

## **“Time Well Spent”: The Ideology of Temporal Disconnection as a Means for Digital Well-Being**

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After facing an intense negative reaction to their accumulation of social, political, and economic power and influence, several tech and social media companies rolled out “digital well-being” tools during the second half of 2018. This article examines the technological and discursive construction of “digital well-being” as enacted through operating system-based tools (Screen Time and Do Not Disturb—iOS, Digital Wellbeing—Android, My Analytics—Microsoft) and social media platform application functions (Your Time—Facebook, Time Watched—YouTube, Your Activity—Instagram). While the companies’ discourse deploys an imaginary centered around ethics and a normative experience accentuating the willfulness and empowerment of the user, the sociomaterial analysis of the interfaces and features shows that they envisage simple, familiar, and limited possibilities of disconnecting. Therefore, agency is limited, and the well-being outcomes are indeterminate, restricted to quantifying time or controlling the intentionality of connectivity.

*Keywords: operating system, quantified self, techlash, screen time, smartphone, platforms, social media*

Tech and social media companies face growing criticism for the impact of its opaque governance and nefarious modus operandi on individuals, the economy, and political systems. “The Great Tech Backlash” (Marantz, 2019) erupted in 2018 in particular after reports detailing the influence of Cambridge Analytica

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on the U.S. presidential election and the U.K.'s Brexit referendum. The docudrama *The Social Dilemma* (Orlowski, 2020) added to this mainstream criticism of tech and social media companies by also pointing out generalized Internet addiction and widespread loneliness as byproducts of the "addictive" design integral to their business model.

In what can be seen as a response to such criticism, during the second half of 2018, tech and social media companies rolled out screen time functions under the labels of "digital well-being." Despite the growing attention to digital temporalities, digital well-being, and the florescence of disconnection studies, the recent changes in technologies and discourse require further study. So, this article asks, How do the digital solutions proposed by tech and social media companies contribute, in their discourses and technologies, to notions of digital well-being and personal disconnection? The objects of analysis are the time management and disconnection tools provided with operating systems (OS) and social media platforms, namely Google's Digital Wellbeing and Microsoft's My Analytics. We analyze apps' interfaces through a technical walk-through method and critically analyze their public relations (PR). Our analysis suggests that, through these technical interfaces and the discourses framing them, tech companies promote an ideology of temporal disconnection as a necessary means to recalibrate the user of connected devices, in the specific context of the "techlash" of 2017 and 2018 and the cultural devaluing of their products and services.

### **Digital Temporalities**

The perceived acceleration of time and its consequences for social and individual life are distinctive features of theories of modernity. Marx (2010) and Simmel (1950) noted the effects of accelerated time and the intensification of stimuli in the physical, psychological, economic, and social realms, and their effects on culture and politics. Against the backdrop of technological disruption, life in industrial societies becomes more beholden to what Innis (2008) called space-biased media (i.e., media that accelerate communications across great distances), furthering the predilection for acceleration and intensifying the social costs of desynchronization. More recently, speed theorists, notably Bauman (2000) and Virilio (2006), addressed acceleration technologies as catalysts of social and political upheaval, giving rise to a new chronopolitics by creating new social divisions of labor and chronologies.

Chronopolitics is a biopolitical phenomenon. Distinctions between time uses are blurred into a kind of always-on lifestyle, presented as both virtuous and desirable, establishing different "temporal regimes" (Urry, 2016, p. 43). These practices, in turn, demand the careful individual management of physical and psychological well-being, which is understood as an internalized "managerial vision" deployed through the athletics and aesthetics of "competitive individualism" (Urry, 2016, pp. 113–114). A more complete account of time management, including that of apparent technological solutions, must address these sociomaterial dimensions of acceleration and the unequal distribution of time pressures and demands (Sharma, 2017). Such solutions feed into what Sharma (2015) calls an "infrastructure of temporal care" and intend to promote "recalibration" as an essential mechanism "to learn how to deal with time, be on top of one's time, to learn when to be fast and when to be slow" (p. 18), expecting that everyone becomes "an entrepreneur of time control" (2015, p. 138). This further strengthens structural inequalities and cultural pressure for intensified efficiency (Sharma, 2017, p. 139).

Such calls for a chronopolitical critique address the emergence of a new governmentality based on a technique of temporal care, wherein individuals are invited to manage their productive and leisure time while remaining within circumscribed technosocial and normative frameworks. Following Foucault's (1994) definition of governmentality as "the contact between techniques of domination of others and the techniques of the self" (p. 785), this process becomes a "technique of the self," whereby individuals employ available infrastructure to carefully manage themselves, their environment, and their time. In turn, this form of self-management arises from a norm-laden structuring of private life and work through "schemes, programmes, techniques and devices which seek to shape conduct" (Rose, 1999, p. 20). In a context of sociomaterial acceleration and inequality, individuals' labor and leisure times are subjected to normative optimization processes where the end results—productivity and wellness—are the hallmarks of the successful self-disciplining individual.

Technologies to measure the time of digital use have a long history in the attempts to control individual use of communication technologies, either targeting the self or others (notably, employers controlling employees' work time or parents controlling children's use of technology). On the one hand, these attempts include individuals' own agency (i.e., their ability to intervene in themselves and in the world) through "willful" actions (Plaut, 2015, para. 3): turning off the phone or the sound, not answering a call, putting the phone away or giving it to someone, or adopting other forms of asceticism and self-discipline in abstinence from the digital (Portwood-Stacer, 2012). On the other hand, individuals are offered products and services to deter, interrupt, or select their use, concerning content, time, and place of communication (Beattie & Cassidy, 2021; Karppi, 2018), from retreats, camps, and vacations programs. Technologies to sustain disconnection stem out of an ethos of digital solutionism (Kuntsman & Miyake, 2019). However, Bucher (2020) states that "obfuscation or absence does not hide users' traces but rather exposes them"; therefore, she flags that "there is nothing to disconnect from" (p. 4). These can be seen as market responses to the pathologization of Internet use, circulated by self-help literature (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020), as well as by ordinary users or companies (Jorge, 2019; Schoenebeck, 2014). There is an overgeneralization of "addiction" (Aagaard, 2020) and compulsion (Lupton, 2016) to account for the digital media experience. Insofar as digital media are constructed as toxic and a potential waste of time, the brain is deemed as "disobedient" in the face of technology (Guyard & Kaun, 2018). The digital detox metaphor reflects a construction of "online life [as] indulgent and unhealthy, while offline experiences are more demanding" but more rewarding (Sutton, 2017, para. 77). The user should thus regulate and take control of their use of digital technology; otherwise, it is seen as unhealthy (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). However, Lupinacci (2021) found that using social media generated ambivalent experiences, comprising fatigue and anxiety as much as reassurance and excitement.

Technology also promises to support a better life, which highlights the subjectivity-producing power of data-gathering technological interventions in a capitalistic time management setting where data being gathered and processed is then routed back to the user (Kennedy, Poell, & van Dijck, 2015). Self-track and self-quantification apps of time use are often entangled with a pledge of increased productivity (Gregg, 2018; Hand & Gorea, 2018; Wajcman, 2019). Lupton (2016) highlights how self-tracking cultures promote self-improvement, productivity, and optimization by monitoring, measuring, and recording behavioral or body elements. Within an algorithmic culture, the quantified self is made to feel as an empowered individual and in control of (all kinds of) information produced by the body and their actions. The quantified self is

anchored to a control theory that promotes self-experimentation to overcome mind-body duality and achieve self-understanding by analyzing data generated by tracking (Ruckenstein & Pantzar, 2017). In other words, it presupposes that the informed and willful individual will take action to remedy any discrepancy or accentuate positive signs. These technologies reinforce capitalism by enforcing self-responsibilization for health and well-being (Kristensen & Ruckenstein, 2018) but also as part of a growing culture of surveillance and datafied society (Lyon, 2018) by further colonizing the life-world (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Moreover, there is not enough evidence about how users actually engage these technologies (Kent, 2020); "research on the effectiveness of digital wellbeing interventions" is inconclusive (Vanden Abeele, 2020, p. 2), as users access, manage, and mobilize their own data along lines other than self-optimization.

### **Discursive Construction of Digital Well-Being**

What do disconnecting solutions and services seek to attain? Digital solutions to manage "overuse" of digital media aim to optimize digital health by overcoming "information overload" (Levitin, 2014), "digital overconsumption" (Gui, Fasoli, & Carradore, 2017), "social media fatigue" (Bright, Kleiser, & Grau, 2015), and "technostress" (Lee, Lee, & Suh, 2016). They also promise to unmerge personal and professional lives that smartphones and portable devices, platforms, and services have boosted (Agger, 2011). These digital solutions motivate users toward individual and socially valuable behaviors (Sullivan & Reiner, 2019) and are orientated to "feeling good" rather than "being well" (Baker & Rojek, 2020), which owes to a hedonistic conception of well-being (Docherty, 2020, p. 4).

Addressing digital well-being, Burr and Floridi (2020) highlight "the impact that digital technologies, such as social media, smartphones, and AI, have had on our wellbeing and our self-understanding of what it means to live a life that is good for us in an increasingly digital society" (p. 3). This impact encompasses the psychological and social influence of those digital technologies. Vanden Abeele (2020) conceptualizes digital well-being as dynamic and complex, dependent on person-, device-, and context-specific factors. Device-specific factors to be considered include "stable characteristic" of the devices, such as the digital well-being functions or apps, as already installed or ready to download and set up; "momentary characteristics" as notifications and postuse functions; and "device-induced behaviors" as checking routines. Vanden Abeele (2020) emphasizes the "affective and cognitive appraisals of the integration of digital connectivity into ordinary life" (p. 938) in a way that balances its benefits and drawbacks. In that sense, restricting connectivity "can deprive users of positively valued aspects of technology use" (p. 937).

Tech companies are inescapable players in constructing what well-being means at the technological and at the discursive level. Docherty (2020) shows that Facebook's PR promote a model of "healthy" usership that is based on an instrumental view of "relationships as resources" (p. 6) to attain well-being, and that the tech architecture seeks to sustain such a model through nudging the users to engage with others continually. Therefore, while this model alludes to a eudaimonic conception of well-being, concerned with "human flourishing," "self-fulfillment [and] meaningful existence" (p. 4), it ultimately positions the individual as someone who should respond and engage—and ultimately be generative of data—with the platform.

Not all players have the same "voice"—the "Big Five" (Google, Apple, Facebook/Meta, Amazon, and Microsoft) are typically identified as the main actors in the design and development of the "platform economy" or the "platform society" (Gillespie, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013; Van Dijck, Poell, & De Waal, 2018) and the technosocial assemblage to which algorithmic governance and big data have given rise in the last decade (Diakopoulos, 2016; Rahwan, 2018). The rhetorical and ideological characteristics of the platforms are evidenced by the way these companies structure their public statements as the expression of "core values," such as of innovation, community, social concern, connection, transparency, or technological solutionism (Alves, 2018; Pozen, 2018; Van Dijck, 2013).

Discourses centering the companies' social responsibility, such as well-being or transparency initiatives, contribute to the social shaping of the wider debate on technology options and "impacts," as companies struggle to shape and adjust public perceptions of their roles. Social responsibility policies and discourse tend to address multiple public interest topics, from intellectual property, privacy, and transparency to surveillance practices, quantification, or digital literacy, as well as other aspects of regulatory and governance policy (Gillespie, 2013; Kohl, 2012; Lyon, 2018; Smyrnaio, 2016; Zuboff, 2015). Inflections in internal and public debates about the platforms' social responsibility give shape to the coconstruction of new tools and services encompassing epistemic (true and false information), ethical (social responsibility), geographical (country-specific events and rules), and chronological (time usage) forms of governance. After the Snowden revelations of 2013, there was an expansion of transparency portals and other initiatives aimed at boosting public confidence in the platforms' practices; the "techlash" and other public crises have intensified this trend (Hemphill, 2019; Srnicek, 2017). Well-being tools reflect views on distribution of time and labor, as well as the general structural conditions of the dominant neoliberal economic system (Docherty, 2021). There is a constant reconfiguration of tools and services, with which platforms largely retain normative and technological control, namely through quantified feedback governance mechanisms (Rouvroy & Berns, 2013). Forms of chronological governance have, however, not been looked at sufficiently.

### Context

The inclusion of the word "techlash" in the shortlist for *Oxford Dictionary's* Word of the Year in 2018, and in *Financial Times'* "Year in a Word" feature, highlighted the seriousness of calls for platform accountability (Zimmer, 2019). In the media specializing in technology and economy, we found information about the tools offered in and around 2018 to monitor and manage screen time, in recuperation from the techlash. The earliest reports followed press releases—as we will see below—and pointed out that features are opt-in, even if in-built, and that the user can "choose to dismiss the reminder and keep watching, or close the app" (Perez, 2018, para. 2). Furthermore, "as always, acting on the information is up to you," the user (Welch, 2018, para. 6). Besides options for parental control, there is the possibility to delegate control (Ceres, 2018, para. 2), which lets an immature user who cannot set or commit alone find someone to set the control for them.

The industry's move was framed as an act on a "crisis of conscience" (Marantz, 2019), in continuation of Tristan Harris's position, Google's "design ethicist" who eventually left the company and founded the Centre for Humane Technology. Harris "evangelizes a more human approach to personal tech,

calling for better tools from the big tech companies, regulation from government, and a greater awareness of how much of our lives we waste staring at screens” (Pardes, 2018b, para. 8). When Zuckerberg presented the effort to ensure users’ time on Facebook is “time well spent,” he was coopting the phrase from Harris’s nonprofit founded in 2016 (Marantz, 2019; Newton, 2018; Pardes, 2018b), and actually “prioritis[ing] the intensity of data extraction over its extensiveness” (Tarnoff & Weigel, 2018, para. 46; i.e., generate more likes and comments, rather than mindless scrolling).

Commentators point out that “digital well-being” tools constitute a simplistic and even cynical reform. *Wired* journalist Arielle Pardes (2018a) outrightly states that “[t]he digital wellness movement has spread through Silicon Valley like a Goop-ordained health trend”<sup>1</sup> (para. 15), and points out that “[n]othing else has changed. (. . .) you still have to dodge the constant notifications (. . .) and thousands of features designed to keep you scrolling” (Pardes, 2018c, para. 10). Pardes (2018a) also points out that Android, “alongside the ‘digital wellness’ tools,” announced features that “use machine learning and AI to predict your behavior” (para. 21), resonating with Bucher’s (2020) claims that there is “nothing to disconnect from.”

When Screen Time was released, Apple also introduced “tools to prevent advertisers from tracking users” (Solon, 2018, para. 10), which was presented as affording more privacy to the users. And they also implemented Memoji, “a new personalized emoji feature,” another feature “to keep you staring at your screen” (Pardes, 2018b, para. 7). Tim Cook, Apple’s CEO, attempted to minimize their responsibility, insisting that “screen addiction comes from the apps, not the screen itself,” but journalists counter that the iPhone’s delivery of apps and Apple’s “own push into services” served as evidence of coresponsibility (Kraus, 2019, para. 11). Scarce media commentary pointed to tech companies’ lack of transparency and unfair competition. Apple and Google screen time products lack APIs, barring third parties to assess or improve them (Pardes, 2018c, para. 13). “Neither Apple nor Google has created APIs for their screen time products, which means third-party developers can’t build on them”; and other “digital wellness” app-developers complained about being pushed aside “from the App Store,” Pardes (2018c) denounces (para. 13).

### Methods

The article examines the technological and discursive construction of the concept of “digital well-being” as enacted through seven digital tools: from OS and functions by social media platforms (Screen Time—iOs, Do Not Disturb—iOS, Digital Wellbeing—Android, My Analytics—Microsoft, Your Time—Facebook, Time Watched—YouTube, Your Activity—Instagram). We analyze those tools through two parallel routes: one, their interfaces and features and second, the PR discourses around them. This will allow us to explore how they construct and value connectivity, disconnectivity, and the balance between them as well-being (Vanden Abeele, 2020).

Assuming these tools as social-technical constructs (Mascheroni & Holloway, 2019), we understand people (human) and objects (nonhuman) take up the figure of social actors that can be intermediaries or mediators. Intermediaries convey meaning unchanged, while mediators are transformative as they reconstruct the meaning or events within a system (Light, Burgess, & Duguay, 2018, p. 886). Furthermore,

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<sup>1</sup> A wellness site by actress Gwyneth Paltrow.

we understand affordances as functions and constraints that an object provides within situated subjects (Costa, 2018). Therefore, we chose to analyze apps' interfaces through a technical walk-through method stemming from app studies and departing from the affordances-in-practice approach (Costa, 2018). The walk-through method allows us to develop a critical analysis of screen time tools' affordances considering the symbolic and material dimensions; our analysis is based on the observation and documentation of the screens, features, and activity flows (Light et al., 2018). By engaging directly with tools' interfaces, we critically analyze their mediator characteristics, drawing on Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005), and consider user interface arrangement; functions and features; textual content and tone; symbolic representations—a semiotic approach that refers to the user's repertoires, imaginaries, connotations, and cultural associations with aspects of everyday life (Light et al., 2018).

Lukács (1972) stated that the dominant ideas in capitalist systems correspond to "the ideology of the ruling class" (p. 14), that is, to a translation of the dominant groups' modes of thinking into a suppression of the consciousness of the proletariat, making this class view social reality in terms defined by others who rule over them. In other words, ideology operates through power, understood as a capacity to impose rules, ideas, and modes of conduct to others. Accepting that "ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication" (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 17), we conducted a discourse analysis aimed at identifying key ideological themes (Fairclough, 2012) conveyed by the companies in the construction of well-being in mobile platforms. This allows us to focus on the role of tech companies in the discursive construction of digital well-being as an abstract conception that organizes socially shared attitudes (Van Dijk, 2005).

We searched for the names of the features using Google, in English, between 2017 and 2020, and selected 21 instances of corporate PR communications from the tech brands' pages, until we achieved redundancy and saturation of topics and vocabulary. We organized these discursive materials onto a chronological database, where we separated relevant excerpts, which generated 114 units. These units were then simplified through keywords to synthesize the main idea, by two of the researchers independently, and then cross-checked. At a second stage of analysis, the three authors grouped information into "problems and solutions, subjects," and "responsibility, positive and negative" aspects of connectivity. We present these axes after we present our analysis of the screen time functions.

## **Analysis**

### ***Walking Through Screen Time Functions: Measuring, Quantifying, and Visualizing***

The tech industry offers quantification and visualization as the necessary tenets for the awareness of the user. In all the tools and functions analyzed, the proposal is to redirect behaviors and control "excessive" screen time based on the idea of self-quantification and self-monitoring. From the characteristic mediators presented in Table 1, a normative model produces a sense of digital well-being anchored to interfaces' symbolic and material dimensions that enhance and promote individual paths based on the collected usage data.

The functions and affordances of the tools analyzed can be divided into three dimensions: measuring, quantifying, and visualizing. Tools offer possibilities for disconnection or partial disconnection based on limited lists of features and parameters for controlling, monitoring, and visually representing screen time concerning user's usage and digital behaviors.

Table 1 presents an analysis of mediator characteristics of screen time functions.

**Table 1. Walk-Through Analysis of Screen Time Functions—Mediator Characteristics (Light et al., 2018).**

Function	User interface arrangement	Functions and features	Textual content and tone	Symbolic representations
<i>Screen Time</i> (Apple)	Function guides users through a simple menu and on-screen navigation buttons.	Groups of arrangements that track time and enable limit definitions (apps, communication with contacts) demands a code insertion. Set up screen time for the family.	Monitoring information: time log, activity log, most visited (apps and websites), apps and websites categories, screen activations, apps notifications.	Report log associated with Apple colors and symbols. Colors define the activity (purple for pause, orange for limiting applications, green for communication limits with contacts and applications without restrictions, red for blocking content and defining privacy). Daily and weekly screen time.
<i>Do Not Disturb</i> (Apple)	Function guides users through a simple menu and on-screen navigation buttons.	Groups of arrangements enable different limitations without restrictions.	Categories of limits definitions available (do not disturb, schedule, silence, phone, do not disturb while driving).	Visual metaphor of operating systems (Apple and Android).
<i>Digital Wellbeing</i> (Android)	Function guides users through a simple menu and on-screen	Groups of arrangements that track time, set up focus mode and	Monitoring information: time log, activity log (Google products,	Report log associated with Android colors and symbols.

	navigation buttons.	productivity features (do not disturb and customize notifications), suggest ways to disconnect, enable limit definitions (apps), get instructions to use the tool. Set up screen time for the family. Parental control features (screen time and content).	drive, and others), most visited (apps and websites), screen activations, apps notifications.	Visual metaphor of operating system (Android) and Google products. Daily and weekly screen time.
<i>My Analytics</i> (Microsoft)	Function guides users through a graphic menu.	Groups of arrangements that quantify personal productivity, track patterns (focus, well-being, network, collaboration), set privacy, set work patterns (focus function), limit screen time (individual or team), create habits, get instructions to use the tool.	Monitoring information: time log, activity log (individual and team), notifications from other Microsoft products, connect to others.	Report log associated with Microsoft colors and symbols. Visual metaphor of Windows operating system and Microsoft products. Daily and weekly screen time. Weekly newsletter with a summary of focus, well-being, network, and collaboration activity.
<i>Your Time</i> (Facebook)	Function guides users through a graphic menu and on-screen navigation buttons.	Groups of arrangements that quantify screen time, manage screen time, configure preferences to maximize time on app, manage	Monitoring information: time log, access log, activity log.	Visual metaphor of Facebook. Daily and day vs. night screen time. Weekly report on demand.

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			notifications, set silence mode.	
<i>Time Watched</i> (YouTube)	Function guides users through a simple menu and on-screen navigation buttons.	Groups of arrangements that quantify screen time, configure pauses, set sleep time, opt-out of automatically reproducing videos.	Monitoring information: time log, views record.	Report log. Daily and weekly screen time (visualizations).
<i>Your Activity</i> (Instagram)	Function guides users through a simple menu and on-screen navigation buttons.	Groups of arrangements to set up a daily limit reminder and define limitations to different types of notifications through the platform, e-mail, and SMS.	Monitoring information: time log, manage time on the app.	Visual metaphor of Instagram. Daily and weekly screen time.

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All the tools are free, preinstalled, and opt-in, except for Microsoft My Analytics, which is a paid application installed separately. Overall, functions and features are activated with on-screen navigation buttons, navigation is simple, and the interaction is reduced. The components of navigability meet the needs of users, considering not only criteria of accessibility (system accessible without obstacles) and functionality (utility of the function for the task or tasks) but also of usability (maximizing the system resources concerning effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction of use—Nielsen, 2000). Therefore, user experience focuses on an extension of the familiar symbolic representations of the platforms, adding clean interfaces that promise disconnection and well-being. The use of familiar colors for operating/completing tasks and the visual metaphors of operating systems enhance a friendly and more productive user experience through facilitating users' cultural and social interpretations (Rieder & Röhle, 2012). The tone of these features is one of easily afforded self-discipline through the extension of user options and sustenance of habits. User experience is centered on preestablished features that structure and collect users' online and offline data.

Screen time and time-control strategies differ among OS tools and function on social media platforms. The difference lies in the possibilities of quantifying and limiting the use and digital behaviors in different layers. On the one hand, operating systems do not impose limitations on apps and websites' features. Monitoring is circumscribed to quantifying screen time and visually representing digital uses and behaviors, enabling limits for access to apps and websites. Such is the case for Screen Time (Apple) and Digital Wellbeing (Android), which monitor and quantify online time on apps and websites. While Screen Time (Apple) categorizes apps and websites, Digital Wellbeing (Android) only quantifies screen time on apps and websites. Both operating systems and social media platform tools enable users to set

pause and cancel alerts to monitor or control screen time, as well as to extend/ignore or disclaim the tools' warnings to disconnect.

Social media platforms, on the other hand, quantify and monitor activity on each of the features. Functions on social media afford to set up functionalities such as time limit settings concerning pauses and notifications, control over content (Time Watched), manage notifications (Your Activity), or define settings to access contacts and content (Your Time). Social media platforms' functions quantify screen time and afford more advanced features on online activity and time spent on apps/websites. Your Time (Facebook) quantifies screen time, provides information on access to the app/website through third parties, and monitors activity. Time Watched (YouTube) quantifies screen time through detailed time logs and views records. Your Activity (Instagram) provides information only on daily and weekly screen time.

The "digital well-being" tools present different terminologies that ensure time online is well spent, interactions are meaningful, and that there is productivity at work and activities. The latter is especially evident in Microsoft My Analytics, a tool that supports workers to create better work habits with personal and team productivity analysis on Microsoft 365 products. My Analytics presents a group of arrangements that quantify personal productivity, track patterns, set privacy, set work patterns, limit screen time, and create habits, both individually and for teams. It is a tool aimed at maximizing productivity—and thus well-being—at work. Therefore, monitoring logs are detailed and operate in a cross-product logic that promotes networking and collaboration. This tool includes features that allow control over the screen time of the individual or the team as a seamless intrusive technology.

The analysis of screen time functions through the mediator characteristics identifies a normative model that connects digital well-being to manage screen time and engage with an optimal experience (Alves, 2018). The latter is presented as users' awareness by providing them with screen time self-quantification and self-monitoring tools. By affording limited possibilities to disconnect or partially disconnect, digital functions forge the promise of digital well-being through self-regulation mechanisms without unplugged devices, as it is a condition for tools to quantify off-screen time.

### ***The Discourses on Digital Tools***

Elements provided by companies' PR allude to a process we can reconstitute in the following steps: (1) companies raise awareness about passive or mindless connectivity as a problem; (2) users manage connectivity with supporting technology made available by the tech companies; thus, these tools will work as a solution by functioning as facilitators and enablers for the individual to control time of use and nonuse of digital technologies; and (3) users are engaged in actively and responsibly leveraging the information and insights that the tools provide or the nudges they generate, which leads (4) to cognitive and affective outcomes for the users as the attainment of (different levels of) digital well-being. This ideal process remains somewhat abstract and limited and is subject to the challenges of everyday use, where the user might be unwilling or unable to take control of their time in the prescribed ways.

To Instagram and Facebook, the problem "[is] not just about the time people spend on Instagram and Facebook but *how* they spend that time" (Ranadive & Ginsberg, 2018, para. 7; emphasis added). These

new features are presented as part of the corporation's "responsibility to *help* people *understand* how much time they spend on our platforms so they can better *manage* their experience" (Ranadive & Ginsberg, 2018, para. 3; emphasis added). As for YouTube, new features were actually labeled as "digital well-being" (Marquardt, 2018), and they were meant to "provide a *better understanding* of time spent on YouTube, so you can make *informed* decisions about how you want YouTube to *best* fit into your life" (Marquardt, 2018, para. 1; emphasis added). Google declared they were attempting "to enhance people's wellbeing through *supporting* an intentional relationship with technology" (Google Digital Wellbeing, n.d.a, para. 6; emphasis added), but they also foster an idea of creating "healthy habits" (Google Digital Wellbeing, n.d.a, para. 4), which relate to routines of disconnecting in a preset schedule, when content is not meeting specified needs or mindfulness, understood as (disconnected) meditative set of practices, as a set of "smart work" habits (such as work breaks, planning, trust, rest, self-reflection, hydration) whose purpose is to maintain consistent individual and group performance.

Tools and features such as the ones herein analyzed allow a range of use cases, most of which underline a view of user agency as bringing forth the effectiveness of the behavioral aims of designers and companies—"nudge" activation being a crucial action on the part of the user. Typically, this effectiveness relies on individualized full agency (i.e., a commitment on the part of the user to the aims and conditions afforded by the tools, along with a set of willful actions directed toward those ends) to be effective (for example, requiring the users themselves to activate options and set up alerts) but also demand navigating complex and nonstandardized available options. Thus, a healthy use is associated with mindful and intentional (actually employed by Google) use, in contrast with a disobedient brain that indulges in passive use, but this is embedded in habit (i.e., an irreflective form of action; Aagaard, 2020). Nevertheless, and crucially, PR pieces concerning well-being do not mention addiction explicitly, which would not only potentially medicalize the problem but also emphasize the tech companies' responsibility in it. Instead, Google alludes to "temptations" to be reduced or restricted through the judicious use of their tools (Aranda, 2018), while Microsoft mentions "distracting content" to be cleared or blocked when trying to concentrate on other tasks (Braunstein, 2019).

In our examples above, words in italics—the "not/but" structure of the sentences, as well as comparative adjectives ("better/best")—indicate there is a problem that the user needs to acknowledge about the type of use they make, and in balancing connectivity and disconnectivity. There is thus a normative use embedded in this model, where social media facilitates social capital (Docherty, 2020) and connectivity supports intentful actions. Facebook's research team, employing a social psychological approach, highlighted scholarship associating depressed moods with "*passively* consuming information," and adding that "a person's health and happiness relies heavily on the strength of their relationships" (Ginsberg & Burke, 2017, para. 5; emphasis added). Throughout 2018, as new features were launched by the different players, their urgency was justified with the expert authority and growing scientific evidence of the association between the overuse of screens and ill-being, instead of the increasing criticism toward tech companies, particularly mobile devices, and social media platforms.

This scientific discourse is associated with one infused with values. Mark Zuckerberg (2018) announced that "one of our big focus areas for 2018 is making sure the time we all spend on Facebook is *time well spent*." In April 2018, Zuckerberg would bring the phrase "time well spent" to a U.S. Senate

hearing, using the name of the advocacy group led by Tristan Harris, as we mentioned before. The wave of screen time tools was projected by PR as oriented toward goals and missions that are intrinsic to the companies, thus genuine. The vocabulary of ethics and values is put forward: Tim Cook says, "It's the *absence of humanity* in products that create[s] the issue" (Inskeep, 2018, para. 92; emphasis added), building on a dialectic between technology and humans. The industry followed up on Harris and his imaginaries of "humane" technology without committing to broader reform on what are the other negative consequences of companies' practices. Such ethical concerns also reinforce forms of action centered on users, rather than on the companies' interests. As pointed out by a few critical columnists (Tarnoff & Weigel, 2018), the discourse of "tech humanism" diverted attention from the real stakes to further improve data extraction in the context of more limited connectivity.

This normative orientation is visible in the framing of user empowerment by Instagram and Facebook mentioned above. However, when looking at the responsibility and agency envisaged for the user, there is only a slight indication that the systems optimize the features according to the profile of the user. In an apparent concern to optimize the user experience, Apple (2018) announced that "Siri can also intelligently make suggestions for notifications settings" (para. 4). As a few journalists signaled, wellness tools claimed to employ artificial intelligence, while the fact that APIs are not in place signals an increased centralization of power by the tech producers.

This is significant, since it signals a restriction of the claimed "user empowerment" and tensions between discourse, interface, and programming: in the name of convenience, the use of AI restricts the user's sphere of agency and imposes a framework for the conceptualization of activity and disconnection. This option can also be capitalized upon by the tech companies through profiling and prediction at scale. The argument of using machine learning to make user disconnection easier is also used by Google. Google Digital Wellbeing ("Take a Technology Self-Assessment," n.d.b) suggests using the smart speaker and Google Assistant with "Hey, Google, do not disturb," prompting Downtime to retain the notifications from Google Home devices. Moreover, the use of AI assistants is also equated with screen- and hands-free, and, therefore, a form of disconnection, in the terms "As machine learning and the Google Assistant continue to improve, we're helping people do more, while naturally reducing the amount of time they spend on screen" (Google Digital Wellbeing, n.d.c, "Our Commitment," para. 7). Through the combination of these elements, companies reinforce the value of the solution they offer for the gain of the user, overlooking, on the one hand, the further colonization of user's information and, on the other, the paradox of disconnecting through smart (i.e., connected) objects.

Last, discourses are more indeterminate with the outcomes of well-being, except insofar as they might translate into quantitative time, social, or work-productivity metrics. The latter is the case for Apple, where the idea of personalized quantification of well-being is articulated as a strictly evidence-based analysis allowing users to understand and take action over their own time (Apple, 2018). The former position is also apparent in Google's discourse, which presents the company's role as "giving everyone the tools they need to develop *their own sense* of digital wellbeing" (Google Digital Wellbeing, n.d.c, para. 14; emphasis added), and for whom mindfulness is just another customizable intentional "tool" for the optimization of work, sociality, and personal well-being (Parcerisa, 2019, para. 1).

### Discussion and Conclusions

Our analysis of screen time tools by OS and social media platforms revealed, on the one hand, simple, limited, and ambivalent possibilities of disconnecting afforded by the interfaces and tools, and, on the other hand, a PR discourse deploying an imaginary centered around ethics, wherein the use of available tools is equated with user empowerment, but the outcomes in terms of well-being remain indeterminate or restricted to time quantification or control over intentionality of connectivity. This twofold analysis allows us to see that, although the user is placed at the center of discourses of tech companies in the public and media presentation of these new tools, the type of user agency envisaged by the ecology in which the tools are located is limited to following (flexibly) linear disconnection controls. On a material level, it is almost as easy to put the tools to use as it is to choose to ignore or extend their nudges. On a discursive level, we learn that control can be delegated and that tools can evolve and be adapted to the user based on data insights and artificial intelligence. Although claims are made of increased privacy offered to users, from our analysis and from the media commentary, it became apparent that the tools actually expand insight into user's data in the interest of the device or platform that created them, and that companies continue to expand mechanisms to induce connectivity. So, if some device-specific factors could contribute to sustain well-being through disconnection, others continue to induce the user to reconnect.

"Digital wellness" tools are part of a broader process of continuous coconstruction of technologies through the feedback and quantification of usage, as well as through the revision in face of the public reaction to them, with a normative standard in mind by the producers (Rouvroy & Berns, 2013). This new quantified normativity extends to user time by tracking activity and disconnection time within the bounds of platforms, that is, by capturing the traces of another way of relating to digital technologies, work, and leisure. "Disconnected" time becomes a new function and variable for life on the platform, leaving unanswered the larger socioeconomic issues of the distribution of leisure, work, and pay raised by chronopolitics. The sheer fact that different companies embarked on a wave of launching digital tools was motivated by an intention to recuperate the perceived value of the connectivity they promote, thereby resisting the individual and cultural devaluing of their products during the techlash. Thus, companies addressed the challenges of the "techlash" by setting up potential new strategies for users to engage with their platforms while still looking after their well-being. The discourse of well-being and mental hygiene sets up a way for users to govern not only their digital activity but also their work and leisure. In sum, the crucial elements of this form of governmentality, all of which allow users to self-manage while remaining on-platform, are the hyperindividualization of time management, the neutralization of potential offline time through on-platform quantification, and the adoption of a "social-medical" vocabulary.

Media commentary presents this "wave" of digital solutions as a superficial, cynical, and contradictory remedy that postpones reform by the industry, seeks to delay and prevent regulation, and makes the users responsible for their well-being. Our discursive analysis found PR discourses rarely engage with systemic workplace or rights inequalities and do not contemplate how individual users should assess the efficacy of the digital solutions in terms of well-being beyond time quantification: As tools are easily accessible, usable, and quantify and visually represent use, the user has the responsibility to secure a balance between on-screen and off-screen activities at an individual level. More than just self-responsibilization, they put forward a normative conception of striving *individually* for well-being. In other

words, the rhetoric used by tech companies' PR reinforces a normative experience that largely ignores context and accentuates the willfulness of the user—albeit in the form of limited agency.

Temporal disconnection through digital tools is apparent as they afford disconnectivity only insofar as they bid for mindful, intentional (re)connectivity. Thus, they are essential to limit disconnection, ensure connectivity on devices and platforms, and optimize use into an active, engaged use equated with productivity and highly functional social capital. Online time is "time well spent" for the user insofar as it is more socially or labor productive but also more valuable for the companies as it stems from more engagement. Offline time is similarly populated with "valuable" cultural activities and identically exploited and capitalized via machine learning and artificial intelligence, while off-screen time, through smart devices, expands connectivity. Digital tools invite the user to be offline and off-screen without unplugging the devices, which is a precondition for the companies to gather more information on patterns of use and nonuse; what is more, smart devices are not only managed through the digital wellness tools but also made to look disconnected. In this sense, the user who deploys digital wellness functions is doubly quantified and datafied.

In sum, these digital features can hardly be seen to concur for a comprehensive concept of digital well-being. They express an appropriation of wider discussions of well-being and deflate them by putting forward a form of user subjectivity that secures their own good feeling—rather than being well. In that sense, these "digital solutions" can be better read as part of a governmentality apparatus, where temporal disconnection is reinforced as necessary, individual means for recalibration of the user that does not account for different valuations of time (Sharma, 2015, 2017). Digital wellness tools are thus a neoliberal articulation, as they reinforce, like other self-quantification tools, a self-responsibilization for health and well-being (Kristensen & Ruckenstein, 2018): They put in place a chronopolitics of individualized time discipline through the recalibration of the user, the instrumentalization of their data, and the further expansion of datafication and surveillance. We see these elements as different components of an ideology that contributes to perpetuating the position of power occupied by big tech players in the market and society. Greater insight into the situated use(r)s of these tools is needed.

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