Hoang Q, Cronin J, Skandalis A (2025), "Digital detox and the 'app-blocking app': abstinence as a desire-regenerating force". *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-05-2024-0373

Accepted version

Digital Detox & the 'App-blocking App': Abstinence as a Desire-Regenerating Force

Corresponding author: Quynh Hoang, University of Leicester School of Business, University of Leicester, Brookfield, Leicester LE2 1RQ, UK. [email: nqh1@leicester.ac.uk]

Abstract

Purpose: This study critically explores the role of abstinence in networks of desire (NoDs), examining how it shapes, curates, and integrates emerging consumption passions.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Using digital detoxing as an empirical context, we consider how attempts to abstain from certain consumption activities can function as a complex desire-regenerating force with the potential to diversify rather than disrupt consumers' NoDs. Insights are drawn from a 12-month netnography and 21 interviews undertaken amongst self-identifying digital detoxers.

Findings: Building upon Slavoj Žižek's concept of *interpassivity*, we trace how digital detoxing practices often rely on market-located solutions, ultimately facilitating new, substitute, and complementary modes of consumption. We identify three key processes – re-autonomisation, deceleration, and re-sensitisation – that enable digital detoxing to reshape, excite, and diversify consumers' desires.

Research Implications: This study offers insights into how apolitical and pragmatic forms of abstinence – such as digital detoxing – contrast sharply with anti-consumption practices driven by shared political or ideological values. We highlight how the interplay between abstinence and market co-optation is grounded in continuous processes of deterritorialising and reterritorialising desire within NoDs.

Practical Implications: The privatised character of abstinence lacks the solidarity and cooperative vision needed to address systemic problems, becoming instead a gateway for consuming interpassive solutions. Making durable changes to a digitally saturated consumer culture requires interventions that go *beyond* turning individuals' dissatisfactions into commercial opportunities (e.g., 'app-blocking apps', 'unplugged holidays', or 'dumb' phones) and move instead toward ethical technology design and broader structural and communal responses.

Originality/Value: We extend the theorisation of NoDs by showing how technocultural networks are sustained not just by consumers' unfettered engagement *with* digital technologies but also by their ostensible resistance *against* them. We theorise the desire-regeneration processes that occur through abstinence projects, showing how consumers' desires are continuously reshaped and redirected towards other market-located forms.

Keywords: Abstinence; anti-consumption; consumerism; co-optation; digital detox; interpassivity; networks of desire; technoculture; Žižek.

1. Introduction

Giving up consumption has become a significant marketing opportunity. The smoking cessation market is a multi-billion-dollar industry with audiobooks, mobile applications, and wearable devices that assist in monitoring, reducing, and abstaining from consumption (Amiri & Khan, 2022). Similarly, for pornography addiction, an array of online therapies, treatment programmes, and apps – such as Manhood, Reboot, and BrainBuddy – provide support networks, gamify self-restraint, and assist users in curbing their consumption (Sniewski & Farvid, 2019). In most cases, consumption appears to be something that can be brought under control through the use of marketised technology. Nevertheless, technology itself functions as a ubiquitous object of desire known for its hedonic, seductive, and addictive properties, often intersecting with how individuals pursue, experience, and articulate their passions within consumer culture (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022; Belk et al., 2021; Hoang et al., 2022; Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019). Kozinets et al. (2017) explore these intersections through their conceptualisation of *networks of desire*, arguing that consumer desire transcends the individual consumer and is instead constructed, circulated, and amplified within constantly evolving, interconnected technological, social, and economic infrastructures. In their conceptualisation, digital technologies do not merely mediate or facilitate consumer desire; they actively shape its formation and intensification.

Although digital technologies are identified as a crucial aspect of networks of desire, we know much *less* about what happens when consumers try to minimise or break their reliance on digital platforms and devices. To address this research gap, we examine the empirical context of "digital detoxing" – defined as consumers' deliberate efforts to limit or restrict digital usage, either completely or in part, for variable amounts of time. While digital detoxing efforts might appear to disrupt the digitally mediated networks that shape and perpetuate consumer desire, in this paper we argue that such attempts at abstinence do not necessarily negate desire but help to reformat and reimagine it, thus enabling the expansion and diversification of the very networks they appear to disturb. Here, we consider how attempts at abstinence function as a complex *desire-regenerating force* with the potential to expand, curate, and integrate new consumption passions and interests with extant networks. By addressing abstinence projects as a productive albeit paradoxical site within networks of desire, this paper contributes to critical consumer and marketing research by demonstrating how even acts of resistance remain deeply entangled within networked logics of consumption and commodification.

To ground our theorisation, we draw upon the cultural critic Slavoj Žižek's (1998) concept of *interpassivity* (see also Cronin & Fitchett, 2021; Kotzé, 2020) which describes how individuals delegate their abstinence, ethical burden, and subjective agency to intermediary market offerings which promise to confront the very 'thing' they ostensibly wish to reject or cut out on their behalf. We critically explore how digital detox practices – including the use of screen-time regulation settings, 'app-blocking apps', and digital-free retreats – are characterised by a *passive* deferral of abstinence onto substitute brands, products, services, and experiences, sparing individuals from needing to engage more critically in *active*, communal, and radical confrontations with technology-related problems at the structural level.

Rather than wholly rejecting digital technologies, opting out of digital platforms indefinitely, or jettisoning one's desires in totality, we explore how detox practices enable individuals to interpassively tarry with feelings of disconnection and benign rebellion, all the while remaining firmly embedded within the endlessly intersecting networks of desire and the capitalist markets that sustain them. 'App-blocking apps', for example, co-opt and commodify self-control, performing the act of abstinence on behalf of the consumer, while digital-free retreat experiences package disconnection not as an exit from desire but as a novel means of reorienting and expanding it. We examine these practices as symptomatic of a broader trend in which abstinence – framed within the pervasive logic of the market – functions as a convenient "false activity" (Žižek, 2006, p.26), providing the illusion of meaningful change while ultimately leaving underlying structural conditions unchallenged. To orient our analysis, we ask: *How does abstinence function within consumers' networks of desire?* And, *how does the market facilitate processes of desire regeneration?*

In answering these questions, this paper makes two main theoretical contributions. Firstly, by illustrating how disconnection does not negate desire but instead reformats it, our analysis contributes to critical theorisations of the dynamics of market co-optation (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022; Cronin & Fitchett, 2021; Hietanen et al., 2022; Jones & Hietanen, 2023). Our analysis highlights that pragmatic and individualistic attempts to overcome collective consumption-related problems, in the absence of a unifying, politically coherent vision for change, opens multiple opportunities for desires to be reconstituted, redirected, and attached to further market-located objects and experiences, thus extending what Holt (2002, p.89) calls "a form of market-sanctioned cultural experimentation through which the market rejuvenates itself". Here, we show how market co-optation occurs through a consensual process that adapts to and integrates the concerns of resistant consumers who remain reliant upon – rather

than oppositional to – the commodification and commercial mainstreaming of their passions and interests (*cf.* Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007).

Secondly, and relatedly, our analysis of privatised and depoliticised efforts to face down consumption-related problems departs from prior marketing studies that have emphasised the collective and ideologically-motivated character of anti-consumption (e.g., Pecot et al., 2021; Pentina & Amos, 2011). In contrast to assumptions that anti-consumption practices are rooted in political ideology and thus reflect cultural and communal ideals that are antagonistic to market structures and relations, we elaborate on a paradoxical form of privatised and market-reinforcing anti-consumption that remains integrated and allied with the values of consumer culture.

2. Theoretical Underpinnings

Three sub-sections follow. First, we provide a background to networks of desire; second, an overview of abstinence; and third, an account of interpassivity including clarification for how this concept can help us to situate abstinence *within* networks of desire.

2.1 Networks of Desire: A Brief Background

Kozinets et al. (2017) introduce networks of desire (hereafter NoDs) as a catch-all term for the complex techno-cultural constellations of consumers, their energised passions, digital technologies, and the virtual and physical objects that interconnect to incubate shared consumption interests. There are two important sub-constructs of NoDs that require definition: desire and technology. First, desire refers to the raw, amorphous, and sometimes objectless motivating force of human cravings or impulses that underpins much of consumer behaviour. Desire, when expressed within (and influenced by) the market, can be connected to objects, practices, meanings and experiences, thus forming desirous systems (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022). Second, although the word technology has a broad remit and can encompass

a multitude of tools, machines, and techniques with a variety of uses, actions, and meanings, Kozinets et al. (2017, p. 661) emphasise contemporary *digital* technology in their account of NoDs and specifically "networked communication technology". In these respects, NoDs are spoken about in terms of "new information and communication technologies" (e.g., social media, smartphones, tablets, videogames, streaming services, wearable devices, and e-commerce sites) and the combined human interests, surveillance, and algorithmic governance mechanisms that shape and are shaped by these technologies in a "networked age" (p.676).

Such technologies – what Kozinets et al. (2017, pp.676-677) describe as the "electric arteries of desire" – have the capacity to dramatically transform "raw, passionate energy" into an open, dynamic, participatory network within which passions are mediated, captured, and normalised as commodifiable forms. Working as an abstracting force, these technologies can shift desires beyond individual bodies into shareable discourses that others can engage with, reshape, and amplify. Social media platforms or photo-sharing services, for example, provide users with tools to express, curate, and distribute their passions, allowing personal consumption interests to be connected with and intensified by a larger, interconnected web of shared desires (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022). Within this network, technologies work alongside objects and bodies as an extremifying force, promoting and rewarding consumers' radical passions – thus facilitating "endless desiring-production" (Hietanen et al., 2020, p.747).

Via technologies, NoDs function as dynamic, ever-evolving systems that continuously shape consumer desires and engagement through the interconnected processes of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation (Kozinets et al., 2017, p. 662). First, *territorialisation* occurs when subjects (e.g., consumers) and objects (e.g., products, brands, or ideologies) are linked, forming coherent structures – or "territories" – that shape, determine, and intensify passions for consumption. Kozinets et al. illustrate this with the

territory of “gastro-porn”, where diverse human and non-human actors – restaurants, decadent menu items, charismatic bloggers, culinary capital, screens, and digital means of beautifying food (e.g., filters) – converge under one provocative “pornographic” structure (p.665). This coherent framework allows for food to be passionately devoured “not only with the mouth, but also with eyes, thumbs, and ears” (p.672). Similarly, McFarlane et al. (2020) explore how the convergence of fashion blogger-preneurs, their followers, fantasies of prestige, online imagery of Kate Middleton – a member of the British Royal Family – and attempts to emulate Kate’s fashion styles produce a territory called ‘Replikate’, a networked space that animates “[p]assion for recreating aspects of the royal lifestyle” (p.1217).

Second, NoDs function through *deterritorialisation*, a process that disrupts or dissolves established linkages between subjects and objects, thereby creating space for evolving patterns of consumption (Kozinets et al., 2017, p. 662). This can be seen in cases of technological shifts, cultural backlash, or platform migration, such as the shift from static online forums or traditional blogs to dynamic, real-time interactions on platforms like Twitter/X or TikTok. These platforms challenge and destabilise traditional producer-user relationships by breaking down norms and values that once shaped how consumers engaged with brands and constructed their identities around them (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). Additionally, the rise of social media influencers challenges conventional celebrity endorsements – “un-linking” consumers from established marketing paradigms (Cocker et al., 2021).

Third, *reterritorialisation* entails new linkages that happen before, after, or alongside an unlinking (Kozinets et al., 2017, p. 662). This “re-linking” reshapes consumer desires by forging new connections that align with evolving market trends, societal shifts, and disruptive forces. An example of reterritorialisation is found in displaced and isolated consumers’

attempts at social recomposition "following a period of severe social dissolution and extreme individualism" (Cova, 1997, p. 300). As traditional bases for one's passions, such as family, religion, and community, are disrupted or dissolved by consumer capitalism, those impacted might attempt to recompose their social realm through discovering alternative interests with like-minded others via online communities and virtual substitutes for connection (Hoang et al., 2022). McFarlane et al. (2020) refer to this as "the cycle of passion," in which "[p]assion is recycled and channelled into new passionate projects" (p.1223).

Together, these interconnected processes of (de)(re)territorialisation represent the continuous, fluid movement of desirous flows within ever-evolving networks, which are "constantly being made and unmade by data, meaning, consumption, and innovation" (Kozinets et al., 2017, p.676). Configured as vast technocultural fields of multiple interconnected actors and their shifting passions and interests, NoDs should be understood as *always-in-becoming*, forever prone to changes and transformations.

In conceptualising NoDs as complex systems centred on ever-changing interconnections, Kozinets et al. (2017) emphasise the pivotal role of technology in mediating, circulating, and intensifying consumer desires. Central to their framework is a baseline coupling between consumer and digital technologies – a foundational axis around which a plethora of connections or disconnections with other objects, subjects, experiences, and events emerge. In our study, we ask: what happens if that baseline coupling becomes fractured?

Although NoDs are conceptualised as platforms for technologically enhancing intersections between subjects and objects through dynamic, ever-expanding consumption loops, technology itself must also be appreciated as just another restlessly changing actant – subject to transformation, deterritorialisation, and even disappearance. Accordingly, the

always-in-becoming nature of NoDs should not be viewed solely as contingent upon human-technological interdependency, but also upon its fragility and fungibility, as exemplified by consumers' counter-technological tendencies and resistant practices (Hoang et al., 2023). If we accept that digital technologies only make up *part* of some system of consumption interest (e.g., yoga, gastro-porn, fashion), then perhaps cutting down or cutting out digital consumption will not impede that system but could instead be the catalyst for its expansion. We argue that anti-consumption can become yet another arena for consumer desire to blossom, prompting individuals to explore and invest in alternative media, exchange modes, and practices – thereby regenerating desire and diversifying consumption networks. Before we provide theoretical scaffolding for this claim, we first outline the concept of abstinence.

2.2 Anti-consumption & Abstinence

To fully grasp the concept of abstinence, it is crucial to situate it within the broader conceptual class known as anti-consumption. At its core, anti-consumption "literally means against consumption" (Lee et al., 2011, p.1681) and refers to the deliberate and meaningful exclusion or reduction of goods from one's consumption routine (Makri et al., 2020). Prior literature highlights three interrelated categories of anti-consumption: *rejection*, which involves the complete avoidance of certain consumption forms; *restriction*, which entails reducing or limiting consumption; and *reclamation*, which consists of recovering, reinterpreting, or repurposing goods, practices, or cultural meanings that have been marginalised, lost, or commodified by mainstream markets (Lee et al., 2011; Makri et al., 2020). Anti-consumption, in all of its forms, is frequently associated with ideological and political motivations – often framed as a collective response to the excesses of consumer capitalism (Pecot et al., 2021; Pentina & Amos, 2011). Individuals and groups are assumed to engage in rejection, restriction, or reclamation as deliberate and shared acts of defiance against

dominant market structures and consumerist cultures (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). This defiance manifests in diverse ways, from organised boycotts and ethical purchasing choices to voluntary simplicity and broader movements that challenge material excess and overconsumption (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Mikkonen et al., 2011; Peyer et al., 2017).

Abstinence, which we define as the deliberate act of excluding or restraining specific aspects of consumption while critically reflecting on their meaning or impact, appears to sit at the intersection of rejection, restriction, and reclamation – drawing upon all three categories of anti-consumption (Cherrier & Gurrieri, 2013). Abstinence has been mainly explored by contributors outside of marketing scholarship, making it a closely related but potentially independent concept requiring its own careful conceptualisation (Kotzé, 2020; Warner, 2010). In *All or Nothing: A Short History of Abstinence in America*, Warner describes abstinence as "a principled and unerring refusal to engage in a particular activity" (Warner, 2010, p.xi). She clarifies, "[g]oing without something for a short period of time is not abstinence […] Anything short of total victory is a form of defeat" (xi). However, as others have countered (see O'Gorman, 2020), the shortcoming of this definition is that it ignores nuance, and disavows any potential for temporary or episodic forms of abstinence.

Popular forms of abstinence, such as intermittently abstaining from consuming food, alcohol, smoking, or digital media, are often "site-specific", "integrated into a temporary ritualistic practice" and thus reflect "contemporary rituals of moderation" (O'Gorman, 2020, p.134; Cherrier & Gurrieri, 2013; Kotzé, 2020; Nicholls, 2023). Moving beyond Warner's absolutism, Frank et al. (2020, p.1) identify "situational abstinence", where individuals abstain from particular things in particular situations and for particular reasons while consuming those things in other situations. They also highlight "long term abstinence", which encompasses taking a break from a particular type of consumption for extended periods,

typically with “a clear end date” (p. 5), and may not necessarily exclude consuming some adapted, altered, or justified version of the abstained object. Here, abstinence rarely means total, brute abstention: whether situational or longer-term, it does *not* entail the permanent or complete eschewal of consumption. Instead, abstinence often reflects an intermittent, temporary disengagement or adaptation – illustrating the bricolent and multiple ways that individuals “navigate restricted/revised consumption choices within a dominant consumer culture” to fit with personal identities, symbolic aspirations, or spiritual values (Cherrier & Gurrieri, 2013, p.242).

While previous marketing and consumption literature emphasises the ideological and political dimensions of anti-consumption (Pecot et al., 2021; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007), it is important not to lose sight of its apolitical and pragmatic functioning in everyday life (Cherrier & Gurrieri, 2013; Nicholls, 2023). Abstinence is routinely driven by practical and personal reasons – what Cherrier, Black and Lee (2011, p.1763) describe as “instrumental constraints and objective value-rational concerns”. Contemporary forms of situational and long-term abstinence are, oftentimes, *not* undertaken in the spirit of collectively galvanising change to the dominant market-capitalist system (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Instead, abstinence is most popularly undertaken for self-improvement or self-regulation purposes; to accomplish practical ends or achieve balance and control over objects and activities with addictive properties, self-destructive capacities, or moral taints (Hoang et al., 2023; Nicholls, 2023).

Crucially, as we illustrate in this paper, this pragmatic functioning of abstinence might not contravene the capitalist mechanisms that drive and sustain consumption, but rather serve to fuel and intensify *further* episodes of consumption. In Izberk-Bilgin’s (2012) account of the influence that religious beliefs have upon consumption, she identifies that Islamists’

abstinence from purchasing global brands does not dispel consumption desires per se but simply redirects them towards a (re-)engagement with specialist Islamised products. As she notes, "rather than dethroning market capitalism and consumer culture, Islamists seek to be firmly embedded in a market society so that they may transform it to be congruent with Islamist mores" (p.680). Abstinence, far from genuinely transforming the market, might be better considered a productive force that sustains dominant market systems and rejuvenates consumption interests through "creating new 'opportunity spaces' […], markets, and products while contesting existing ones" (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012, p.664). Indeed, in various cases, consumers' attempts to abstain from certain consumption choices are largely co-opted, rerouted, and assimilated back into consumer culture (Holt, 2002). As Kotzé (2020, p. 62) explains: "This is because periods of commodity abstinence simply open up the space for different kinds of desire to emerge and be temporarily satiated by additional commodities that serve as intermittent replacements for the abstained object".

In short, various indicators from previous research suggest the individualistic, apolitical and pragmatic dimensions of abstinence and how it can be conducive to substitute forms of consumption. What is *missing* from prior accounts is a formal conceptualisation of the specific desire-regeneration processes that occur within, and because of, the vacuum introduced by abstinence projects, *i.e.,* how consumers' desire is deterritorialised, reterritorialised, and ultimately redirected towards *further* rather than less market-located commodities.

In redressing this research gap, we draw upon the concept of interpassivity and explore the complex and dynamic processes through which the absence of one form of consumption gives rise to new and expanded forms within NoDs.

2.3 The Interpassivity of Abstinence

A useful concept that can enable us to approach the apolitical and pragmatic aspects of abstinence is Žižek's (1998) "interpassivity" (see also Cronin & Fitchett, 2021; Kotzé, 2020). To behave interpassively is to insulate oneself from needing to commit to complex, abstract and often time-consuming (*i.e.*, active) behaviours, choosing instead to delegate actions, beliefs or emotions onto another subject or object, who acts, thinks or emotes in one's place (Žižek, 1998). Examples of interpassivity from various cultures include hiring professional mourners to grieve in one's place at funerals or using a Tibetan prayer wheel to pray on one's behalf while allowing oneself to focus on other things. As Žižek describes:

> "[Y]ou write a prayer on a paper, put the rolled paper into a wheel, and turn it automatically, without thinking [...] In this way, the wheel itself is praying for me, instead of me – or, more precisely, I myself am praying through the medium of the wheel. The beauty of it is that in my psychological interior I can think about whatever I want, I can yield to the most dirty and obscene fantasies, and it does not matter because… whatever I am thinking, *objectively* I am praying." (Žižek 1989, pp.31-32, original emphasis).

The presence of a substitute – or "medium" – in Žižek's example is crucial in ensuring that active commitments (*i.e*., praying) can be absent yet still observed. Comparably, by signing and sharing an online petition for a meaningful cause on social media, one can stage an appearance of being a virtuous hero who cares about the lives of others, absolving oneself of the felt need to do anything else.

For reasons deep-seated in self-expression, self-fulfilment, and self-esteem, consumers want to be perceived to be on the side of *action*, as "doers" rather than passive observers, yet the ubiquity of interpassivity in consumer culture also reveals a desire to be freed from this burden. Interpassivity engenders what Žižek calls *false activity*: "you think you are active, while your true position, as it is embodied in the fetish, is passive" (1998,

n.p). Prayer wheels, ethical brands, cause campaigns on social media, and so on can be considered as *fetishes*; objects and ideas onto which consumers' responsibilities can be displaced, disabusing them of any felt pressure that first-hand actions must be undertaken. Žižek attributes interpassivity to putting on a performance for ourselves and others – using fetishes to stage a pantomimic act of "make-believe" that represents us as actively committed.

In this paper, we will explore abstinence as a desire-regenerating force constituted by fetishistic acts that *look like* – rather than *deliver* – resistance, thus providing a façade of change, all the while preserving the entrenched structures of the market and networked consumerist logics that sustain them. Far from foreclosing market reliance altogether, abstaining from a particular object, practice, or category of consumption provides a fetish that validates consumers' desire, redirecting them towards substitute consumption activities. Consequently, various replacements for the abstained object become relied upon, which reinvigorate energetic flows of desire within NoDs, while acting on one's behalf to display their rebellious or courageous virtues.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Context

Digital detox has been chosen as an empirical context to explore how abstinence impacts NoDs. Over a decade after first being included in the Oxford Dictionary in 2013, digital detox has become a talking point, a media buzzword, and ironically, a social media hashtag (*#digital detox*) popularly used in discourses on reducing or avoiding digital consumption. Approximately a quarter of US internet users report undertaking some kind of digital detox weekly (Statista, 2022), and half of UK social media users express some desire to detox from social networking services (Mintel, 2021).

Although recognised as a notoriously fluid term, digital detox should not be taken to mean a general cessation of *all* kinds of technology usage, such as cars, power tools, household appliances, and similar technologies. Rather, digital detox is understood to cover enclaved, periodic breaks specifically from digital devices that facilitate interconnectivity and screen-based information, like smartphones, tablets and computing platforms, or from internet-mediated activities on those devices such as social media engagement (Radtke et al., 2022). The depth of these periodic "breaks" is, however, negotiable and varies from person to person, involving diverse means of limiting, restricting usage of, and/or reclaiming relationships with digital consumption beyond their total and universal refusal. Accordingly, rather than a wholesale rejection of digital technology, a digital detox must be viewed as a flexible, amorphous, and personalised series of practices aimed at recovering focus, balance, and well-being in an ever-connected world (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020).

By approaching digital detoxing as a private problem-solving intervention based on individuals taking responsibility for their own technology use in a digital era, previous accounts have focused almost exclusively on the phenomenon's outcomes on health, productivity, and social relationships (Radtke et al., 2022). Questions regarding digital detoxing's political-ideological content (or lack of) and its relationship with the market remain relatively unaddressed. As an exception to this, Syvertsen (2020) considers the potential for discourses and practices of digital detox to be resistant to socialised and politicised digital dependency. However, she dismisses their potential to engender solidarity or any robust collective meaning, suggesting that "digital detoxers rarely wage political campaigns or advocate total abstention" (p. 8). For Syvertsen, while it is vaguely oppositional to widespread digitalisation, digital detoxing must be thought of as a loose, decentralised regime of personal coping behaviours that works instrumentally, expressively, and sometimes cynically "as a short-term cleansing – akin to a juice fast or a colon cleanse –

rather than being part of a collective action to handle root causes" (2020, p.8). Our approach to digital detox builds upon and advances this understanding, with a particular focus on how the temporary abstinence it exemplifies relates to NoDs and the desiring apparatuses of consumer-capitalist technoculture.

3.2. Research Procedures

Our empirical findings derive from a 12-month netnography and 21 in-depth interviews with digital detoxers conducted between 2020 and 2021. First, observational netnographic enquiry was undertaken by the first author, who non-participatively immersed herself in online conversations and interactions on the topic of digital detox, an approach that carries an inherent irony – using the Internet to investigate consumers' efforts to disconnect from that very medium. This paradox reflects the nuanced character of episodic abstinence: digital detoxing is not about permanent disconnection but occurs cyclically, with individuals going online intermittently to share their progress, seek support, (re)negotiate their relationships with digital technologies, and engage with like-minded others about substitute behaviours.

The act of using digital platforms to make sense of digital detox not only underscores the intersection of digital consumption and anti-consumption or the fragmented nature of episodic abstinence, but also how these phenomena are mediated and complicated through critical and communal reflection. A netnographic approach is thus particularly well-suited to capturing the tensions and complexities of digital detox – highlighting the contradictions, evolving practices, and community dynamics that traditional methods might overlook. Furthermore, the stay-at-home guidance and lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with our data collection, likely amplified these tensions. As digital connectivity became a necessary means of work and communication, digital detox efforts appeared short-term or partial at best. By enabling immersion in online spaces where

detoxers articulate their ambivalences, frustrations, and aspirations, netnography reveals not just what users say about disconnecting, but also how they (re)negotiate their habits, experiences, and personal boundaries around abstinence, enabling us to uncover the dynamic and socially constructed processes of desire regeneration within NoDs.

A suitable netnographic site, Reddit, was sampled in line with Kozinets' (2020) five recommended data-selection criteria: relevance, activity, interactivity, diversity, and richness. As described by Kozinets (2020, p.76), "Reddit… [is] similar in many ways to the communications media of the bygone age of virtual community […] the site is open to the public – anyone can view it without registering". Although several "subreddits" (discussion boards) dedicated to discussing digital detoxing were initially identified, including "Digital Minimalism", "Dopamine Detox" and "OfflineDay", one in particular "NoSurf. Stop spending life on the net" (NoSurf for short) emerged as the most relevant source for identifying "deep" and extensively descriptive data necessary for addressing our research questions (Kozinets, 2020, p.194). At the time of data collection, NoSurf had approximately 150,000 members who would participate in the group to exchange concerns, advice, and reflections on "healthy, mindful, and purposeful internet use" (NoSurf, 2024). By focusing solely on the NoSurf subreddit, our forum data collection remains targeted, ensuring a more manageable and insightful analysis.

Founded in 2011, the NoSurf group continues to grow with thousands of new members every month. At the time of data collection, the group had a high frequency of postings with an average of 115 new threads per week and a combined total of more than 6,500 threads overall (between December 2020 and December 2021). The threads with the most interactions were initially located using the "Top" filter function on the forum and the first author then carefully read and selected the threads containing "rich and revealing

excerpts of data" to include for final analysis (Kozinets, 2020, p.409). A total of 124 threads from the NoSurf subreddit, posted between 2019 and 2021, were sampled and included in the final dataset. To triangulate the online data, these threads were supplemented with insights from relevant blogs that offered personal narratives, experiential reflections, and other forms of deeply introspective, "story-revealing" texts (Kozinets, 2020, p. 62). Keywords such as "digital detox," "log off," and "quit tech" were used in Google searches to identify these blog sources. Moreover, the first author kept an "immersion journal" where she chronicled emergent thoughts and ideas (Kozinets, 2020, p.27) over 12 months (Dec 2020 – Dec 2021), resulting in nearly 700 pages of text, images, and annotations.

Second, following a combination of purposive and snowball sampling approaches, the first author reached out to NoSurf and her social circle to recruit participants for semi-structured interviews. In total, 21 informants were recruited, including 15 women and 6 men, aged 19 to 39 years, who varied in educational levels, occupations, and living locations (see Table 1). Due to COVID-19 restrictions at the time of data collection, all interviews were conducted digitally as "e-interviews" (Kozinets, 2020, p.252) via video-calling software or asynchronous email exchanges. Interviews began with a series of grand tour questions and evolved into conversations about participants' engagements with various subsets of technocultural networks (e.g., digital devices, social media, online communities, and other internet-mediated platforms) and their digital detoxing regimes (see Appendix 1 for participants' digital detoxing practices). Questions like "What draws you to these screens?" and "What strategies do you use to disconnect from them?" were employed to explore the participants' digital motivations, experiences, and approaches to digital disengagement. Each interview lasted between 1 to 2 hours. All were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and pseudonymised, resulting in 464 pages of textual data.

Table 1: Participant information (Source: Authors' own work).

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Occupation	Living location
Mike	19	Male	Mixed martial arts practitioner	Sweden
Jane	24	Female	PhD student	USA
Thomas	22	Male	English language teacher	Vietnam
Jason	33	Male	PhD student	UK
Lucy	31	Female	PhD student	Cyprus
Michelle	21	Female	Undergraduate student	Vietnam
Rosa	24	Female	Undergraduate student	The Netherlands
Matthew	29	Male	Non-profit worker	UK
Emma	24	Female	Master's student	UK
Chloe	21	Female	Undergraduate student	USA
Caroline	20	Female	Undergraduate student	UK
Anna	30	Female	HR manager	Vietnam
Alice	26	Female	Graduate student	USA
Amy	22	Female	Food manufacturing specialist	Canada
Julie	27	Female	Secondary school teacher	Canada
Amelia	28	Female	Nursing assistant	USA
Rachel	26	Female	IT specialist	USA
Jack	25	Male	Software engineer	Brazil
Paul	27	Male	Non-profit worker	UK
Sophia	29	Female	Software engineer	USA
Sarah	39	Female	Retreat coordinator	USA

All netnographic and interview materials were brought together as a combined data pool which was coded, categorised, and abstracted several times following "the hermeneutical back and forth between part and whole" approach (Spiggle, 1994, p.495). This involved interpreting and making connections between each part of the data to generate a

sense of the whole, while allowing for emergent themes to be developed, challenged, and modified as we made conceptual connections with the literature. This process was guided by a theory-enfolded approach, involving the combination of inductive reasoning and the abductive application of our overarching lens of interpassivity. This allowed us to develop several theory-enfolded themes which explain the functions of abstinence in NoDs as a desire-regenerating force.

4. Findings

Our findings are organised to describe two complementary levels of analysis. First, we focus on the manifestations of and motivations for digital detoxing, showing how situational and longer-term forms of abstinence do not equate to the total rejection of digital technology but reflect consumers' aspirations for developing a more balanced relationship with it. Second, we engage in a deeper level of theory-enfolded analysis, presenting three key processes through which digital detox is undertaken interpassively. Each process allows us to see how desire is regenerated, allowing NoDs to be diversified and expanded rather than disrupted.

4.1. Abstinence from Digital Consumption: Manifestations & Motivations

Digital detoxing is not a single, generic mode of activity but is variegated and undertaken in line with each individual's specific requirements and life circumstances. The diverse motivations for and manifestations of digital detox we detected across our data are underpinned by a basic dilemma: digital technologies are *simultaneously* positive and negative (see also Airoldi & Rokka, 2022; Denegri-Knott et al., 2023; Hoang et al., 2022). While often aware of problems such as their devices' addictive properties, online surveillance, and privacy loss, many of our informants recognise the life-changing and culture-shaping benefits and pleasures that digital consumption brings. For some, web-based communities, online shopping, podcasts, and video streaming provide them with welcome comforts outside of precarious, ill-paid

employment. For others, studying is made easier through the vast amount of resources available on the web. And for most, keeping in regular contact with friends and family is made possible by video calling and instant messaging applications.

Accordingly, achieving a complete break from digital technologies is rarely the end goal for detoxers, and "conscious", "mindful" or "intentional" usage is preferred. Two important contextualising issues emerged from these insights in relation to the structure of detoxing: its commodification and its short vs long-term manifestation.

First, digital detox is inseparable from the commodification of abstinence itself, exemplified by the expansive array of desirous lifestyle products and brands that have emerged as substitutes for the abstained object including, but not limited to: holidays and wellness retreats (e.g., Unplugged off-grid cabins in the UK, Camp Grounded off-grid retreats in the US); homoeopathy and naturopathy offerings (e.g., ilāpothecary's digital detox face therapy); wellbeing kits (e.g., EnergyDots Digital Detox Kit); self-help books (e.g., Tanya Goodin's *Stop Staring at Screens*, Catherine Price's *How to Break Up With Your Phone*), and even; digital products including wellbeing apps (e.g., Digital Mindfulness, Headspace, Smiling Mind); website blockers (e.g., Cold Turkey Blocker, RescueTime, SelfControl), and; "dumb phones" (e.g., the Light Phone, Punkt MP01).

Second, the search for balance rather than outright rejection of digital technologies results in short and long-term manifestations of digital detox. In terms of short-term manifestations, attempts to sequester the act of abstinence to designated times (e.g., at the weekends, in the evenings, before sleep), spaces (e.g., the bedroom, the living room, the garden), or activities (e.g., family dinners, friend gatherings, meditative walks) were observed to be dependent on what is most desirable and convenient. Common terms across our data,

such as “digital-free evenings”, “digital-free zones” or “digital-free days-out”, reflect the ephemeral and occasion-based nature of short-term manifestations.

Detoxers we spoke with use metaphors such as “rebooting” or “rewiring” their brains to explain the personal and therapeutic logic of their situational abstinence. For example, as shared to NoSurf by “Mina”: “Your brain is like a computer and sometimes it needs a reboot or a defrag. Stop, sit and think. Allow your mind to refresh” (“Mina”, NoSurf). Comparably, “Fiona” advocates for carving out small breaks from digital technologies to allow for mental clarity and creativity:

> “The game changer for me was to find time with no inputs that gave my brain time to catch up on all the processing and mental clearing-out it had fallen behind on. For me, it’s taking walks with no music in, waiting in line for my coffee without reaching for my phone and doing manual chores like the dishes with no background noise” (“Fiona”, NoSurf).

Like Fiona, other detoxers spoke of trying to insulate their immediate pleasures, such as sightseeing, enjoying a meal at a restaurant, or watching a musical artist in concert from the encroachment of unwanted screens. The presence of smartphone cameras and social media messaging at these events is perceived by detoxers to be disruptive to offline hobbies and passions where “desire’s energetic connections and disconnections occur” (Kozinets et al., 2017, p.662).

With longer-term manifestations of digital detox, our informants described detox projects as hiatuses from usually only one or two addictive digital products, such as social media, online pornography, or video games. For some detoxers, subtracting “the main digital distractions” from their consumption lifestyles and passions over extended periods seems preferable to shorter periods of abstinence from *all* digital technologies.

Overall, in both short and longer-term manifestations of digital detox, our participants share their aspirations for using technology "in moderation". We now turn to our main findings on how abstinence works to regenerate consumers' desire within NoDs.

4.2. Re-autonomisation of Desire

Common to detoxers' attempts to abstain from digital technologies is *not* the absence of desire for consumption, but rather the redirection and reformulation of desirous cravings into other commodity forms. Across the data, we see many instances of what we call the *re-autonomisation of desire*, that is the reshaping of desire into more "autonomous" consumption choices that detoxers feel are more aligned with their own organic decision-making and personal interests.

For digital detoxers, the revival of one's autonomy oftentimes means the ability to exercise a degree of control over their passions and to regulate what and when to consume independent of, for instance, algorithmic surveillance, AI-driven targeted advertising, and the addictive logic of digital devices and platforms (Hoang et al., 2022; Lambert et al., 2024). The paradox we detected in our data, however, is that "control" is often interpassively transferred to another subject, object, or consumption activity. Detoxers purchase specialist products such as lockboxes with timer functionality to seal away their smartphones for certain periods or download applications to block access to particular websites on their devices.

In close alignment with Žižek's (1989, p.32) description of an interpassive "medium" that consumers rely upon to *do* their resistance for them, many detoxers depend on tools or settings *within* digital platforms such as newsfeed personalisation and advert "snoozing" options that filter, minimise, and eliminate what they might deem to be negative or "toxic" from their NoDs. In a conversation about the toxicity of Instagram, "Andy", a NoSurf poster, shares how the platform's "mute" function helps him to decontaminate his personal

architectural hobbies and design-oriented NoD from extraneous materials, thus regaining a sense of control:

> "I definitely agree that as a social tool it [Instagram] can be toxic. I have muted everyone I know that made me feel competitive (stories and posts), and now I only see design accounts or my family members' posts. It's actually wonderful because a lot of smaller design firms post job opportunities here rather than on LinkedIn or the typical corporate job channels.. And I love seeing the latest architecture projects. I was really hateful towards it when I could see all the posturing but now that it's only another means to absorb design/architecture, I love it once again" ("Andy", NoSurf).

Andy's narrative shows the amorphous and variegated nature of abstinence. Digital detox, for him, does not entail the complete abstention from all aspects of digital consumption but rather encompasses a selective, pragmatic disengagement with *only* what he perceives to be toxic elements of his digital milieu. Through making use of the platform's mute feature, Andy grows to "love" Instagram again, entrusting this site with its own detoxification and helping him to avoid aspects of online consumption he finds problematic. In a clear expression of interpassivity, Andy delegates his abstinence efforts to a digital feature which limits toxic content on his behalf and curates the consumption territories he desires, sparing him the need to fully abstain from or abandon his NoD. "Far from foreclosing one's consumption," Kotzé (2020, p.63) suggests, these interpassive gestures give consumption "a moral licence". By social media being made to feel *less* toxic and *more* relevant to one's true self, the detoxer feels morally assured of one's autonomy.

In a NoSurf thread about personal remedies for regaining time and control, "Joan" discloses that she relies on the password function of her social media accounts as an interpassive way of locking herself out of them, negating her need to actively exert willpower and conserving her passions for other life pursuits:

> "You can get app-blocking apps which prevent you from using certain apps - and they also have settings which prevent you from changing the app settings which, if you are comfortable with it, works really well […] I think it's less about using willpower, which is a precious resource and should be saved for actually important things, and more about removing the need to exercise willpower in the first place." ("Joan", NoSurf).

Like many other detoxers, autonomy over consumption for Joan is made possible through *further,* albeit more selective, engagements in technocultural fields, such as her reliance on "app-blocking apps". Joan's argument that digital detox is achieved not through willpower but through *removing* the need for willpower is interpassivity par excellence. She delegates abstinence to *within-market* features that grant the individual feelings of respite without necessitating any actual critique, thus allowing for her conserved energies to be spent elsewhere (Cronin & Fitchett, 2021). Here, one's belief is transposed onto new additions to NoDs that help one to express some autonomy but effectively leave an ethos of individualist desire unchallenged.

"Sophia", a 29-year-old software engineer living in the US, shares with us that her digital detox efforts revolve mostly around concerns for autonomy. Having worked in the tech industry for several years, Sophia feels that the deliberately addictive and manipulative qualities of social media are capable of disastrous consequences. Nevertheless, she stops short of viewing her concerns in structural terms and avoids suggesting collective actions. Instead of advocating for any radical systemic solutions that might alter digitally-mediated markets' enduring problems, Sophia keeps the focus passively on what "could" be desirably introduced and consumed *within* digital networks:

> "What I think would be like the best thing that could ever happen to me is if phone companies start making those dumb phones with the full keyboard again like they had in like 2008 where you could text really easily. I would use one of those for the rest of my life if I could..." ("Sophia", 29).

Sophia passionately reimagines what technocultural networks might be like if entrepreneurial actors could somehow resurrect, revitalise, and marketise aspects of the "good old days". For Sophia, in true interpassive form, *more* market solutions rather than less should be made available for her responsibilities to be transferred to.

Elsewhere, "Ali" describes on the NoSurf forum that breaking his addiction to surfing the web does *not* mean giving up the freedom to become addicted. Rather, he advocates for redirecting one's obsessions away from the web to other market arenas, whether in gaming or exercise:

> "It doesn't really matter what you're addicted to, like with me and gaming, even if I manage to stop playing a certain game, I just find another to get hyper obsessed with. It's not about the specifics, you have to find the root of the problem and why you feel you need to be distracted all the time. For now, I've just about managed to get myself obsessed with exercise so at least what I'm doing 24/7 is good for me." ("Ali", NoSurf).

For Ali, digital detox does not mean excluding or cutting digital technologies from his consumption, rather it constitutes an exciting opportunity to "find [something else] to get hyper obsessed with", allowing him to interpassively regain a perceived sense of autonomy.

By entrusting capitalist technoculture with its own reformation through the marketisation of other technological products to substitute existing ones, many detoxers do not militate against their desirous cravings or the wider market-capitalist system. Instead, they pragmatically *defer to* the very market conditions that propagate the problems they seek relief from (also Hietanen et al., 2022).

4.3. Deceleration of Desire

Another theme to emerge from our data centres on detoxers' attempts at decreasing their pace of involvement in digital consumption, what we call the *deceleration of desire.* Across our data are multiple instances of detoxers attempting to prevent being swept up in the currents of always-on, ever-connected, image-saturated lifestyles that fuel the "accelerated aesthetics and self-promotion" implicit in NoDs (Kozinets et al., 2017, p.274). We repeatedly heard how detoxers cultivate what Husemann and Eckhardt (2019) call "oases of deceleration", online or offline milieus that exist as "spaces where the speed and rhythm of life is temporarily slowed down." (p.1143). Rather than quell desire, these oases mostly serve as moments for recharging and storing up desire for compensatory acts later. The main aim for detoxers is not to disrupt desire itself, but simply to slow it down temporarily so that they feel renewed enough to pick up the pace at a later point.

"Andy" shares a post on Reddit (NoSurf) about how he is slowing down his frequency of (ironically) posting on Reddit:

> "…[S]even days ago on a whim I committed to not posting anything to Reddit for a week. I could still read Reddit. I could still upvote/downvote things, but I could not post anything myself […] The urge to post was strong. On more than one occasion I caught myself actually typing a post out automatically before I managed to stop myself before deleting it […] I confirmed with myself that my engagement with a social media platform, Reddit included, is strongly dependent on my *participation*. If you remove the participatory element, you become a passive observer. A ghost." ("Andy", NoSurf).

In trying to restrict himself from getting caught up in the eddies of "amplification, acceleration, destabilization, and exacerbation" that Kozinets et al. (2017, p.678) attribute to many technocultural hangouts like Reddit, Andy adopts a strategy of partial, modest, and pragmatic abstinence – deliberately limiting *certain* aspects of his digital consumption. By

only viewing and reading but *not* posting content on Reddit, Andy is able to present himself as a "passive observer" or "ghost" whose desires cannot be captured and territorialised. This reflects the *false activity* that Žižek (1998) highlights, which allows Andy to feel *as if* he is actively resisting social media while his actual position remains passive.

In the following post on NoSurf, "Nico" talks about engaging more mindfully with his devices:

> "Yesterday I challenged myself to go completely without my phone for a full 24 hours…I didn't limit my laptop surfing btw…I also had the option to check Telegram and other messaging apps to keep up with my friends, but I checked in about 3 to 4 times during the whole day instead of up to 50 times… Overall, I noticed that I was much more thoughtful and aware about what I was doing on my laptop compared to my phone…It was actually nice to endure some quiet time without music while getting ready or on my way to meet my friend. Having no concept of time when you don't need one is actually great, too. I was really focusing on the moment and my environment and not thinking about the future and what to do after, etc. I wasn't insanely productive…" ("Nico", NoSurf).

Here, Nico explains how he achieves abstinence from his smartphone by keeping his web surfing on his laptop unfettered. As described by Husemann and Eckhardt (2019, p.1153), "technological deceleration is relative". By redirecting his desires from one technology to another, Nico feels less hurried and credits his lowered rate of obsessively checking messages to this interpassive substitution. As with most cases in our data, however, periodic bursts of deceleration can function as personal justifications for *continual* rather than aborted engagement in NoDs. "Jack", a NoSurf poster, shares how meditation and breath-training activities help "boost [his] desire" to return to projects that are important to him:

> "Although I'll admit I'm still developing this into a habit, meditation helps keep me focused and can bring back some energy I thought was lost. More often than not, I think I feel "exhausted" and "done for the day" (aka time for easy Reddit dopamine),

> it’s bc I’ve been so “on” all day and haven’t taken a moment for myself. Taking 10 minutes to focus on my breath helps clear my mind and boost my desire to get back to things that are important to me. The hard part is just remembering to meditate and not giving into Reddit first.” (“Jack”, NoSurf).

For Jack, the act of slowing down via 10-minute meditation blocks before diving into unfettered online activity functions as an interpassive *fetish* – a symbolic gesture that disburdens him from needing to undertake more radical lifestyle adjustments. Fetishes, in a Žižekian sense, can include little successes in life – like minor boosts of productivity – that offer a reassuring illusion of control. These interpassive moments, or intentionally managed forms of deceleration, are not driven by a desire for systemic change but carried out pragmatically and privately, so as to enable more effective or less stressful participation in the accelerated social order later.

4.4. Re-sensitisation of Desire

Lastly, our findings reveal how detoxers attempt to renew and enrich their NoDs by punctuating digital life with sensation-rich and somatic experiences – what we call the *re-sensitisation of desire*. Common amongst detox discourses is the desire to “touch grass”; an emic term meaning to get off the internet and reconnect with the lively materiality of the outside world. Such “touch grass” narratives are reflected in confessions such as: “Two months ago I deleted everything […] today I saw a rainbow and I looked at it, and looked at the clouds all over it and really grasped the visuals I was seeing” (“Dan”, NoSurf); “I've done this detoxing like I completely go off tech for like, two weeks or something […] it's like stepping into a different reality. I'm more connected like, you know, notice flowers” (“Matthew”, 29, interview).

Many detoxers voice their frustration with the disembodied artifice, simulacra, and inauthenticity of virtual environments which they feel over-satiate, encourage complacency,

and distance them from their own "aliveness…its embodied vitality, energy and expression" (Lambert et al., 2024, p.359). The encroaching ubiquity of image-saturated digital dreamscapes results in a state of what Berardi (2009, p.103) calls an "atrophy of emotionality", characterised by the absence of an emotional interface between the material world and what we can feel upon our skin.

By turning off their phones and taking a trip to the countryside, the park, sports grounds, or even the city centre, detoxers seek ways to re-engage with the materialities and socialities of non-virtual ecologies and organic bodies. However, our data suggest these moves should not be read as durable departures from – or resistance to – desirous possibilities, but rather as guileful and interpassive techniques that detoxers rely upon to 1.) expand their desires beyond online venues to the offline, thereby diversifying NoDs; and 2.) allow "real life" to become more of a focus in their consumption lifestyles. Offline environments are complementary to the digital playgrounds that detoxers ostensibly retreat from, ultimately becoming assimilated into extant consumption constellations and interests.

In a blog by "Ann", a certified health coach and wellness blogger living in Brooklyn, New York, she describes how she filled her time during six weeks of abstinence from Instagram with trips to bricks-and-mortar marketplaces where she could touch, feel, and smell fresh produce and engage in authentic, on-the-fly conversations with flesh-and-blood vendors. The opportunity that a farmer's market provides her to coordinate diverse bodily, interpersonal, material, and affective resources, Ann explains, can re-energise, re-inspire, and ultimately relocate her desire beyond screen-based images:

> "The first full day without Instagram, I put my phone into airplane mode and went to the farmer's market. I didn't take my phone out at all while I was there [...] Instead, I admired the produce and thought about recipes I could make. I talked to the farmers at each stand. I had a particularly wonderful conversation with the mushroom farmer,

> and I delighted myself by being able to identify every single mushroom in his tent […] Even though this may seem like a small, everyday experience, I felt spontaneous joy and presence welling up inside of me. Knowing I could savor such a moment in my life so fully and not even pause to CONSIDER whether or not I should be documenting it made me feel so good…That day, I wrote in my journal – "I think Instagram is sucking out my soul." ("Ann", blog).

For Ann, deactivating social media, silencing her smartphone, and partaking in in-person conversations allow the offline world to become an interpassive space that "does" authenticity for her; small measures she can feel good about without needing much effort. Within this interpassive space, multisensorial bazaars such as the mushroom farmer's tent provide her with inspiration to reconstitute her desires and dream up ever more inventive consumption projects. Nevertheless, there is little evidence that such lively offline materiality will be long-lasting or durably replace her digital consumption habits. One might even wonder how long it will be until Ann introduces her smartphone to the farmer's market and images of the mushroom farmer's offerings begin to make their way onto her reactivated social media profile. Here, Ann's abstinence reflects Kozinets et al.'s (2017, p.671) remark that, as NoDs have proliferated, "the digital has become a part of real life, and real life a major focus of the digital".

"Judy", a NoSurf poster, describes her abstinence as an opportunity to try and resensitise herself to the material things around her, jumpstarting her ability to think *about* and *through* her senses to understand her desires:

> "I've been trying to pull away from these behavioural addictions a bit, and when I like, lay down and try to chill, I realised my thoughts weren't there anymore. I think they got cleared out to make room for the constant stream of information. So from today on I'm trying to invite them back in with a conscious effort to relate to the things around me, to name my sensations and my feelings about it. It kind of feels like I'm talking to

> myself like I'm a toddler, it's so janky. Like: "These are my pants. I feel weird about them because they're made of synthetic material" ("Judy", NoSurf).

Little victories such as introspecting upon the material that her pants are made from are elevated by Judy to a level of importance, thus interpassively saving her from having to undertake more radical actions such as long-term abstinence or collective political protest against social media providers. Judy's modest attempts at re-sensitisation remain strictly private rather than participative or communicable and therefore of little threat to the functioning of NoDs generally.

"John", another NoSurf poster, reflects on how sensations that are felt in offline contexts are superior to online ones and thus become the yardstick that all digitally-mediated desire must be measured against:

> "I was always a porn addict. It's a sentence, a reality […] You will always remember and be happy about your sensual and sexual interactions with people, but porn videos you watched in the past? They will never come to mind when thinking about satisfying feelings. I realized this some months ago when I went to sleep. I dream about my sexual experiences because they were the richest I went [sic] through all my life before. The connection you feel with the person next to you is astonishing and bets every other image or video you could watch […]. Today I am 23. Even If I will be graduating soon from college…you can't even imagine the opportunities I lost of [sic] experiencing many many things. My dreams. I wanted to start a Youtube channel, I wanted to become a musician, I wanted to become a web developer or a game developer […]" ("John", NoSurf).

For John, any re-sensitisation of desire occurs only in the depths of his *dreams*, where he is confronted with vestiges of physical intimacies that remain unreproducible by digital means. John's dreams, however, are not a realistic threat to the online pornography he is reliant upon; if anything, they further ossify its influence. As Žižek (2008, p.152) explains, a dream is that which allows the interpassive subject to continue "wallowing" in his desire, and, ironically,

"to postpone an awakening" from it. Rather than waking John from his entrenchment in digital worlds, his dreams become little more than the subject for a post on Reddit where he floats further desirous possibilities, such as starting a YouTube channel, creating music, or becoming a web or game developer – all occupations that ironically create, promote, and profit from digital networks rather than depart from them. "If we only change reality in order to realize our dreams and do not change these dreams themselves," Žižek (2008, p.196) cautions, "sooner or later we regress back to the old reality".

John's reflections, like those of others attempting digital detox, do not seem to reveal a genuine yearning to alter the structural problems tied to the Internet. Instead, they suggest a desire for developing, at most, a nonresentful relationship with the digital world, indicating that detoxing has become a passive, rather than transformative, endeavor.

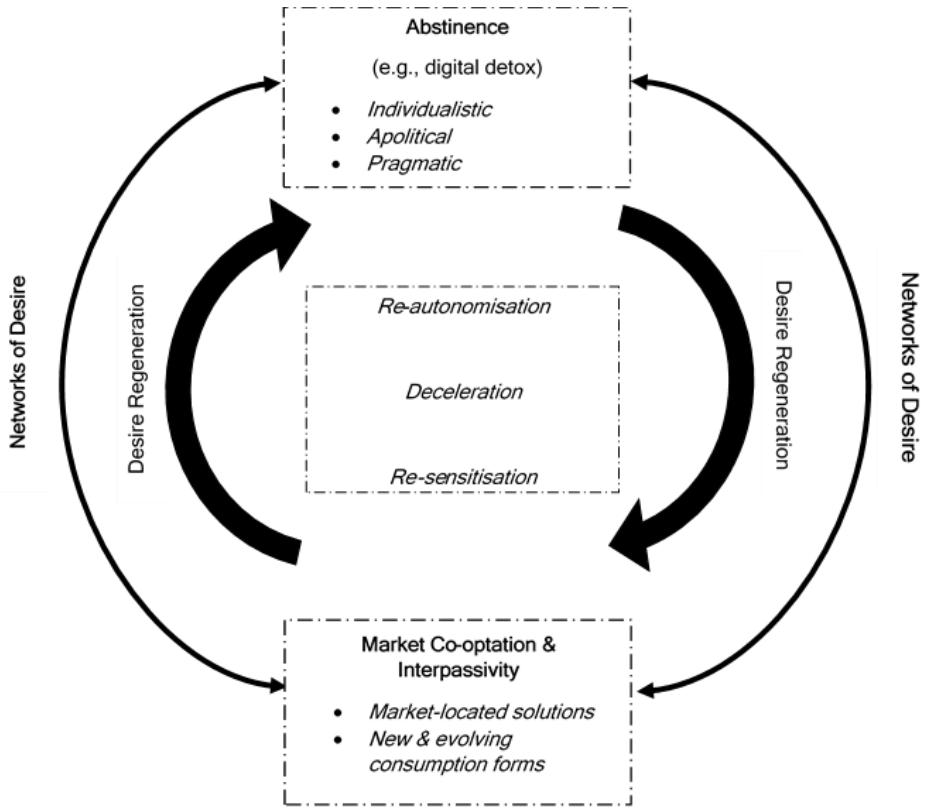
5. Discussion

In this paper, we extended Kozinets et al.'s (2017) theorisation of NoDs by exploring how these networks are sustained not just by consumers' unfettered engagement *with* digital technologies but also by their ostensible resistance *against* them. Periodic and partial attempts to cut out or cut down digital consumption open up spaces and opportunities for NoDs to diversify and expand through processes of what we call desire regeneration. We identify three key manifestations of these processes – *re-autonomisation*, *deceleration*, and *re-sensitisation* – which function as modes of de- and reterritorialisation.

Deterritorialisation occurs as consumers momentarily disconnect from aspects of NoDs that they perceive to be misaligned with their personal interests and expectations of meaningful experience. In doing so, they seek to renegotiate their relationships with technoculture by adjusting or modifying existing consumption habits – moving away from algorithmically-herded episodes of "mindless", accelerated, and hollow digital engagement.

Instead, they pragmatically cultivate new consumption territories that better reflect their identities, preferences, and values. Many of our informants describe efforts to reclaim agency and enrich their participation in NoDs – engaging in selective un-linking practices that are neither absolute nor permanent but rather fragmented and fleeting. These momentary disconnections simultaneously create openings for reterritorialisation to unfold through enabling new connections with alternative market objects and experiences, whether emerging trends (e.g., unplugged holidays, screen-free weekends) or technological innovations (e.g., app blockers, "dumb" phones). Ultimately, reterritorialisation reabsorbs consumers back into the market sphere, continuously extending and refreshing NoDs' reach and influence. Figure 1 captures how NoDs' desire-regeneration processes unfold within the context of digital detoxing.

Figure 1. Abstinence as a Desire-Regeneration Force
(Source: Authors' own work)



These processes reveal that NoDs expand and evolve not only through interdependency between humans and technology but also through moments of enmity. This dynamic highlights that NoDs do not rely solely on technology's presence (Kozinets et al., 2017); rather, its real or imagined absence can equally stimulate consumers' desires, acting as a generative force that "build[s] new connections between extant desires and a wider network" (Kozinets et al., 2017, p.659). Attempts to disconnect from technology do not appear to dismantle technologically integrated NoDs so much as they revitalise them, serving as *catalysts* for the introduction and territorialisation of substitute, complementary, or alternative objects and experiences. Thus, rather than constituting a "universe of technologically enhanced desire" (Kozinets et al., 2017, p.659), NoDs might more accurately be understood as technologically *colonised* landscapes of *expansive* desire – where any absence in desiring flows is continuously compensated by emergent consumption opportunities.

The idea of abstinence as a desire-regenerating force may first seem to reiterate the well-accepted view that consumers cannot escape the market (e.g., Kozinets, 2002; Holt, 2002), but there is a more complicated message at play. Popular desire-regenerating projects like digital detoxing tell us that escape from the market, in its purest terms, is not necessarily sought by consumers. Such projects are perhaps better understood in terms of personal pragmatic adjustments that individuals make to their relationships *with* the market and how the market, in turn, adapts to and relies upon these adjustments in continuous – or "rolling" – processes of co-optation. Co-optation theory has assumed that market actors poach the symbols and discourses of a resistant minority, re-engineering and repackaging their ethos for mainstream audiences. However, with everyday consumption adjustments that remain mostly individualistic, popular, and apolitical – such as digital detoxing – the market does

not so much poach from a resistant minority, rather it caters to a vocal majority who seek to perform dispersed forms of market-reliant agency.

The motivations that drive digital detoxing are not centred on collectively altering the dominant market system, *nor* do digital detoxers desire to react against market co-optation itself. Rather, as Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007, p.147) note, the flow of co-optation appears to exist in a "gray area" and, thus, "unfolds through a hybrid process of consensus building". The market grows by *consent*; learning from, responding to, and ultimately "cooperating" with, rather than simply poaching popular resistance, perhaps even more so than Thompson and Coskuner-Balli originally proposed. These insights introduce useful implications for marketing theory and practice, which we discuss below.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This paper makes two interrelated contributions to marketing and consumer research. First, it reveals a form of abstinence that is apolitical and individualistic, diverging from traditional anti-consumption movements rooted in political transformation, solidarity, and counter-publics opposing dominant market systems (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Pecot et al., 2021; Pentina & Amos, 2011). Instead, our study emphasises the primacy of self-interest and cynical pragmatism. While some might equate abstinence practices like digital detoxing with voluntary simplicity or downsizing (Cherrier, 2009; Peyer et al., 2017), we must caution against this comparison. Voluntary simplifiers and downsizers are often motivated by their collective "desire to create, diffuse and 'teach'" and an evangelical belief "that each individual's action can influence the world in which we live" (Cherrier, 2009, p.186). Even when voluntary simplicity lacks ideological coherence and remains largely rhetorical, scholars still emphasise its quasi-political functioning, social embeddedness, and intention to

proselytise (Mikkonen et al., 2011). In contrast, our analysis of digital detoxing reveals a much less communal and more isolated, instrumental relationship with anti-consumption.

For much of our data, short- and long-term abstinence from consumption is divorced from unifying political ideals or solidarity projects and does not necessarily signal a "rejection of the consumerist mainstream" (Peyer et al., 2017, p.38). Unlike anti-consumption activists, who draw clear "*us*" vs. "*them*" boundaries – portraying themselves "as both more knowledgeable than the stereotyped consumer and as morally superior" (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004, p.699; Cherrier et al., 2011), detoxers do *not* position themselves as morally distinct or politically unified against mainstream consumers. Instead, they see themselves as intrinsically part of consumer culture, seeking only to improve their personal circumstances within it. Rather than striving to "transfor[m] society through collective political action" (Pentina & Amos, 2011, p. 1775), these individuals engage in abstinence as a practical way to manage consumption *within* the constraints of the status quo (see also Cherrier & Gurrieri, 2013). For many of the digital detoxers we spoke with, burdened by pandemics, economic pressures, family responsibilities, and the structural constraints of a cost-of-living crisis (Hoang & Lascaux, 2025a; Lambert et al., 2024), staging collective resistance against the pervasive encroachment of addictive technologies is simply not a priority. Instead, self-governing strategies such as digital detoxing, while lacking the impetus for collective and political action, function as personally meaningful and restorative regimes. These practices provide time-pressed individuals with moments of respite, alleviating stress, and offering a rare opportunity for self-care amid the overwhelming demands of modern life.

Second, and relatedly, the paper provides further insights into the dynamics between anti-consumption and market co-optation (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022; Jones & Hietanen, 2023; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Drawing upon Deleuzian-Guattarian

theories of desire – also central to Kozinets et al.'s (2017) conceptualisation of NoDs – Jones and Hietanen (2023) argue that consumer capitalism thrives by creating infinite spaces and opportunities for desire to flow, while constantly adapting itself to accommodate and capture these emergent opportunities (p.230). In the age of algorithmic networked technologies, Airoldi and Rokka (2022, p.420) observe: "consumer desires are likely to become swiftly aligned with the marketing goals put forward by the machine…and, again, digested in a new iteration". Our findings extend these insights, illustrating how desire is constantly reproduced, reconstituted, and digested in the service of market interests and consumerism.

The three processes we identify – re-autonomisation, deceleration and re-sensitisation – demonstrate that even the desire to resist the pull of digital consumer culture is ultimately absorbed and reformulated within the market sphere. As Airoldi and Rokka (2022, p.424) aptly put it, such resistance is "baked into future human-machine interactions". In these instances, abstinence functions *not* as a true counterforce but merely as a trigger for market innovations, technocultural advancements, and new consumption styles – constantly reshaped through cycles of (de)(re)territorialisation within NoDs. Through these dynamics of desire-regeneration, we show that much of the interpassive content of abstinence projects is fully commensurate with the market's drive for relentless commodification. More often than not, these interpassive efforts function as a *false activity* that creates the impression of change, precisely so that systemic problems remain unchanged within endless rounds of market evolution (Žižek, 2006).

5.2. Practical Implications

The findings of this study outline not just some of the problems associated with digital overconsumption but with the *interpassive inertia* that keeps individuals and groups reliant on personal market-based solutions, indicating both the difficulty of self-regulation and the

perceived need for external interventions in a highly commercialised environment. To significantly improve the quality of technology users' lives, we argue for interventions that move *beyond* market-based objects of interpassivity – such as 'dumb' phones, app blockers, and unplugged holidays – towards a broader, more collective behavioural change framework focused on empowering users for long-term self-regulation. We propose two aspects of this framework.

First, social marketing campaigns should emphasise the social, communal, and civic consequences of digital overconsumption. Framing these issues as collective rather than individual concerns could help break the prevailing culture of interpassivity, thus shifting technology users' attention from atomised, pragmatic attempts at abstinence to more communal interventions. Just as various industries have responded to organised public demands for sustainability and environmental reform, attempts to galvanise a common tide of dissatisfaction with unfettered digitalisation might exert political pressure on the tech industry to adopt more responsible design practices. The popularity of non-profit campaigns, such as those promoted by the Center for Humane Technology and brought to popular attention through *The Social Dilemma* documentary, demonstrates the impact that raising public consciousness about digitalisation can have.

Second, social marketers and policymakers can play a joint role in shaping a more sustainable digital ecosystem by promoting digital literacy, strengthening community support networks, and building individual and collective resilience. Our study highlights that durable, prosocial change requires more meaningful interventions from the tech industry than simply adding "snoozing" options, "mute" buttons or "usage reminders" to their offerings – all of which compel passivity from the user rather than their active (dis)engagement. Instead, the tech industry must work with social marketers and communities to design interventions that

incentivise meaningful user action *beyond* basic optionality to punctuate endless scrolling with muting or snoozing. By shifting the narrative from interpassive detoxing to mindfully designed technologies and community support, a more sustainable and balanced approach to technology use becomes conceivable at both individual and collective levels.

5.3. Considerations for Future Research

Given the inherent paradox of digital detoxers using online platforms to share their attempts at digital disconnection, future research could delve deeper into how such online discourses mediate narratives of identity and reproduce particular lifestyle ideals (Mikkonen et al., 2011). These discussions present a rich opportunity to critically unpack the performative and/or maladaptive aspects of digital detoxing. Particularly, researchers can examine how social pressures – such as peer influence, self-presentation anxiety, and the pursuit of community validation – contribute to the reinforcement of idealised narratives of self-improvement and the normative appeal of digital detoxing as a moral obligation (Hoang et al., 2023; Hoang & Lascaux, 2025b). Ultimately, this line of enquiry can expose how digital detoxing shapes and is shaped by broader neoliberal imperatives that primarily frame health, productivity, and well-being as matters of individual responsibility.

Future research might also benefit from longitudinal approaches that trace individual and collective digital detox discourses over time, focusing on their intersections with life course trajectories. This would allow researchers to better unpack how the dynamics of changing roles (e.g., becoming a parent), life transitions (e.g., entering the workforce or retirement), turning points (e.g., diagnosis with chronic illness), and broader contextual conditions (e.g., wars, pandemics, recessions) influence ongoing relationships with digital consumption and anti-consumption. This approach could determine whether digital detox practices are predominantly

associated with particular life stages, ages, and circumstances, or if they represent a more widespread phenomenon across diverse generations and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Moreover, our study's data was collected during the 2020-2021 COVID pandemic – a period of restricted access to offline social connectedness and accelerated digital dependency. Accordingly, longitudinal analyses are encouraged to discern how digital detox practices have evolved since and whether they function as a situational response to certain moments of acute digital overload or as part of an enduring, lifelong strategy for managing digital engagement. It is likely also that there are consumers who have managed to abstain completely from digital technologies, whom we have not represented in our study.

Future studies should also examine how desire-regeneration processes unfold beyond digital detoxing. Popular abstinence practices in other domains – such as intermittent fasting, smoking cessation, or alcohol abstinence – offer rich settings to further explore how consumers' desires may be continually reconfigured, potentially shaping new and substitute markets over time (Nicholls, 2023). There are also opportunities for researchers to seek out and investigate alternative and more dramatic lifestyle adjustments, such as freeganism, anarcho-primitivism, neo-Luddism, or off-grid living, where long- and short-term abstention from consumption may serve more radical purposes characterised by sacrifices and implications that differ significantly from those theorised in this paper.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, our study contributes to the growing literature on anti-consumption by exploring how abstinence functions to expand, curate, and integrate new consumption passions within consumers' NoDs. Using digital detox as an empirical context, we reveal that abstinence is a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be fully understood without considering the inherent tensions between consumption and anti-consumption. The research underscores the paradox

that even as digital detoxers seek to restrict or reject online consumption, they rely on digital platforms for support, validation, and shared meaning-making. This reveals the complexity of abstinence and its role within NoDs. Typically embraced as personal lifestyle adjustments rather than radical resistance, these practices remain apolitical and pragmatic, ultimately expanding rather than disrupting consumers' desires through processes of re-autonomisation, deceleration, and re-sensitisation. Instead of actively subverting or obviating consumer desire, abstinence functions interpassively, facilitating the emergence of new, substitute, and complementary modes of expression and experience, which are continuously absorbed into prevailing market logics. Practically, the study highlights the need for collective, structural responses – from ethical technology design to more accountable governance – that address the conditions producing digital overload rather than allowing abstinence itself to be continually repackaged into new commodified solutions.

7. References

Airoldi, M., & Rokka, J. (2022). Algorithmic consumer culture. *Consumption Markets & Culture, 25*(5), 411-428.

Amiri, S., & Khan, M.A. (2023). Digital interventions for smoking abstinence: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized control trials. *Journal of Addictive Diseases, 41*(1), 4-29.

Arvidsson, A., & Caliandro, A. (2016). Brand public. *Journal of consumer research, 42*(5), 727-748.

Belk, R., Weijo, H., & Kozinets, R. V. (2021). Enchantment and perpetual desire: Theorizing disenchanted enchantment and technology adoption. *Marketing Theory, 21*(1), 25-52.

Berardi, F. (2009). *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation*. London: Minor Compositions.

Cherrier, H. (2009). Anti-consumption discourses and consumer-resistant identities. *Journal of Business Research*, *62*(2), 181-190.

Cherrier, H., & Gurrieri, L. (2013). Anti-consumption choices performed in a drinking culture: Normative struggles and repairs. *Journal of Macromarketing*, *33*(3), 232-244.

Cherrier, H., Black, I. R., & Lee, M. (2011). Intentional non-consumption for sustainability: Consumer resistance and/or anti-consumption?. *European Journal of Marketing*, *45*(11/12), 1757-1767.

Cocker, H., Mardon, R., & Daunt, K. L. (2021). Social media influencers and transgressive celebrity endorsement in consumption community contexts. *European Journal of Marketing*, *55*(7), 1841-1872.

Cova, B. (1997). Community and consumption: Towards a definition of the "linking value" of product or services. *European journal of marketing*, *31*(3/4), 297-316.

Cronin, J., & Fitchett, J. (2021) Lunch of the last human: Nutritionally complete food and the fantasies of market-based progress. *Marketing Theory*, *21*(1), 3-24.

Denegri-Knott, J., Jenkins, R., Molesworth, M., & Grigore, G. (2024). Platformised possessions and relational labour. *Marketing Theory*, *24*(1), 23-44.

Frank V.A., Herold, M.D., Schrøder, S., Bjønness, J., & Hunt, G. (2020). Legitimizing and negotiating abstinence: Young adults' narratives about practicing situational and long term abstinence in Denmark. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, *81* (2020), 102655.

Hietanen J., Ahlberg O., & Botez A. (2022). The 'dividual'is semiocapitalist consumer culture. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *38*(1-2), 165-181.

Hietanen J., Andéhn M., & Wickström A. (2020). The inhuman challenge: Writing with dark desire. *Organization*, *27*(5), 742-754.

Hoang Q., Cronin J., & Skandalis. A (2022). High-fidelity consumption and the claustropolitan structure of feeling. *Marketing Theory*, *22*(1), 85-104.

Hoang, Q., Cronin, J., & Skandalis, A. (2023). Futureless vicissitudes: Gestural anti-consumption and the reflexively impotent (anti-)consumer. *Marketing Theory*, *23*(4), 585-606.

Hoang, Q., & Lascaux, A. (2025a). Cyberspace-prompted consumption: Surrendering to technology in a ubiquitous digital era. *Marketing Theory*, 14705931251335252.

Hoang, Q., & Lascaux, A. (2025b), 'It's so hard to control it': navigating responsible digital consumption in an age of individualisation, *Sociology*, ahead-of-print, 10.1177/00380385251388548.

Holt DB. (2002). Why do brands cause trouble? A dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *29*(1), 70-90.

Husemann, K. C., & Eckhardt, G. M. (2019). Consumer deceleration. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *45*(6), 1142-1163.

Izberk-Bilgin E. (2012). Infidel brands: Unveiling alternative meanings of global brands at the nexus of globalization, consumer culture, and Islamism. *Journal of Consumer Research*. *39*(4), 663-687.

Jones, H., & Hietanen, J. (2023). The r/wallstreetbets 'war machine': Explicating dynamics of consumer resistance and capture. *Marketing Theory*, *23*(2), 225-247.

Kotzé J. (2020). The commodification of abstinence. In S. Hall, T. Kuldova, M. Horsley (Eds.), *Crime, Harm and Consumerism*. London: Routledge. pp 54-69.

Kozinets RV. (2020). *Netnography: The essential guide to qualitative social media research*. London: Sage.

Kozinets RV., Patterson A., & Ashman R. (2017). Networks of desire: How technology increases our passion to consume. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *43*(5), 659-682.

Kozinets, R. V. (2002). Can consumers escape the market? Emancipatory illuminations from burning man. *Journal of Consumer research*, *29*(1), 20-38.

Kozinets, R. V., & Handelman, J. M. (2004). Adversaries of consumption: Consumer movements, activism, and ideology. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *31*(3), 691-704.

Lambert, A., Rome, A., & Fornari, F. (2024). Stayin'alive? Reflections on navigating digital dependency. *Marketing Theory*, 24(3), 359-366.

Makri, K., Schlegelmilch, B. B., Mai, R., & Dinhof, K. (2020). What we know about anticonsumption: An attempt to nail jelly to the wall. *Psychology & Marketing*, *37*(2), 177-215.

McFarlane, A., Hamilton, K., & Hewer, P. (2022). Putting passion to work: passionate labour in the fashion blogosphere. *European Journal of Marketing*, *56*(4), 1210-1231.

Mikkonen, I., Moisander, J., & Fırat, A. F. (2011). Cynical identity projects as consumer resistance–the Scrooge as a social critic?. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 14(1), 99-116.

Mintel (2021). *Social Media - UK - May 2021*. Mintel. Available at: https://reports.mintel.com/display/1050289/ [Accessed 17 March 2023].

Nicholls, E. (2023). "I don't want to introduce it into new places in my life": The marketing and consumption of no and low alcohol drinks. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, *119*, 104149.

NoSurf (2024). "What is NoSurf?*", Nosurf.net*. Available at: What is NoSurf? – NoSurf [Accessed 08 May 2024].

O'Gorman, M. (2020). Designing Technological Comportment: On Wearable Technology, Digital Rituals, and Non-Users. *Embodied Computing: Wearables, Implantables, Embeddables, Ingestibles*, p. 131.

Pecot, F., Vasilopoulou, S., and Cavallaro, M. (2021). How political ideology drives anti-consumption manifestations. *Journal of Business Research*, *128*, 61-69.

Pentina, I., & Amos, C. (2011). The Freegan phenomenon: anti-consumption or consumer resistance?. *European Journal of Marketing*, *45*(11/12), 1768-1778.

Peyer, M., Balderjahn, I., Seegebarth, B., & Klemm, A. (2017). The role of sustainability in profiling voluntary simplifiers. *Journal of Business Research*, *70*, 37-43.

Radtke, T., Apel, T., Schenkel, K., Keller, J., & von Lindern, E. (2022). Digital detox: An effective solution in the smartphone era? A systematic literature review. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 10(2), 190-215.

Sniewski, L., & Farvid, P. (2019). Abstinence or acceptance? A case series of men's experiences with an intervention addressing self-perceived problematic pornography use. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, *26*(3-4), 191-210.

Spiggle S., (1994). Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *21*(3), 491-503.

Statista (2022). "Share of users in the United States intentionally taking a break from their digital devices as of September 2022, by frequency", *Statista*, Feb 20. Available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1342542/us-users-frequency-digital-detox/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%202022%20survey%20of%20internet%20users,detox%20monthly%20were%20eight%20percent%20of%20the%20respondents. [Accessed 17 March 2023].

Syvertsen T., & Enli G. (2020). Digital detox: Media resistance and the promise of authenticity. *Convergence*, *26*(5-6), 1269-1283.

Syvertsen, T. (2020). *Digital detox: The politics of disconnecting.* Leeds*:* Emerald Publishing Limited.

Thompson, C. J., & Coskuner-Balli, G. (2007). Countervailing market responses to corporate co-optation and the ideological recruitment of consumption communities. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *34*(2), 135-152.

Warner J. (2010). *All or nothing: a short history of abstinence in America*. Toronto: Emblem Editions.

Žižek, S. (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso Books.

Žižek S. (1998). "The interpassive subject". *Traverses, Centre Georges Pompidou*. Available at: https://www.lacan.com/zizek-pompidou.htm [Accessed 29 March 2023].

Žižek S. (2006). *How to Read Lacan*. London: Granta Books.

Žižek, S. (2008). *In Defense of Lost Causes*. London: Verso Books.

Appendix 1: Participants' Digital Detoxing Practices

(Source: Authors' own work).

No	Demographic Information	Digital Detoxers' Efforts to Limit and Manage Technology Use
1	"Rosa", 24-year-old, female, undergraduate student, Netherlands	Restricting time spent on Facebook and Instagram (1 hour/day); Keeping her phone "out of sight"; Using "Facebook Blockers" on her laptop; Only using the laptop for work and chatting with friends and family, and relatives; Using the "Forest" app on her phone (to stay focused and help "grow trees").
2	"Rachel", 26-year-old, female, IT specialist, USA	Periodically digital detoxing and "locking [herself] out of everything" for a few hours; Using the "SelfControl" app to lock herself out of Reddit when necessary; Deleting a platform when feeling like "being consumed by that platform", then often remaking an account; Periodically locking her phone in the "lock boxes" and engaging in non-digital activities.
3	"Anna", 30-year-old, female, HR manager, Vietnam	Disabling all "tracking functions" on social media; Disabling all cookies; Periodically deactivating her social media accounts (e.g., Facebook, Instagram); Filtering and unfollowing people on Facebook and

		Instagram for some time (via pressing the "snooze" or "unfollow" button); Putting the phone on aeroplane mode when being at home.
4	"Thomas", 22-year-old, male, English language tutor, Vietnam	Using the phone and the laptop in moderation ("for work and important communication"); Restricting social media usage; Using the "Screen Time" app to monitor his time spent online.
5	"Jason", 33-year-old, male, PhD researcher, UK	Cutting down social media usage; Turning off all notifications; Taking intermittent "no screen" breaks or walks during the day; Not looking at screens after 6 pm or on Sunday.
6	"Lucy", 31-year-old, female, PhD researcher, Cyprus	Trying "long password" techniques (i.e., using long and complex passwords to stop her from using social media and the phone less often); Using website blockers on her laptop; Planning to restrict her digital usage more after graduation.
7	"Matthew", 29-year-old, male, non-profit worker, UK	He attempted to delete his Facebook app multiple times but went back to using it (because of the useful marketplace and DIY groups); Going on meditation ("digital-free") retreats once or twice a year; Using the "Habit Share" app to do a 4-minute meditation three times a day.
8	"Michelle", 21-year-old, female, undergraduate student, Vietnam	Using the "one-hour" rules (not using the phone 1 hour before bed); Spending time outdoors with family more often, and not looking at her phone; Planning to "dumb" down her phone (i.e., via removing unnecessary apps).
9	"Mike", 19-year-old, male, mixed martial arts practitioner, Sweden	Deleting Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat while keeping other apps (e.g., YouTube, Reddit); Restricting his pornography consumption; Trying "grayscale" and uninstalling methods; Disabling online cookies whenever possible; Returning to use a "dumb" phone.

10	"Emma", 24-year-old, female, graduate student, UK	Deleted Instagram and YouTube for a complete period of 3-4 days, then returned to using them; Using social media with an "intention" and a particular purpose (such as learning something or following particular people); Using "Screen Time" to manage her phone usage; Listening to podcasts instead of scrolling social media.
11	"Chloe", 21-year-old, female, undergraduate student, USA	Used the "grayscale" method (i.e., turning the phone screen into black and white); Not bringing the phone into her bedroom; Using website blockers; Only using Reddit and YouTube on her computer.
12	"Caroline", 20-year-old, female, undergraduate student, UK	Deleted Facebook Messenger app from her phone (but has reinstalled it); Using an app blocker to block Facebook and WhatsApp; Keeping her phone out of sight (i.e., "hiding" it in a cupboard); Trying to be more "intentional" with her digital usage.
13	"Jane", 24-year-old, female, PhD researcher, USA	Deleting all apps on her phone; Deactivating social media accounts & keeping Reddit and Facebook Messenger; Putting her phone on "do not disturb"; Turning off notifications.
14	"Alice", 26-year-old, female, graduate student, USA	Playing a puzzle game on her phone to avoid using Reddit (keeping Reddit usage to 30 minutes/day and playing the game instead); Using a website blocker; Watching TV with her husband or playing D&D with her friends instead of using YouTube; Planning for "digital-free" holidays after graduation.
15	"Amy", 22-year-old, female, food manufacturing specialist, Canada	Using "Newsfeed Eradicator" to block all newsfeeds on her Facebook; Using "Focal Filter" app to periodically block Reddit (for 4-12 hours) – Reddit is blocked 5 days a week; Using an alarm clock instead of her phone to wake up; "Dumbing down the phone a bit" by taking down a browser and some apps.

16	"Julie", 27-year-old, female, secondary school teacher, Canada	Deleting social media; Creating digital-free, silent zones in her home; Engaging in non-digital things (e.g., cooking, cross stitching); Leaving the phone in the bedroom and using a "new fancy smartwatch" for getting important updates; Having intermittent "digital-free" walks during the day.
17	"Amelia", 28-year-old, female, nursing assistant, USA	Trying to be more "conscious" about her digital usage; Trying to periodically get away from the laptop and take up non-digital activities (e.g., writing, reading, listening to music, cooking, etc.); Using a blocking app on Firefox to prevent her from accessing unhelpful websites.
18	"Jack", 25-year-old, male, software engineer, Brazil	Quit Facebook and Instagram; Cutting down on his pornography consumption; Disabling his phone notifications; Taking up non-digital activities (e.g., practising guitar, writing, reading, gardening, walking, playing Sudoku); Using "Screen Time" to monitor his smartphone usage; Using Telegram instead of WhatsApp; Trying to be more mindful on the Internet.
19	"Paul", 27-year-old, male, non-profit worker, UK	Occasionally taking a break from the digital world (e.g., having "digital detox" holidays); Consciously not using the phone or any social media for the first 2 hours of the day; Periodically deleting Facebook and taking up more reading instead of scrolling; Disabling online cookies; Getting a friend's support with restricting his phone consumption.
20	"Sophia", 29-year-old, female, software engineer, USA	Deactivating Instagram and Facebook; Using a website blocker on her computer to block distracting websites; Having her brother put a passcode on her iPhone and intermittently lock it; Tried using a flip phone.
21	"Sarah", 39-year-old, female,	Using both a "dumb" phone and a smartphone for different purposes; Cutting down on social media

	retreat coordinator, USA	usage; Having intermittent “digital-free” evenings and weekend; Trying to be more mindful on the Internet.