the futility of disconnection (Lomborg, 2020). This is reflected in how the disconnection under study is usually temporary or partial. Ironically, this leaves digital disconnection studies without many insights about what happens when media *do* disappear. Despite this, there is a growing research interest in the death and stagnation of digital platforms (Corry, 2021; McCammon & Lingel, 2022), which has thus far had little exchange with disconnection studies. Similarly, digital disconnection studies have thus far been able to tell us little about how a lack of adoption of new or much-hyped media may lead such media to disappear (e.g, Samson, 2023; Zitron, 2023), studies of "innovation resistance" notwithstanding (Huang et al., 2021). Such instructive counterexamples may be rare, but they can act as a refutation of the received wisdom that digital disconnection is indeed futile.

Fourth and finally, an attention to such counterexamples would also need to at least in part revolve around an acknowledgement of non-individualised resistance. In the caricature I sketched above, the young person or college student is seen as the paradigmatic example of a disconnective agent insofar as they were able to voluntarily abstain from social media or smartphones. However, the college experience is arguably also a zone of exception for those who experience it, as they are often unfettered by care and professional

responsibilities. Hence, we seem to know comparatively little about how such duties might affect a wish for disconnection (although, see Andelsman Alvarez, Chapter 12 in this volume).

Although recent studies have begun to emphasise the roles organisations play in digital disconnection (e.g., Syvertsen, 2023), this is the exception rather than the rule. We should keep in mind that most of us live in societies permeated by organisations and institutions (Perrow, 1991), and that these may both constrain and enable people's abilities to disconnect. Here, a highly instructive context is working life, which has largely been neglected by digital disconnection studies. In this context, individual agency is highly restrained (Anderson, 2017), and ubiquitous digital technologies play a huge role (Plesner & Husted, 2020). These are sites where workers ultimately cede much of their power in technology choice (Bagger, 2021a, 2023). Workplaces may be places where both certain popular media are restricted by order of management and leadership (North, 2010; Guyard & Kaun, 2018), and where workers may attempt to restrict certain media within temporal and spatial boundaries of work (Waller & Ragsdell, 2012).

As pointed out by Fast (2021: 1616), studies of working life "seem more inclined to use connectivity rather than *dis*-connectivity as a point of entry". Accordingly, studies of non-adoption of work-specific media tend to view such non-use as a problem to be solved, thus falling outside the scope of disconnection studies included here. Hence, the "gray media" (Conrad, 2019) of working life are thus mainly absent from the study of disconnection, and the existing studies usually only focus on a selection of non-widespread platforms (e.g., Bagger & Lomborg, 2021). Nothing perhaps illustrates better the absence of disconnection studies from working life than the fact that when media for person- and body-tracking are studied, it is within a non-work context, even though such media have been codified in working life (Gregg, 2018; but see also Scott Hansen, Chapter 10 in this volume).

Some studies tacitly acknowledge the impact it would have if organisations were to withdraw from popular media (Pelletier et al., 2021), although empirical examples remain scarce. Perhaps the explanation can in part be found by looking at which professional contexts disconnection has been studied within. Here, the focus has been on creative workers and knowledge workers (e.g., Karlsen & Ytre-Arne, 2022), and to a lesser extent on marginalised workers (e.g., Chib et al., 2021). In contrast, we know very little about the disconnection practices of people with high amounts of political or economic capital by virtue of their working life (although see Fast & Enli, Chapter 7 in this volume). This also serves as an indication that disconnection is not widely studied in organisational settings, where such disconnection might be the most impactful, or agenda-setting, such as among elite populations and lawmakers. For instance, a Enli and Fast (2023) have suggested that politicians are reluctant to perform political interventions in aid of digital

disconnection, preferring instead to cede responsibility to users and platform owners. The tenets of responsibilisation and self-governance thus seem hard to get rid of.

In summary, if digital disconnection as a field is to fully embrace its ethos of openness towards the meaningfulness or necessity of refusing media use, then there are several considerations. This includes looking at new empirical settings (outside the most digitalised nations), new objects of disconnection (outside commercial social media), and new phenomena (such as the disappearance or shutdown of media), as well as considering the disconnecting agent in new ways (embedded in organisational settings which may both hinder or help disconnection). Otherwise, the emerging field risks rendering the allegedly futile nature of digital disconnection into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Concluding discussion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the empirical studies produced within the broader wake of the "disconnection turn" (Fast, 2021) and under the ethos of openness to the meaningfulness of digital disconnection (Bucher, 2020; Syvertsen, 2020). My operative question has been how far this ethos has extended itself and which avenues it has yet to extend into. In my mapping the first decade of disconnection research, I have emphasised that digital disconnection has thus far been documented as a Western, social media–centric, temporary, and individualised phenomenon, although a few outlier studies have indicated that this might change. I argue that there is still much room for meaningful expansion into new venues of empirical research. The futility of digital disconnection may be both more deep-set and far more surmountable than has been previously proclaimed, depending on where we choose to look. For now, the present state of research leaves this as an open question.

The story of digital disconnection may begin with ambivalences towards social media, but it need not end there. Instead, the open interest in disconnection could fruitfully extend to all the aspects of life in which media may play a role. I argue that we should bear this openness in mind whenever new media appear on the scene. Additionally, I argue we should be curious about which social contexts and structures media are already embedded in, and which might aid or constrain disconnective possibilities. Insofar as there is a digital backlash occuring, then digital disconnection studies are a prime venue for making sense of it, and I argue that this emerging field has far from reached its full potential.

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